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“Cafeteria: For Better or Worse”

Hungry? Why not stop at SUNY College at Old Westbury to dine at their clean and sanitary campus center cafeteria? You can choose from a buffet of gourmet food and cuisines from all around the world that will leave you completely satisfied. Or maybe you want to shed a few pounds for spring break and looking for a healthy nutritious meal. Well, at the cafe you can choose from a huge assortment of fresh vegetables, fruits and all the healthy food you need to get a kick start on your healthy journey. How can one forget to mention that all meals are cooked with low fat, low sodium, without trans fat and cooked with just a tad bit of oil? Sounds like the perfect cafeteria huh?

An ordinary day at the cafeteria consists of complaining, angry and re-occurring cases of upset stomach. Thompson Hospitality, the nation’s largest minority- owned food service, and Chartwells, an academic foodservice company in collaboration provide meals and recipes to over forty colleges and businesses. According to Chartwells, the company is “dedicated to provide the academic community with fun, healthy dining options.” However, a majority of the students who dine at the cafe would say the meals are basically a daily rotation of pasta, burgers, tacos, pizza, roast pork, chicken and hot dogs.

Recently, the cafeteria proposed “Become a Flexitarian Mondays, “encouraging students to eat a meatless meal once a week while eating healthy, making a sustainable difference, and eat ing “more humanly.” Yet about 85% of meals provided at the cafe come from animals. Jasmine Moses, a junior at Old Westbury, pledged to live a vegetarian lifestyle. However, she feels her choice has limited the amount of the meals available to her while living on campus. “They do not accommodate my vegetarian lifestyle, it is hard for me to eat anything the cafe provides because most of the time the food they claim is vegetarian is usually cooked around meat or fried in the same oil,” says Jasmine.

The cafe does provide students with a salad bar with salad, nuts, cheeses, croutons, and salad dressing. However, these “fresh” vegetables are sometimes frozen and reused. With over twenty years of experience in the food industry, Dave Conway, director of dining services at Old Westbury, describes the three-week cycle meal rotation stating, the majority of meals served at the café consist of protein and that is what students see when they enter the cafeteria: a lineup of beef, turkey, chicken and pork. Conway stressed the fact that they do try to provide a healthy option but their meals are based on what the students would prefer. Conway stated as far as nutrition the options are mixed. As far as the flexitarian Monday Conway stated, “the option was not received well by the students.”

Executive chef, Andrew H.B. Greene stated that all stations are clean on a daily basis. Due to build up of oil and debris the grill station is cleaned at least three times per shift. However, a cafeteria associate states, “the cafeteria workers should sanitize more than just the grill station; fryers should be cleaned or changed more often.”

As far as leftovers, Conway stated, “We will not serve leftovers as an exact meal.” However, a café associate stated “we save some food, mostly meat then we use them again for a different meal.” Which means chicken tenders at the grill one day will be the same chicken tenders re cooked, thrown in red sauce, with cut up fruit and called a “Russian cuisine” the next day.

The average student who enters the cafe would say it’s a mystery every time you walk in and you never know what you will get. However, a majority of students are usually disappointed. In attempts to

improve the cafe food, Greene stated, “We meet on a monthly basis with Food Service Advisory Committee to improve meal and recipes.”

With the help of student surveys and consistent feedback from the Campus population Chartwells is slowly but surely attempting to improve the dining experience for the entire campus community. Communication is the key to attaining a successful relationship between the campus community and Chartwells, thus each diner should express their approval or disapproval of the food being offered.

But there are days that the Chartwells staff will have a lineup of meals that leave the students in complete awe. Resident Advisor Biama Charles was so surprised and satisfied with the café food one day that she took it upon herself to congratulate the staff on their success. Conway stated, “We are aware and reacting to the concern, which seems to be a lot. We are listening. We want what is right for our students.”