

**Southwestern University**  
**Spring 2021 Dining Options Survey**  
**Executive Summary**

The dining options survey was administered in spring 2021. Responses were received from 601 students, faculty, and staff. The majority of responses were from students (63%).

- The majority of student responses (71%) were from first-year or sophomore students, which makes sense due to Southwestern's two-year residency requirement. Most student respondents (64%) lived on campus with community kitchen access or on campus without kitchen access. The majority of students had some sort of meal plan (72%).
- The majority of students indicated that the Southwestern campus dining experience was only moderately important in their decision to attend (35%) and remain (32%) at Southwestern. However, 66% of students indicated that the Southwestern campus dining experience was very important or moderately important to their academic success at Southwestern.
- Faculty and staff primarily eat on campus during lunch, but students eat on campus for lunch and dinner. Students eat at The Commons and The Cove more often than faculty and staff.
- 52% of students indicated that they would like operating hours for The Cove and the Commons to be extended over the weekend.
- When faculty (61%) and staff (57%) do not eat at a campus dining facility it is most often because they prefer to bring their own food. When students do not eat at a dining facility it is most often because of the lack of options (63%) and quality (72%).
- When deciding where to dine faculty rated *quick, within walking distance, fair price, and meets my dietary requirements* as most important. Staff rated *fair price, quick, variety, and to-go if desired* as most important. Students rated *variety, fair price, to-go if desired, and meets my dietary requirements* as most important.
- Students, faculty, and staff all rated the quality and variety of food options as being most important for campus food services.
- Students indicated much greater dissatisfaction (60% very dissatisfied or dissatisfied) with The Commons than faculty (21%) or staff (27%). Faculty indicated greater dissatisfaction (33%) with The Cove than staff (25%) or students (19%). The most commonly occurring reasons for dissatisfaction had to do with lack of variety and poor food quality.
- 72% of students, 61% of staff, and 46% of faculty would like to see additional food service locations on campus. Students would like to see additional locations close to residence housing.
- *Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and pastries, desserts, and coffees* were the most requested types of food that everyone would like see on campus.
- In terms of additional food services, students were interested in *take out, on campus 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors, and using pirate cards off campus*. Faculty were interested in *take out* and staff were interested in *take out and on campus 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors*.

**Southwestern University  
Spring 2021 Dining Options Survey**

Southwestern University administered a survey to all students, faculty, and staff to collect feedback on the dining options on campus in preparation of a call for proposals for new dining services. The survey was opened on April 7, 2021 and closed April 22, 2021. The survey was administered during the pandemic but was targeting feedback on post-pandemic dining options. There were 601 responses to the survey. Due to survey flow and skip patterns, not all participants received every question in the survey. Totals of percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

**Question 1: Which of the following best describes you?**

Response	N	%
Student	378	63%
Faculty	73	12%
Staff	150	25%

Of the 601 responses, 378 (63%) were from students. Questions 2 through 7 were only shown to students.

**Question 2: Which of the following best describes your college classification?**

Response	N	%
First-Year	142	38%
Sophomore	125	33%
Junior	68	18%
Senior	42	11%
(blank)	1	0%

**Question 3: Where do you live?**

Response	N	%
Off campus not with family	63	17%
Off campus with family	33	9%
On campus with community kitchen access	139	37%
On campus with suite kitchen	40	11%
On campus without kitchen access	102	27%
(blank)	1	0%

The majority of respondents have some level of kitchen access. Of those who did not, 91% were either First-Years or Sophomores.

**Question 4: How important was the perceived campus dining experience in terms of your decision to attend Southwestern?**

Response	N	%
Extremely important	34	9%
Very important	72	19%
Moderately important	134	35%
Slightly important	73	19%
Not at all important	63	17%
(blank)	2	1%

**Question 5: How important is the actual campus dining experience in terms of your decision to remain at Southwestern?**

Response	N	%
Extremely important	34	9%
Very important	69	18%
Moderately important	120	32%
Slightly important	71	19%
Not at all important	82	22%
(blank)	2	1%

**Question 6: How important is the campus dining experience (i.e., wi-fi, social interaction, comfort, etc.) in terms of your academic success at Southwestern?**

Response	N	%
Extremely important	63	17%
Very important	114	30%
Moderately important	136	36%
Slightly important	45	12%
Not at all important	17	4%
(blank)	3	1%

**Question 7: Do you have a meal plan?**

Response	N	%
Yes - an unlimited one	12	3%
Yes - limited to 15 meals per week, 12 meals per week, or 165 meals per semester	123	33%
Yes - limited to 9 meals per week, or 140 meals per semester	121	32%
5 meals per week (commuter)	17	4%
No	103	27%
(blank)	2	1%

96% of First-Year, 80% of Sophomore, 39% of Junior, and 24% of Senior respondents indicated they had some level of meal plan during Spring 2021. Due to residential campus policies, most students are required to have a meal plan at some point during their time at Southwestern.

All respondents (students, faculty, and staff) were asked the following questions.

**Question 8: At what time(s) of the day do you normally use the dining facilities?**

	Students (335)		Faculty (70)		Staff (147)	
Morning	78	23%	3	4%	13	9%
Mid-Morning	41	12%	2	3%	11	7%
Lunch	254	76%	67	96%	134	91%
Afternoon	75	22%	9	13%	19	13%
Dinner	280	84%	7	10%	12	8%
Night	69	21%	0	0%	5	3%

**Question 9: Between The Commons and The Cove, food services are available Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to midnight. What changes to operating hours would work best for your schedule**

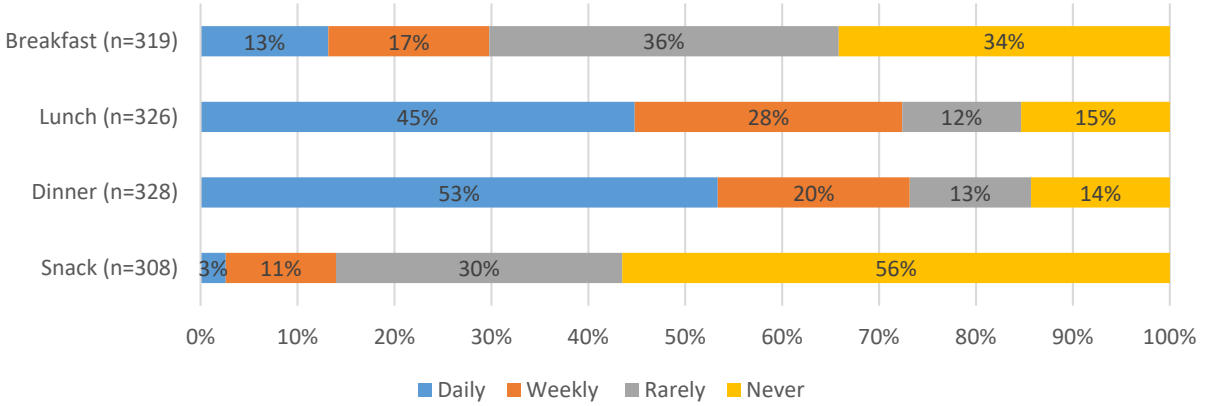
	Students (351)		Faculty (71)		Staff (146)	
24 hours/day	102	29%	2	3%	6	4%
Extended weekends	181	52%	5	7%	13	9%
No changes are needed	107	30%	60	85%	112	77%
Other	22	6%	6	8%	19	13%

Other (examples of frequently occurring responses):

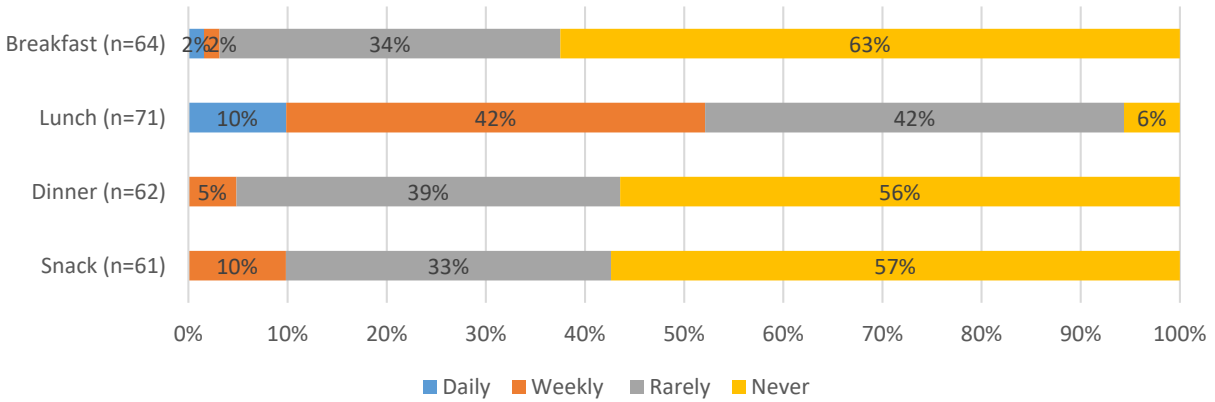
Students	With Ramadan coming up it would be great to potentially have food options for sunrise (suhour).
	If the commons could stay open later for dinner that would be great, some athletes don't get out of practice until 9pm.
	24 hours/day would be ideal, but at the very least the commons needs to be open for longer and the cove should open earlier on weekends
	operating hours that accommodate students for religious holidays such as Ramadan
	Commons should close at 9:30pm or 10pm instead of 8pm.
	Cove weekend availability throughout the day
Faculty	Earlier weekday morning opening time
	Weekend hours for Cove
	The cove hours are not predictable
Staff	The Cove should open earlier for at least beverage service.
	Coffee service at the Cove earlier in the morning.
	Have Commons open later

**Question 10a: How often do you eat at The Commons for each meal?**

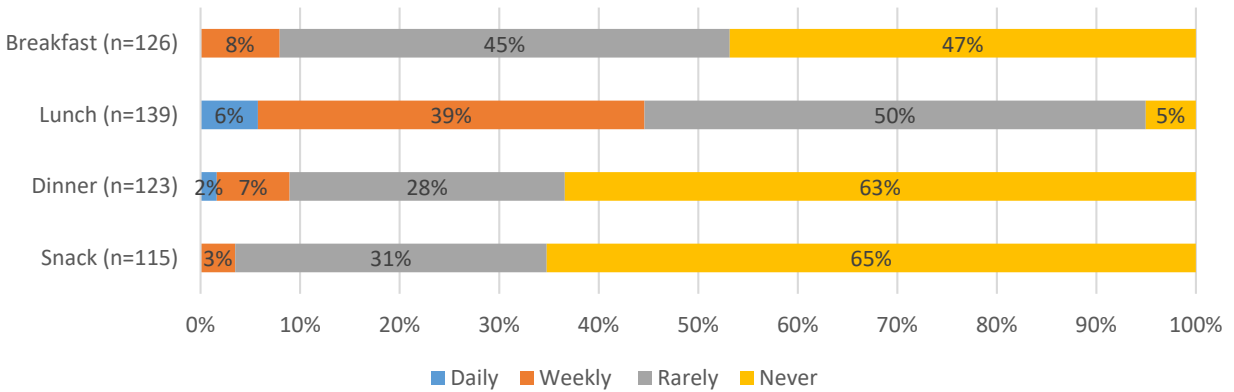
**The Commons - Students**



**The Commons - Faculty**

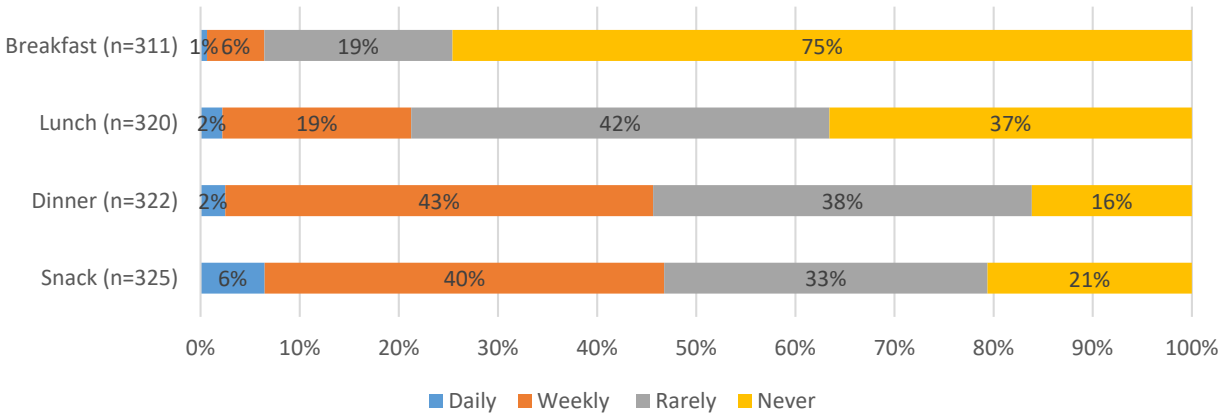


**The Commons - Staff**

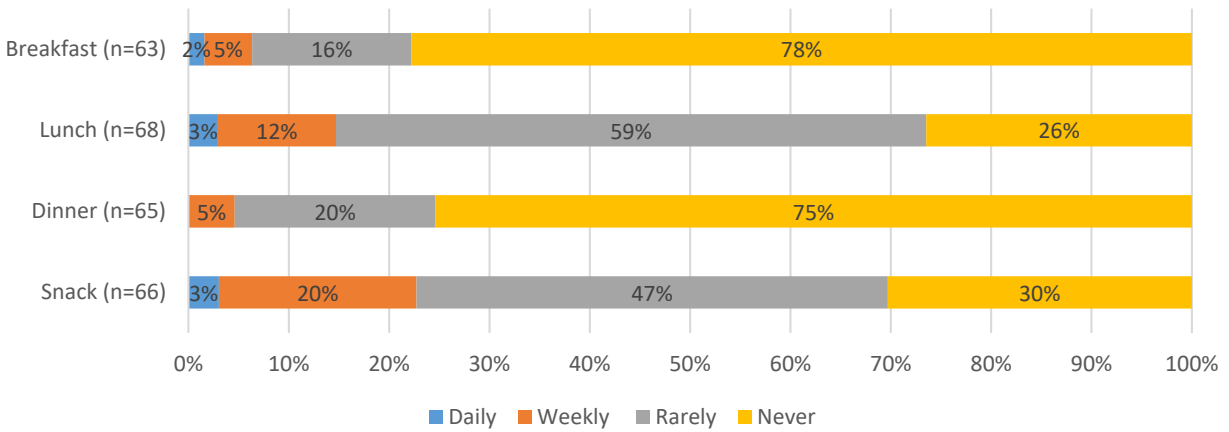


**Question 10b: How often do you eat at The Cove for each meal?**

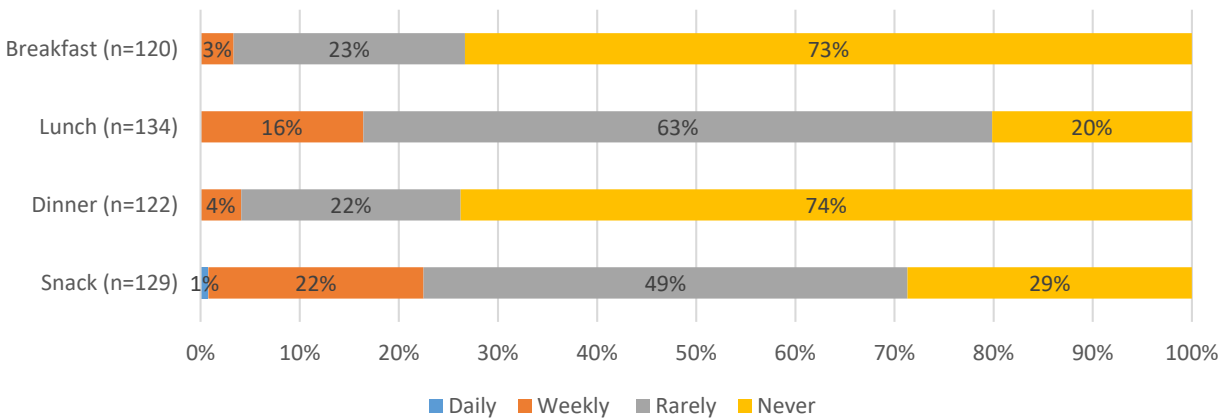
**The Cove - Students**



**The Cove - Faculty**



**The Cove - Staff**



**Question 11: If you do not eat on campus what are the reasons (select all that apply)?**

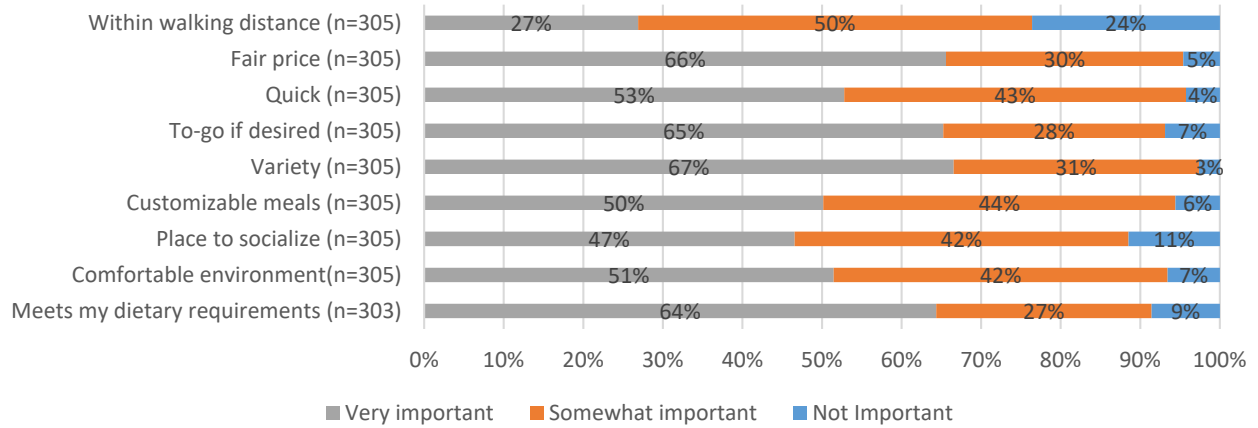
	Students (239)		Faculty (62)		Staff (127)	
Cost	62	26%	11	18%	24	19%
I don't have a meal plan	40	17%	6	10%	10	8%
I prefer to bring my own	57	24%	38	61%	73	57%
Lack of options	150	63%	20	32%	46	36%
Quality	171	72%	17	27%	43	34%
Hours of operation	104	44%	5	8%	12	9%
Other	23	10%	16	26%	25	20%

Other (examples of frequently occurring responses):

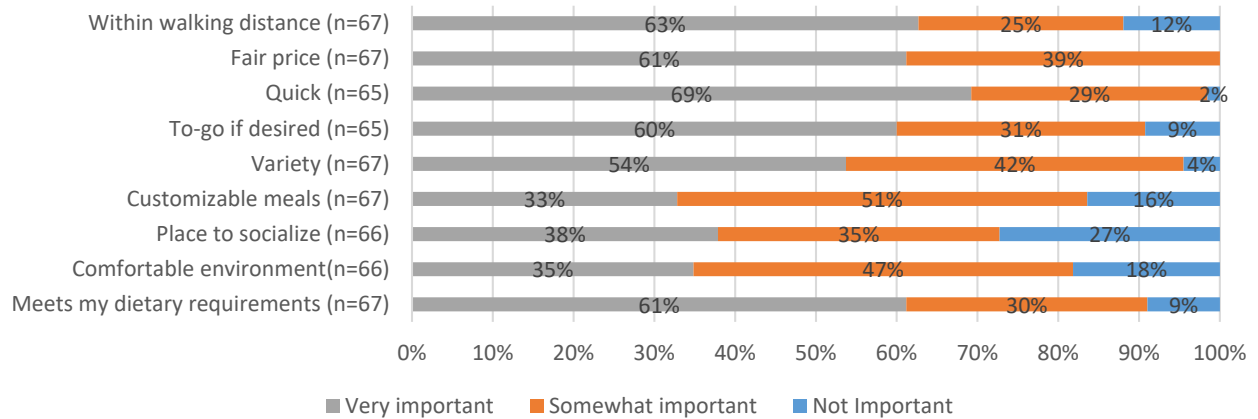
Students	Commons food is often very poor in quality and nutrition
	The repetitive food gets old after 3 years
	The food since I've been here has vastly decreased in quality but more importantly taste. It's honestly hardly even edible most of the time and a huge disappointment coming from such a good school. and lack of options has especially gotten worse this year
	We should have more options and more availability
	Difficult to find options that fit my diet
Faculty	Lack of time
	Limited options for food allergies/dietary restrictions
	Healthy options
	Reduce calorie intake...hard to say no to a buffet
	It often takes a lot of time to get food because of the long lines at the register. Then there are longer lines at the stations. Food isn't amazing.
Staff	I live near the campus and go home for meals
	The Cove's costs are too high. I can go out for much cheaper.
	I am often working at lunch and have to eat on the run
	Don't want to pay fee for adding money to Pirate Card
	I am vegetarian and there are limited options.

**Question 12: Please rate the importance of the following when deciding where to dine**

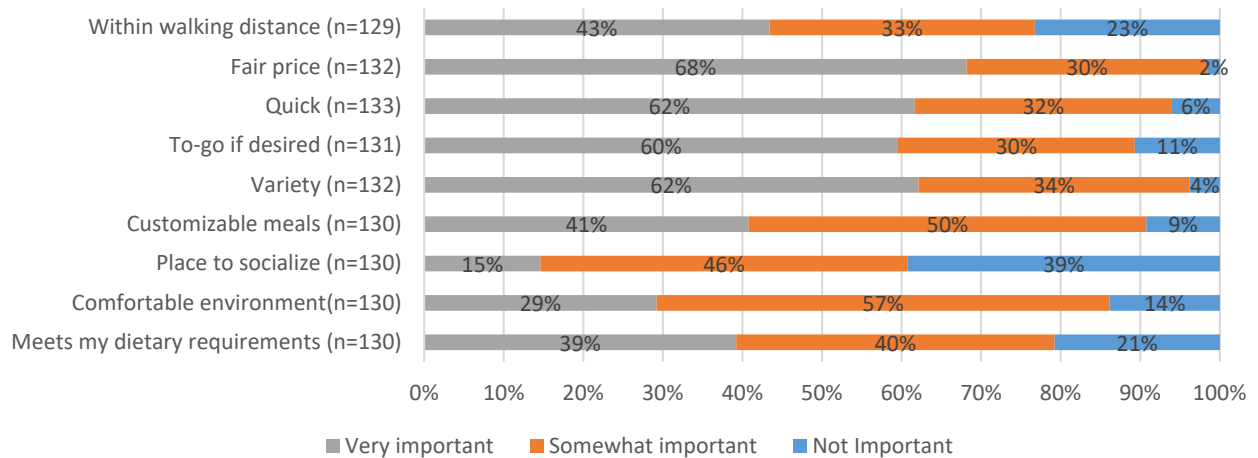
**Students**



**Faculty**



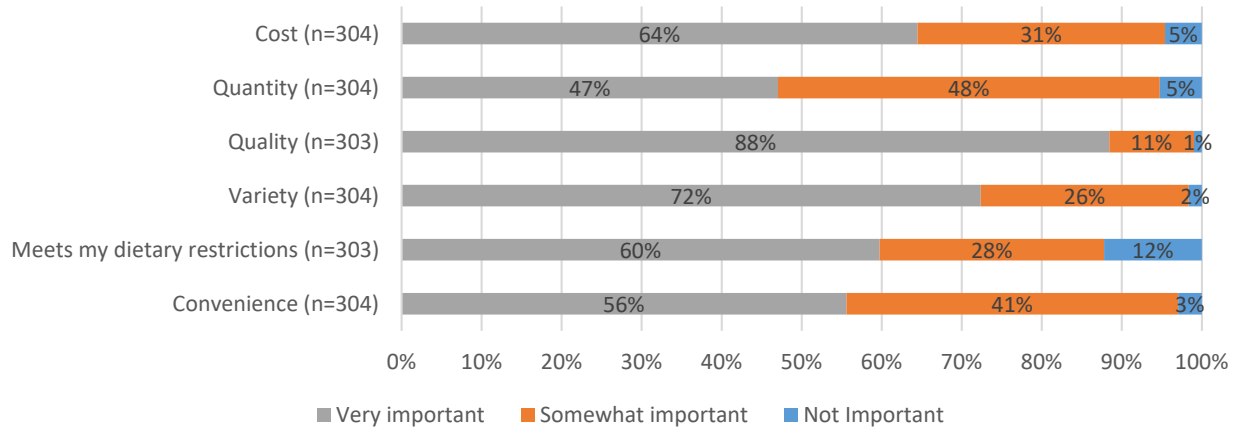
**Staff**



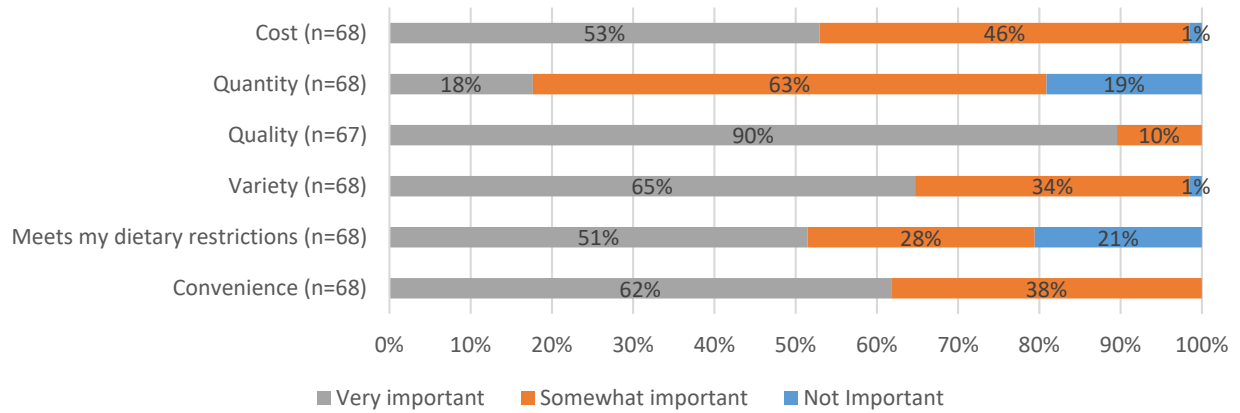


**Question 13: Regarding dining options on campus, please rate the importance of the following campus food services:**

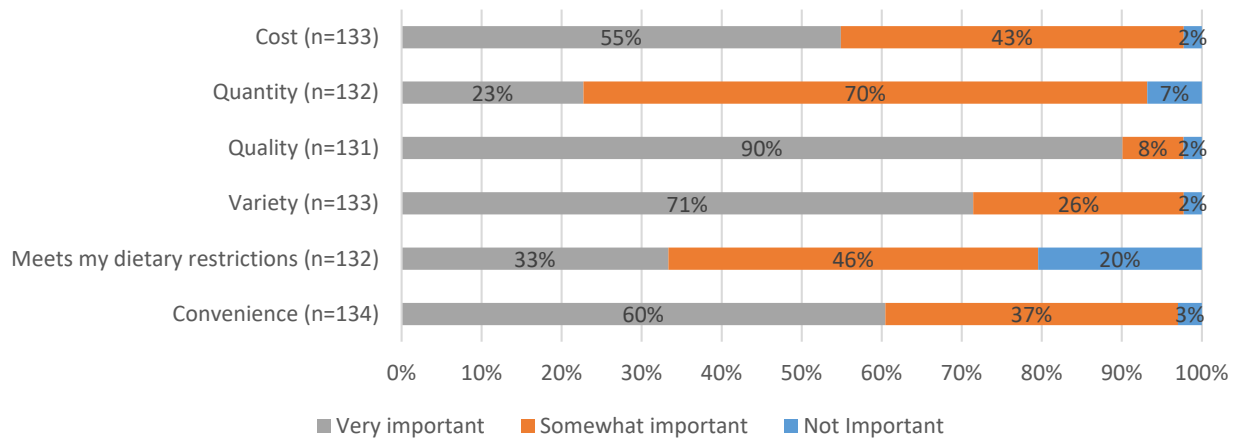
**Students**



**Faculty**

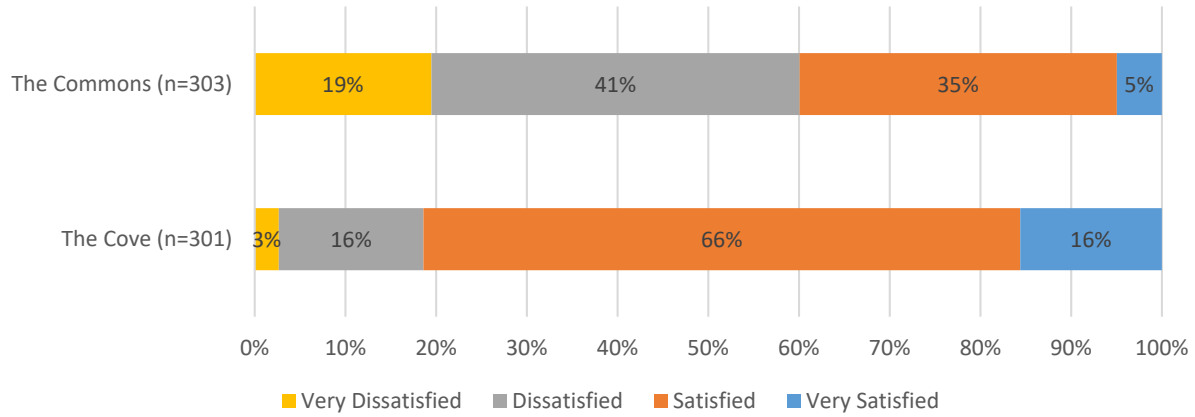


**Staff**

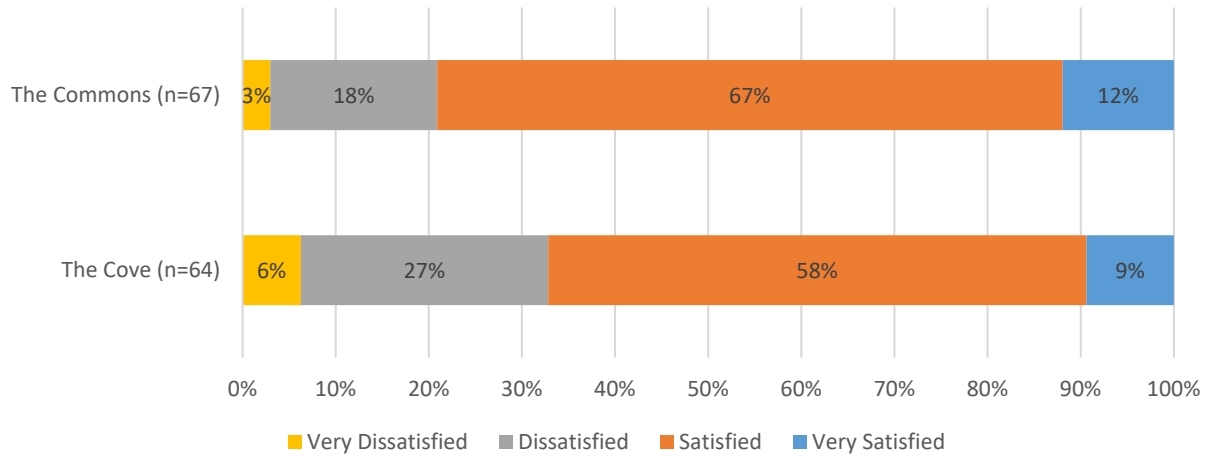


**Question 14: Which of the following best describes your overall opinion towards the current dining options at Southwestern (The Commons and The Cove)?**

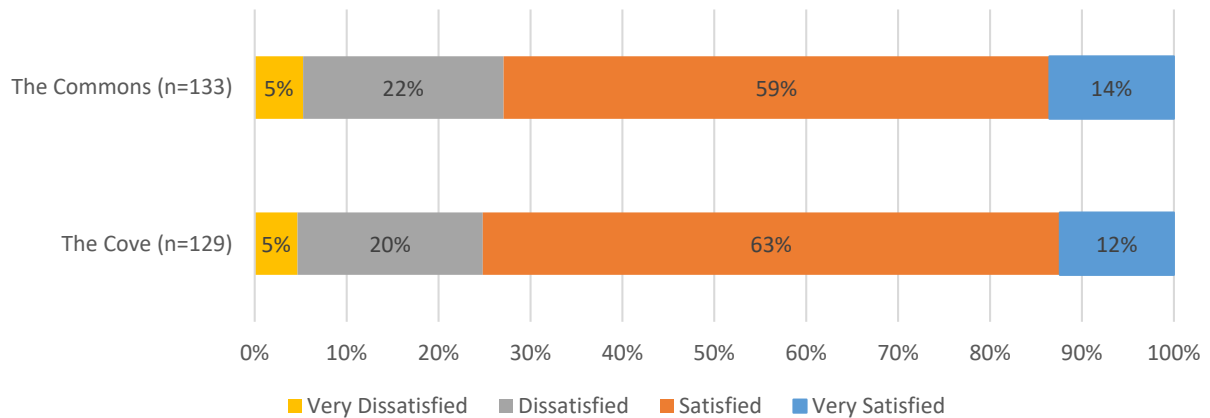
**Students**



**Faculty**



**Staff**



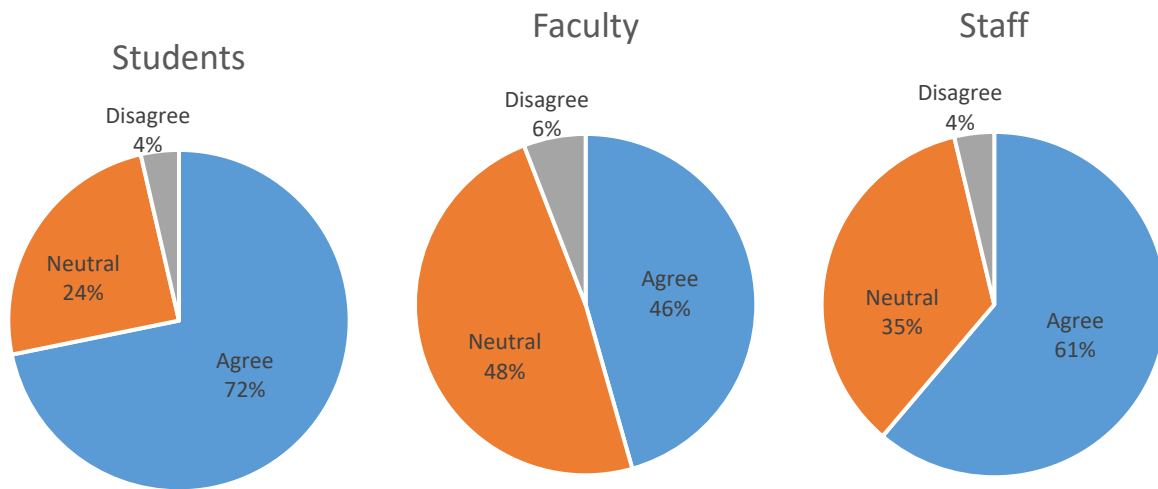
**Question 15: Why are you dissatisfied with the current dining options at Southwestern?**

Examples of frequently occurring responses organized by most prevalent theme

Quality	Students	When there's something good it's only once a month and the food just sits there sometimes and tastes bad after it sits
		I am always concerned about whether the chicken is cooked or not. There are also not a lot of protein and healthier options, especially for athletes.
		I have seen way too many pictures of gross things students have found in the Sodexo food. I don't like that we have a contract with Sodexo, they operate 5 private prisons, they have been known to mistreat their workers, and the fact that we contract with them is a major problem at SU.
		The food quality, The cross contamination, The lack of fresh, healthy options, The smell, The dry desserts, AND SO MUCH MORE
		There is too much quantity and little care for quality. Yes, you may have vegan options, a main line, pizza line, and entree, but the food is almost always cold, far too much pepper (it's overwhelming), and I daily find myself spitting out at least one food item per day because it is uncooked or just nasty. However, there are certain foods that are always good (such as the burritos or cottage pie), and others that are always bad and burnt or under cooked (like the burgers, I have learned never to eat them). Please have a more consistent meal set that is consistently done well. Trying to cook too many things at once and 90% of them being bad doesn't help anybody.
	Faculty	Unhealthy, unpalatable food.
		The food is not good. It is better than before, but not great.
	Staff	quality was not quite there
		The food is just OK. It's often bland (fairly typical for cafeteria food).
		Poor quality control
Variety	Students	Food at commons is not varied enough, there are not vegan, halal, etc options.
		Food options were not always appealing and quantity was limited for certain students if dining staff knew a rush was about to come.
		there are not enough options, we used to at least be able to eat cereal if there was nothing else good and now we can't even do that, the quality is also still very poor
		Not enough variety... quality sometimes very lack luster
		I usually have trouble finding something that is both healthy and satisfying. I usually end up having to eat the same thing every day.
		the options at the commons are very limited and often not even appetizing.
	Faculty	No Halal meat or Kosher; quality and variety need work, I don't eat there often, and when I do, I find myself getting the same things every time.
	Staff	Quality of food and variety. It would be nice to have some chains on campus as an option
		The quality of the food that Sodexo provides is not good. It's does not seem to be made with quality ingredients.
		The menu is the same every week.
		More variety needed at Cove. Better grab and go options.
It's like K-12 cafeteria. You know what they are serving Monday-Friday. Be creative.		
Diet	Students	The options for food are not healthy, and I get sick often from the food.
		There are not enough options for people with dietary restrictions (vegan, halal, kosher, gluten free, etc). And Sedexo is a terrible company that exploits their labors

		not enough options for my dietary needs
		There are very limited options for people with any sort of dining restriction, and it can sometimes be hard to tell if a food being offered is something that a person with an allergy or dietary restriction can eat, or whether it is not.
		The dairy free options are limited, as well as healthier options. The healthier options have very little variety or are too bland or too spicy.
	Faculty	Does not adequately meet needs of people with food allergies or other dietary restrictions.
		There are insufficient options for people with dairy allergies particularly in the COVE. So many of the options are cheese-based and not everyone can tolerate cheese.
	Staff	As a vegetarian, the options are also limited. There are very few options that are appealing in the ready-made food at the Cove.
		It is often difficult to find food that is both healthy and delicious. Pizza, burgers and loaded fries are great every once in a while, but not on a regular basis.
Cost	Students	extremely expensive meal plans
		Half of the time the food is bland and or dry. Not worth the money most of the time. It is also expensive in my opinion. The 5 meal plan should be available to all students who wish to eat at SU less.
		I think we pay way too much per meal for the employees in the commons and cove to get paid minimum wage for working ridiculous hours.
		Way overpriced for how sub par it is. It is so much better to cook for yourself for much cheaper per meal and taste way better. I feel that on campus students should not be forced to pay for the meal plan. I never ended up eating there the last semester of my stay on campus.
		Cove is so expensive. Money for cove runs out within 4 weeks if u go 4-5 a week
	Faculty	It is healthier and uses less plastic for me to cook food and bring it from home. Commons portions are too large. Snacks in the Cove are too expensive and not healthy enough.
	Staff	I am a staff member but the cost of items at the Cove are very high and are more than what students would pay at a grocery store. I think this is unfair to students who do not have wealthy parents.
		The Cove is very expensive. Also, kidney beans should be replaced with pinto or black beans. They do not need to put kidney beans in so many items. Nobody likes them. Only lima beans are worse.
Time	Students	There are limited options and nothing made to order. The hours of operation don't work for all and should be open longer for students who can't make it on time
		The hours need to be extended to accommodate students during Ramadan.
		there is not enough variety + quality or time when commons and cove are open
		quality is poor, and the dinning hours don't work for athletes
	Faculty	It takes a very long time to order and receive your meal at the Cove.
		Time is always an issue. Healthy options that are easy to order, pick up, and pay for quickly (e.g. online ordering) would be great. I would use those options far more frequently.
	Staff	Food not available at times when work allows
		Limited choices of hot food and food that is not tasty. Too hard to get through line in a timely fashion. Not having trays is inconvenient when transporting food to table.

**Question 16: I would like additional food service locations on campus.**



**Question 17: Do you have recommendations for where additional food service locations should be on campus?**

Most frequently suggested locations

Students	Residence housing, Library, Robertson Center, Prothro, Science Building
Faculty	Science Building, Library
Staff	Food trucks/Kiosks, Residence Housing, Robertson Center, Prothro, Library

**Question 18: What types of foods would you like to see on campus (select all that apply)?**

	Students (289)		Faculty (67)		Staff (126)	
Vegetarian/Vegan	135	47%	37	55%	46	37%
Hispanic/Latino cuisine	178	62%	47	70%	94	75%
Asian cuisine	209	72%	50	75%	90	71%
Italian cuisine	181	63%	26	39%	73	58%
Pastries, desserts, coffees	192	66%	35	52%	85	67%
Pre-package, ready-to-go	150	52%	22	33%	85	67%
Gluten free	70	24%	10	15%	32	25%
Other	38	13%	20	30%	27	21%

Other (examples of frequently occurring responses):

Students, Faculty, & Staff	Food that is Halal, Kosher, options for people who eat meat but not red meat or who don't eat pork
	Gluten, dairy and sugar free
	Indian, African, Mediterranean
	organic/local/sustainable
	Healthier food options
	Comfort foods
	Keto/low carb

**Question 19: What food services would you be interested in (select all that apply)?**

	Students (295)		Faculty (60)		Staff (124)	
Take out	238	81%	52	87%	105	85%
Delivery	130	44%	27	45%	50	40%
Table service	97	33%	15	25%	32	26%
On campus 3rd party vendors	258	87%	27	45%	93	75%
Use pirate card off campus	235	80%	8	13%	40	32%
Other	6	2%	5	8%	7	6%

Other (examples of frequently occurring responses):

Students	Third party vendors would be absolutely incredible
	The more options are better
Faculty	Pop ups or food trucks in various locations on campus once or twice a week. Doesn't have to be an outside vendor.
Staff	3rd party only if local small businesses. No chain restaurants.
	Mobil Vendors

**Question 20: Have you heard about food services offered at other institutions that you would like to see at Southwestern or do you have suggestions for us to consider?**

Example responses

Students	Yes - Binghamton University is one example of an institution that offers other food services
	I wish we could use dining dollars or pirate bucs at off campus restaurants in town or have other restaurants food available on campus. For example on Monday's chick fil A sandwich are available for grab and go in the cove, on Tuesday personal sized pizzas from dominos available and so on
	I'd like southwestern to consider working with local companies, companies that align with SU's morality and ethos- SODEXO is a problematic entity and they're sourcing freezes out local farmers
	Chik fil a, panda express, taco bell, taco cabana, in n out, Starbucks, milkshakes, ice cream, thai food, sushi, BOBA TEA
	A little cafe style restaurant with seating etc would be super, lots of places have that. Also like a small coffee/tea/smoothie/drink bar of some sort with longer hours in the early mornings and late evenings where you could order and grab a drink to go would be really awesome (bonus points if it offers baked goods/doubles as a bakery)
	the University of North Texas has an all vegan cafeteria that seems to be enjoyed by vegans and non vegans alike. Something like that would offer better options for vegan students and give other students the chance to try new things, more vegetables and eat less meat/animal products. I have also seen the grab n go type stations at a variety of universities, I think they are called POD at UTSA
	Yes, UMHB down the road has plenty of fast-food franchises. So does UTSA in San Antonio
	Trinity University's commons are open 24/7, TCU offers more meals a week. 15 meals a week isn't enough for a student; we shouldn't have to choose between eating fewer meals a day so we don't run over the plan.
	There are so many schools that offer actual restaurants on their campuses. We need more options of literally anything because what we have right now is not good enough
	Some kind of food court that has options made by campus and some restaurants from off campus as well, and having these restaurants be part of our meal plan.

	I like UNTs food program. It focuses on local/healthy food options and is completely internal (no third party vendor like Sodexo)
Faculty	I hear great things about St. Mary College of Maryland's dining hall options! I also liked my experience eating at the Claremont McKenna dining hall.
	I've been to other institutions that have corner coffee shop carts that pop up in the mornings. These always had lines of people grabbing coffee/pastries on the way to class.
	We live near Austin and if possible should capitalize on the amazing local chains we have. What about a P Terry's instead of a McDonald's? Starbucks is a good choice, but let's try for quirkier, fun choices!
	Bon Appetit does a great job with universities in California
	I really enjoyed the little food carts when I went to UT. I used them almost every day for a quick meal/snack between classes. I don't go to the Cove/Commons despite being very hungry some days because it will take too long.
Staff	I've seen sandwich stores like Subway at other schools that seem to have been successful. Perhaps something like Jimmy Johns or Schlotzky's?
	Arizona State University Plant Forward Menus looks interesting; consider healthy and sustainable dining
	At other universities, dining was far better or improved immensely when the school partnered with known restaurants, including fast food, such as markets (grab 'n' go), cafes (Panera), deli and sandwich shops (gyros, falafel, Subway, Jersey Mike's), and places that served a variety of healthy options (Freshii). Several universities also have dining services that are committed to sustainability in terms of sourcing ingredients, not just in packaging.
	Other universities have food offerings similar to our own. The difference is they also bring in outside companies (Chick-fil-A, Asian Cuisine, pizza, etc. - kind of like a food court) as additional offerings. This way, the students (and faculty and staff) do not always need to eat the same rotation of food.
	Grab-and-go options on St. Edward's campus. Street Eats at UT Austin campus.
	Bon Appetit food services. Supports local, offers diverse food, great salad bar where salads are made for you with different fresh meat carved
	Pre-bagged grab and go breakfast (e.g. bagel/cream cheese, yogurt, banana, juice) was extremely popular when I was a student.
	Rice University has its own university-run dining part of their "Housing & Dining" department. They hire actual chefs per dining hall: <a href="https://dining.rice.edu/">https://dining.rice.edu/</a>
	The coffee shop at St. Ed's is great (run by a local coffee shop rather than Starbucks). In general, a wider variety of foods, including a lot more vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free options, as well as a dedicated allergen-free kitchen/dining area are what I think we need most.
	There are great options out there (TCU), but my guess is that they come at a cost and are we willing to place that burden on our students? If we go to a 3 year residency, will the meal plan be required for those three years? If yes, then more variety is needed in some form.
	Texas State has a great selection of third party vendors and on campus dining service. St. Edwards food is way too expensive for the selection and the food that you are able to get. perhaps some local restaurants could have a satellite location at SU (600 Degrees, Nancy's Sky Garden or others)