

Cramming: A well-balanced menu for Sunday dinner in the kitchen of the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity at Northwestern

not captives. At some cafeterias this means catering to a newly nutrition-conscious taste for more fruits and vegetables, lighter desserts and less beef: students at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for example, are eating only half as much red meat as they did five years ago. Chicken, fish and meatless entrees are appearing often. "Earlier in my career, if I'd put any kind of seafood out, I would have been hung out to dry," remarks Karen Peterson, who runs the food service at Carleton College. Carleton's vegetarian-minded students have ventured far beyond seafood. "They're the ones that came up with good ways to use tofu, and innovative ways to use complementary proteins," says Peterson. At the same time, however, others maintain undiminished appetites for junk food—so snack shops and student unions provide an all-day supply of hamburgers, french fries and pizza.

In their new role as customers, moreover, students are being surveyed on their food preferences, invited to join food-service advisory committees and treated to an occasional blowout. Notre Dame specializes in theme dining: on "Swamp Night" students tried Cajun cuisine; on "Home Cooking Night" they sampled recipes from assorted moms as well as a few dads. And at Georgetown the new White Linen Service—filet mignon by candlelight—is a hit.

Many food-service directors solicit student opinion about the food—and some respond. One of the most popular features of Saga/Marriott's food service at Wellesley these days is the bulletin board where dining-hall manager Roy

Poll say their schools offer vegetarian choices, and more than three-quarters report a salad bar.

The idea, according to food-service directors, is to treat students as customers,



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Pizza my heart: Indiana duo dines at Mother Bear's

Spagnolo posts his correspondence with students. "Roy, dear, please put a bit more curry in the 'curried vegetables.' Mild is one thing, but this verges on the ridiculously unflavored," one student chided recently. "Next time we'll try to spice things up a bit more," promised Spagnolo. "Roy, you've really outdone yourself—today's lunch was AWFUL!" wrote another gourmand. "Yucky-looking soup, no Coke, bad sloppy Joes, last night's beef slime, and what happened to the peanut-butter bars on the menu? What's this Day-Glo yellow stuff? BLEAH!" "Sorry you couldn't find anything you liked," answered the ever-patient Spagnolo.

About half the nation's colleges and universities operate their own food services; the rest contract with an outside company such as ARA or Saga/Marriott, the two giants in the field. It's easy to recognize an ARA operation: the company specializes in prepackaged "concepts" designed to meet fast-food-franchise competition head-on. Typically ARA might install an Itza Pizza counter, where pizzas are made fresh each day, Gretel's Bake Shop for cookies and desserts, a mobile snack cart known as the Bagel Wagon and various counters called Grillworks, Salad Garden and the like.

Mystery meat: The food served throughout ARA's 250 campuses comes from the company's master recipe file of 3,000 recipes, but dining-hall managers sometimes modify recipes to suit local tastes. At NYU, for instance, the Itza Pizza sauce is spicier than the master recipe dictates, and the staff is experimenting with such variations as calzone. ARA supplies cards listing all the ingredients in every dish it offers; the food-service director decides whether to display the cards or let students contemplate the eternal question of "mystery meat."

Saga/Marriott, the result of a recent merger between two much-maligned college food services, operates at some 400 campuses with its own line of prepackaged service ideas, in this case called "formats." The company recently polled students and came up with a list of the top 40 favorite entrees, headed by fried chicken, pizza, lasagna, steak and spaghetti. Food-service directors now plan menus around at least two of the top 40; the third can be chosen by the director according to local preferences. At Tulane, for instance, Cajun staples such as red beans and rice, gumbo and jambalaya are served up regularly. "The most important thing in this business is listening to your customers," says Garry Knox, a senior vice president of Saga/Marriott. "College students are very intel-

Too pooped to pop: Microwaved popcorn at Texas A&M

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