A Comparison of the University of Maryland Dining Services with Dining Services at Fourteen AAU Public Universities

Executive Summary

- As part of its on-going quality assurance program, the Department of Dining Services collected published data about campus dining programs at fourteen comprehensive research universities. The institutions included: The Ohio State University; The Pennsylvania State University; University of Arizona; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Santa Barbara; University of Colorado-Boulder; University of Florida; University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign; University of Michigan; University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill; University of Texas; University of Virginia; University of Washington; and University of Wisconsin-Madison (pages 2 & 3).

- Five institutions - Ohio State, Penn State, University of Arizona, University of Texas, and the University of Washington completed an online survey providing information on finances, campus services provided, staffing patterns, catering policies, among other topics (page 3).

- The administration of campus dining programs varies. Among the campuses studied, eight report to the housing department, four to auxiliary services, and three to student life. Of the eight that report to the housing department, six report to student affairs and two to administrative affairs (page 3 & table 1).

- The University of Maryland operates one of the most comprehensive programs. Of the 14 schools studied, 3 contract with ARAMARK for all of their dining services and the others are either 100% self-operated or contract a portion of their services. Athletic concessions was the most frequently contracted service (pages 3, 4, 10, & table 2).
Almost all of the campuses offer a scope of services comparable to UMCP. Only the University of Arizona does not offer a residence hall dining program (page 4 & table 2).

Almost all of the campuses restrict catering to the on-campus provider or to an approved list of off-campus caterers. Only one of the other campuses reported having an exclusive catering arrangement and in that case, off campus caterers were allowed as long as the purchase was for less than $500.00 (pages 4 & 8).

All of the schools offer some form of meal plan. Six of the universities do not require the majority of students living on campus to purchase a board plan. Plans typically offer a variety of declining balance, fixed number of meals per week or semester, and have different degrees of freedom and flexibility and refund policies. Three of the campuses that require meal plans offer more restrictive plans for first semester or first year students. Meal plan programs are structured to provide financial support for the fixed costs of operating dining facilities along with the costs for actual meals selected (pages 4 – 5, table 3, and pages 12- 17).

The hours of operation vary among the schools. Six of the schools have at least one of the residential dining halls available for continuous dining on Monday – Thursday between 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. Almost all of the institutions have fewer dining venues open on the weekend; however there are usually several venues open for late night dining until midnight or 2:00 a.m.(pages 5 -6 and table 4).

All of the campuses paid campus overhead although the formulas and percentages varied widely. UMCP pays 11.5% overhead charges. The overhead charges at the other five universities ranged from 9.7% of sales in retail units to 2.75% of expenses less food and items for resale. One campus reported that the residence hall dining facilities were exempt from paying overhead and
another noted that the original five dining commons were exempted from paying a 2% fee for Debit Card sales (page 7).

- UMCP pays 2% for debt service for its capital facilities and 3% for the facility renewal. Four of the five others paid debt service for capital facilities; one paid 3.7% of budget and three paid a flat amount of $90,000, $400,000, or $3 million. Three paid an annual contribution for facility renewal; two paying $1 million/year and the other paying 14.7% (page 7).

- The percentage of concessions revenue returned to the athletic department ranged from 15% - 33% in comparison to UMCP’s 50%. Revenue returned to the student union was reported as 5-6% and one institution reported that the union received a $19,000 cash portion of the exclusive beverage contract. UMCP pays 10% of union outlet sales to the student union. One campus reported paying 40% of net operating income to the library, School of Business; and the museum from their respective retail units. UMCP pays 10% of outlet sales (page 7).

- The amount of square footage varied. UMCP has the largest space inventory of the other five schools. The most comprehensive program of the other five schools reported 224,328 square feet while the others reported a range from 85,000 square feet to 150,000 square feet (page 8).

- Like UMCP, three of the other campuses reported that dining service employees were covered by a collective bargaining agreement. The number of employees varied depending on the scope of the operations. Three of the campuses did not use contract employees and only one paid benefits for contract employees. The use of student employees also varied widely from 100 to 1204 student employees (pages 8 & 9).

- The responses from the five institutions and the other data gathered point to some areas that UMCP might want to consider as they plan strategically for the future of dining services on campus. There are likely trade-offs which must be considered (pages 10 & 11).