

DINING DECISIONS

Often the more options you have, the more difficult the decision is to make. Such is frequently the case when your student is selecting classes, but it is also true when selecting among the eating options on campus. As the variety of locations, food types and dining formats has expanded over the past few years for our students, the decisions about which dining options to choose gets more complicated. And in this more challenging economic environment, determining which is the most economic option is also a key consideration for both parents and students. Highlighted here some of the important things to keep in mind when making decisions about Lafayette's dining options.

Let's start with a brief reminder of the dining facilities available on campus. First are the two main all-you-care-to-eat format dining halls:

- Drake Student Restaurant*
- The largest dining facility on campus and completely renovated in 2008
 - Located in the Farinon Student Center
 - All-you-care-to-eat format
 - Made-to-order cooking stations including classic comfort foods, signature grill items, pizza and pasta, vegetarian, Teppanyaki grill, salad bar and deli
 - Open from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. most days
- Marquis Student Restaurant*
- Located in Marquis Hall
 - All-you-care-to-eat format
 - Build-your-own items as well as made-to-order student favorites like wood fired pizza, vegan , salad and deli items
 - Open most weekdays for primarily for lunch (11:00–1:30) and dinner (4:30-6:30)

Then there are various other eateries on campus where food is ordered and paid for as it would be in a fast food type restaurant, such as:

- Food Court* Similar to the food court at a mall, Lafayette's Food Court has a variety of pre-made and made-to-order items. Located in Farinon Student Center, the Food Court offers pizza, burgers, wraps, sandwiches and more.
- Skillman Café* A coffee and snack area right inside the main Library for convenient study breaks
- Gilbert's Café* Located in Kirby House, soup, sandwiches and other snacks along with the cozy fireplace and occasional live entertainment makes Gilbert's popular for lunch on weekdays and late nights anytime since it's often open until 2 a.m.
- Simon's* Located in Kamine Residence Hall and open late-night (from 6:30 p.m. until 1:00 a.m.) for hot sandwiches, salads and deserts

Now the hard part. How can I ensure my student has healthy, delicious meals that are convenient in terms of location and time and reasonably priced? Any of the above eateries can be accessed by paying cash, but that means regularly sending your student cash and ensuring that he/she spends it on food rather than other tempting purchases.

Another option is "Flex dollars." Flex dollars are a pre-paid cash balance (similar to a debit card) available for food only and can be used at any of the dining facilities by the student simply presenting his/her Lafayette ID card. The Flex dollars available are reduced for each purchase, in a declining balance format. Parents or students can add Flex dollars to their account during the course of the year and most unused amounts can be carried over from Fall semester to Spring semester and/or can be refunded at the end of the year. [The only non-

refundable Flex dollars are those that are mandatory because the student opted out of any meal plan or those that are included as part of a meal plan.] Flex dollars can be used to buy a friend (or, more importantly, their parents when they come to visit) a meal or to pay to have a birthday party or other event catered. The price of access to either of the all-you-care-to-eat restaurants is more expensive with Flex dollars and cash than it is with a meal plan.

So when is a meal plan best? A meal plan is going to be the most economical when your student has a healthy appetite or when they like variety rather than choosing among the standard menu options available in our ala carte locations or when the centrally-located Farinon Student Center or Marquis Hall are convenient locations for them.

Which meal plan depends on the student. To help ensure that they are eating well during the initial period of transition from home, first year students must select from one of the more-inclusive meal plans: either 20 meals per week, the Carte Blanche plan or the 200 Block plan. Below is a chart that highlights some of the differences between the three major types of plans.

MEAL PLANS		
TYPES		DESCRIPTION
Carte Blanche		By far the most flexible plan, it includes unlimited access to both Drake and Marquis all-you-care-to-eat restaurants. Your student can go back to the restaurant for a meal, a snack or a beverage as many times as they like each day at any time either of the restaurants is open. Included in the cost is \$250 of non-refundable Flex dollars which also gives your student the opportunity to use the other cafes across campus.
Meal Count Plans	20 Meal	This plan includes breakfast (brunch on Sundays), lunch and dinner each day. It is not quite as flexible as the Carte Blanche because your student must arrive for each meal during designated hours or that meal is "lost". If your student would prefer to eat in the Food Court instead of one of the two student all-you-care-to-eat restaurants, a cash value is available and can cover or help defray the cost of the purchase (known as "cash/meal equivalency"). Equivalency rates for 2008 - 2009 are \$3.00 for breakfast, \$4.60 for Lunch and \$5.00 for dinner. Balances over the equivalency rate can be paid for with Flex or cash.
	14 Meal	Same as above but 2 meals per day/14 meals per week.
	10 Meal	Same as above but 10 meals per week.
	5 Meal	Same as above but 1 meal per day/5 meals per week.
Block Plans	200 Block	The Block-style meal plans are a cross between the Carte Blanche and the more traditional meal plans. They were introduced to allow the students more flexibility because they allow multiple meals per meal period. For example, if your student has a late breakfast at 11 a.m. and then wants to have an early dinner at 4:15 p.m., the 20-meal plan would not allow it since they are both during the designated "lunch" meal time. But under the 200 Block, timing doesn't matter; the student simply uses 2 of the 200 meals to which he/she is entitled. He/She can also use their meal allowance to "buy" access to one of the all-you-can-eat restaurants for friends or visiting guests. Although it equates to an average of 13 meals per week, the student can have zero meals one week and 21 meals the next. Like the Meal Count Plans, a student can elect to use his/her meal allocations in the Food Court rather than the all-you-care-to-eat restaurants through the "cash/meal equivalency" program.
	150 Block	Same as above, but 150 meals/semester
	100 Block	Same as above, but 100 meals/semester
	75 Block	Same as above, but 75 meals/semester

For most students, one of the above plans is usually most cost-effective and convenient, rather than relying exclusively on Flex dollars. If you or your student need assistance in deciding which one might be most appropriate in your particular case, please don't hesitate to call Dining Services at 610.330.5347 or if you want to know how to add Flex dollars to your student's account, call the Controller's Office at 610.330.5136.

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