



STEVE LEONARD

Food for Thought

There's more on college menus, but not all students choose well

Hamburgers made to order, pizzas prepared from scratch, chicken enchiladas, a salad bar yards long, frozen yogurt, a dozen different kinds of cookies—it's lunchtime at New York University, and the possibilities are manifold. Not even the student with a '50s-style palate is forgotten: there's a huge bowl of canned fruit with miniature marshmallows. ARA Services, which runs the cafeterias at NYU, has the tough job of competing with its Greenwich Village neighborhood for student customers, and the company tries hard. "We think our catering rivals any of the New York restaurants—Arcadia, the Helmsley hotels, anywhere," says ARA's Donna Quaddri proudly. Judging from the meal at hand, this was an overstatement bordering on felony, but the food—an unadorned beef-and-eggplant casserole accompanied by some equally unadorned chopped spinach—was respectable, if plain.

There probably isn't a campus in the country where students don't complain about the food. But these days they don't seem to be complaining quite as bitterly—and someone appears to be listening. According to a *NEWSWEEK ON CAMPUS* Poll, 64 percent of students now rate their food services as good or excellent, up from 49 percent two years

ago (box, page 18). Their major demands in the dining hall are for healthier meals and more fast food—a contradiction that doesn't appear to bother many—and colleges are providing both plus a great deal more. The new factor is choice: whether you're lacto-ovo vegetarian, staunchly meat-and-potatoes or committed to Froot Loops three times a day, chances are getting better that you'll find something you can eat in the cafeteria. After decades of mandatory meal plans, mandatory entrees with ice cream for dessert on Wednesdays and mandatory rescue squads dispatched late at night to the nearest pizza parlor, college food services are finally catching up to the outside world.

They have to. With a strip of cheap and speedy grease palaces right outside the college gates in many communities, campus dining halls must fight to keep hold of their students' food dollars. Today students can sign up for the number of meals per semester they're likely to show up for; they can charge meals and groceries to their own accounts—or their parents'; they can even choose the amount of money they want to spend on food and receive a board card worth exactly that much. Assorted self-serve counters—for baked potatoes, yogurt and more—now supplement the usual cafeteria meals; indeed, more than half the students in the *ON CAMPUS*