Meal plan costs to rise

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Senior News Editor

Students living in Lister Centre next year may see a significant increase to the cost of their mandatory meal plan, if a proposal by the University of Alberta Board of Governors is passed.

Vice President (Facilities and Operations) Don Hickey told Students Council last night that they will be proposing to raise the cost of the meal plan by 7.7 per cent for next year at each level except the highest.

"The (plan) had been increased since 2009 and we need to catch up on that," Hickey said. "We're proposing a catch-up based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) around the food service industry [...] and is amounts to 7.7 per cent to catch up for the four years."

Hickey said they will also be adding a motion to the university board asking that the meal plan be renegotiated for the future against CPI to avoid one-time large increases.

Hickey also explained that they will be reconstructing the meal plan to phase out the low-two plan, which is $2,330 for the current year. This will be done through increasing the lowest meal plan levels for the next three years. In the current year, there are four cost brackets, but for 2013-14, there will only be three and the lowest meal plan will cost $3,393.

Hickey said that although approximately 50 per cent of students purchase the lowest level, almost 20 per cent of them run out of funds or add money to their plan.

"The lowest level, we don't believe, is representative of a value that is needed to adequately provide the meals that a student would have," Hickey said.

Councillors raised concerns over the fact that many students do not use their entire meal plan and spend the money at the end of the year.

"There are some that don't use up their money, and I understand that sometimes there's a rush on pizzas at the end of the year [...] so the fact is at the end of the day, there's not really a lot of money left," Hickey said.

As part of the new contract between Aramark and the U of A, they will also be updating the facilities in Lister. Hickey pointed out that this has not been done since before Schaffer Hall was built.

"We've added around 30 per cent more students with the same infra-structure. Part of the contract negotiations with Aramark was around them putting in dollars for capital improvements in Lister that will then be paid back over the term of the contract, which I think is 15 years."

Students' Union Vice President (Student Life) Rory Tighe was concerned with the increase and proposed a plan, which he found more problematic than the one-time CPI adjustment.

"I think moving to a subsidy is CPI makes sense. I don't like the idea of phasing out the minimum plan. I would, however, take advantage of that sensitive meal plan and I don't think that we're doing students justice."

Tighe explained that, based on his discussions with students, the response to the changes was negative.

"We've seen a couple of residents council meetings and tried to elicit feedback from students as much as I could. I haven't heard any positive feedback towards this change. Generally, students aren't happy," he said.

"So the university is consulting with students, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're taking that into account.

However, he said that hopefully the capital investment from Aramark will address some of the complaints in Lister.

"People generally do complain a lot in Lister about the quality of food and the price. But I guess the idea is with a larger capital investment, they'll be able to increase the quality," he said.

Tighe added that the SU is hoping to counter the U of A's proposal.

In addition to the changes in the meal plan, Hickey stated that they are proposing an increase in rent for student residences by 0.8 per cent, tied to CPI, for 2011-12. Tighe said this is the lowest rent increase in the past several years.

GOLDEN DUNK The Gateway profiles graduate student Dylan Ferguson, a guard for the U of A Golden Bears basketball team. See story, page 15.

Panel on the internet examines the use of Wikipedia, Facebook

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The volume and validity of information on the Internet was discussed by panels on November 23, addressing audiences in the Maple Leaf Room in Lister Centre.

Titled “Does the Internet Lie?" and running with the festival of ideas theme of “Truth and Lies,” the panel was moderated by keynote speaker Geoffrey Rockwell and consisted of Ole Larmy, Peter Finn, Susan Brown, and Lisa Green — all of whom are University of Alberta researchers in various fields surrounding humanities, computing and information studies.

Rockwell began the discussion by focusing on Google and its role as an information provider, which was an issue that Rockwell picked up, citing the problems in the lack of transparency and knowledge about how Google returns its searches.

"Search engines that are faced with today, like Google, present the most dramatic-case of bias ever facing scholars," said Green. "Up to this point, biases have been more decentralized and personalized. This is a search engine; how do we [...] understand how the results are selected?"

Lisa Green explained that, despite those problems, "there's something about the 'I'm Feeling Lucky' button that is an attractive notion [...] when people are overwhelmed by information."

The concept of "information overload" was discussed at length, with each panel offering insights as to how to combat it. It was argued that since publishing data is far richer than it was a decade ago, making tools available to manage data as a personal level was paramount since people's ability to process information has not increased along with the volume of information accessible on the internet.

Green also spoke about the issue of having proper context. Brown offered the example of "having a piece of text [such as] nugatory literature [which can be], out of context, a piece of hate speech. Within context, it can be a historic document that works against hate speech." In addition, Green also questioned the idea of authority of creation, saying that too much voice is placed in popular sites such as Wikipedia and Facebook because of the authorities they receive. "They added that it should be a priority to bring the Facebook generation awareness to the limitations and validity of readily available information."

"The event was closed by special guest Chad Gaffield, the President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In his presentation, he talked about how everyday citizens are becoming more of a driving force in how society operates. He discussed the notion that instead of being driven by technology, it is being seen as a tool that we can choose whether or not we wish to use."

"This is allowing students to move from passive (learning to) more active model where you’ll learn in the process of creating things and getting involved. The learning part is going to be integrated into the creation part, as [...] changing becomes creators instead of passive absorbers," He added that it’s “a real deep shift.”

Taunting your foes

When the Roughriders and the Alouettes take to the field Sunday, we’ll be heckling the shit out of the players.

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Films for chumps

Just because they’re on a top-10 list doesn’t make these horrible movies good. Stupid critics.