

University of Rhode Island

External Review of URI Dining Services

Review Team

Ken Toong

Executive Director
Auxiliary Enterprises
University of Massachusetts

Kory Samuels

Executive Director of Dining
Rochester Institute of Technology

Colleen Wright-Riva, Chair

Director of Dining Services
University of Maryland

Submitted to Dr. Kathy Collins

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1.0 Executive Summary

More than ever before, the higher education landscape requires colleges and universities to focus on improving student and stakeholder experiences, while also leveraging shared resources to be as efficient and effective as possible. It is through this lens that the University of Rhode Island Student Affairs leadership has embarked upon comprehensive program reviews for all its departments.

This External Review was initiated as a follow-up study to a recently completed self-study of URI Dining Services. To inform its work, the External Review Team (ERT) evaluated the existing program; considered appropriate assessment benchmarks; participated in over 15 hours of interviews with Dining Services team members and other key stakeholders, and identified several immediate, short-term and long-term strategies forward. Following the site-visit, the review team engaged in several conference calls and completed independent research before submitting this report.

Throughout the review, all URI participants were candid and available for the ERT. There was a general “can-do” attitude observed in the Dining Services management, hourly and student employees that was impressive and commendable. While this report will share detailed outcomes in the pages ahead, several themes emerged, including:

- Campus support for Dining Services is significant and should be leveraged
- Financial outcomes from Dining Services operations are stable and there are appropriate reserves available to elevate the program in the years ahead
- There is an opportunity for shared services within the Division that will provide several departments with needed support and efficiency
- Dining Services will benefit from a comprehensive Marketing and Communications strategy
- There is a need for additional training in the areas of culinary, service and leadership
- The organizational structure within Dining Services should be re-evaluated to increase effectiveness
- State and campus administrative requirements are a significant hurdle to current operational effectiveness and future success

The ERT is confident that its recommendations will provide a roadmap for improved outcomes for URI Dining Services. The ERT acknowledges that its proposed changes must be considered against time constraints, capital constraints and competing priorities. The immediate; short-term, and long-term recommendations may not all be feasible or possible, but progress made on any of them will greatly increase student satisfaction and program effectiveness.

2.0 Program Strengths

The ERT evaluated URI Dining Services over several days. The team quickly identified a number of program strengths and unique attributes that should be celebrated and acknowledged, including:

- The Dining team’s desire to do well – The ERT was impressed by the level of commitment and passion that the team exhibited during the site-visit. While many of the team shared concerns or expressed opinions about the program, there was never a negative tone or defeatist attitude present. The team had a clear passion for what they do, and it was evident that they want to see the program improve - for the students and for their own personal growth and job satisfaction. Several team members noted a true sense of pride when Hope Commons was renovated and when Mainfare extended service hours and offerings – the ERT believes the team is ready for more of those wins.
- The tenure of the team – URI Dining Services, like many other dining programs across the country, has a tenured staff. This speaks to the quality of life and the work/life balance that is so important and that many of the team spoke about during our interviews. Several team members described positively the flexibility with their schedules and others spoke about the tuition remission benefits afforded to them. While there is a risk that some long-tenured team members might exhibit a “been there, done that attitude” instead of using that experience to leverage informed decisions for change, the ERT did not believe this to be a significant concern for URI Dining Services leadership.
- Department and Divisional Leadership Expertise – The ERT heard time and again that there is high confidence in the Divisional leadership and in the recently hired Director of Dining Services. This level of trust will help the Director gain buy-in from the team, especially when he asks them to take risks in the months and years ahead.
- The IT Team’s Commitment – While the ERT believes the IT team may be under-resourced, the team’s willingness to support new initiatives and “find a way” is commendable. Clear examples of this resourcefulness include the creation of the digital Catering events calendar, launch of Text and Tell and the App that was created to provide students with “push” announcements and current information.
- Sustainability Initiatives – There are a number of notable programs to celebrate including a partnership with the University Farm; local seafood commitments; composting and the movement away from plastic bags and straws.
- Food Insecurity Solutions – The ERT was impressed to see the collaboration with the Dean of Student’s Office, the Share-a-Swipe-for-Hope program and the financial support for a Graduate Assistant focused on outreach and education.
- Summer Student Management Program – Student Success in and out of the classroom is top of mind for most Student Affairs professionals today. The ERT believes that URI Dining Services has a wonderful program that offers its student leaders real-world management training and teaches life skills like problem-solving, conflict resolution and food safety.

3.0 Aspirations/Opportunities for Growth

The ERT identified opportunities for growth and divided them into two distinct areas – Administrative/Support functions and Operations. Both have an impact on program success, but the ERT believes that any improvements made in the administrative/support functions will allow operational effectiveness to be gained more quickly.

Administrative/Support Functions:

- **State and campus bureaucracy are negatively impacting the Dining program** – The ERT found state and campus regulations to be cumbersome and notes that almost every focus group expressed their frustration about the unrealistic guidelines and requirements they encounter. Two areas that stood out for the ERT:

- **Purchasing** – The ERT recognizes that all public institutions must adhere to state guidelines, but the extensive and burdensome requirements on how URI Dining Services purchases food for resale is inconsistent with best practices found elsewhere. The current model, while allowing for some food cost wins, does not necessarily guarantee consistent pricing and it does not support creative, flexible, diverse and sustainable menus. It also prevents URI Dining Services from fostering a collaborative relationship with its vendors and/or manufacturers. These relationships often provide dining programs with additional expertise and support in identifying menu trends, training, research and marketing. These resources are especially valuable when hosting major events on campus or considering programmatic change.

URI Dining team members have adapted to this environment, but it was clear during interviews that they have had difficulty being responsive to students, especially because menus are written far in advance due to the current bid process. The Catering team also noted that their responsiveness to client requests is at risk of delay, especially when there are needs for new or unique items. URI Dining Services procures approximately \$10 million annually and is one of the largest food purchasing programs in Rhode Island.

Recommendation – The ERT believes the entire process should be re-evaluated and that a case be made for a waiver or exemption from existing State requirements.

- **Human Resources** – Job descriptions, job titles, salaries and hiring protocols at URI appear to be significantly outdated. The ERT’s review of several Dining Services positions revealed job descriptions dated in the 1960s and salaries that were not competitive enough to recruit and retain the best talent in the State. This has resulted in several failed searches, extended position vacancies and decreased employee morale.

Gaps in appropriate staffing levels negatively impact guest satisfaction. URI Dining Services team members shared numerous examples of not having the necessary staff to execute “pop-up” stations or effectively staff for fall semester opening. In one example, the team noted that ten cooks started work on the first day that students returned to campus – this would be a challenge for any program. The team reported that, at best, a new employee could be on-boarded in six weeks, but eight or more weeks would be the typical hiring timeline experienced. In a service environment, the hiring process needs to be more effective.

Recommendation - The ERT believes there must be a Program Champion who will prepare a compelling case for change to the University and/or State Human Resource decision-makers.

- **Facilities Infrastructure and Maintenance** – URI’s dining halls and the retail locations in Hope Commons appear to be in good repair and have been reasonably well maintained. These locations have had renovations or “spruce-ups” within the past 10 years and ERT recommended changes to them will not be extensive. On the other hand, the retail program in the Memorial Union is dated and should be renovated as soon as possible.

URI Dining Services has a team of four Maintenance employees who trouble shoot and maintain Dining spaces. This staffing level seems appropriate to the ERT, but several team members shared that the Maintenance team does not always respond as promptly as necessary, especially on nights and weekends. This issue should be explored more fully by Dining leadership.

Recommendation – The ERT believes URI Dining Services should invest in some immediate, modest updates to the dining halls and move as quickly as reasonable to fully renovate retail space in the Memorial Union. Furthermore, the ERT believes that the Director of Dining should perform a detailed facilities walk-through with both - Unit Managers and the Facilities Manager - so that outstanding repair issues are agreed upon and promptly corrected. Specifically, the URI team shared concerns

about a steam pipe in MainFare and about the floor condition in the Fusion station that the ERT believes should be addressed immediately.

- **Information Technology** – URI Dining Services IT systems are well integrated with the University’s various platforms. The IT team has leveraged technology to better serve guests and provide greater efficiency by moving its enterprise system CBORD Odyssey to a web-based hosted system on Amazon cloud; upgrading to the latest CBORD Food Service Suite; introducing CBORD Net Nutrition and installing touch screen kiosks.

With all this important work noted, the ERT observed that the three-person team seems over-taxed and appears to have had little opportunity to elevate the Dining website or address ongoing concerns from operations team members related to the menu management system. Additionally, the ERT notes that one position in this group is the Graphic Designer, which may align more appropriately within a Marketing function.

Recommendation - The ERT believes that more training is needed in the use of the menu management system and that a “Super User” should be identified and become the department’s expert. This would allow URI Dining Services to extract more value and data analysis from this important tool. The ERT also believes there is an opportunity to re-structure this support function.

- **Marketing** – Marketing is about telling the story. The ERT believes that URI Dining Services is missing valuable opportunities to tell that story - through appropriate and attractive signage and labeling, an improved website and a comprehensive marketing calendar. In addition, the ERT completed its visit without a clear sense of what the URI Dining Services “brand” actually stands for. When asked, no one from the Dining team was able to articulate the mission, vision or values of the program.

Recommendation - The ERT recommends that URI Dining Services retain a Marketing and Communications consultant to assist them in creating a comprehensive Marketing Strategy for the months and years ahead. In addition, the team should make simple improvements in signage and labeling to begin in the fall semester, 2019.

Operations:

- **Residential Dining** – The ERT believes that a great dining program can and will assist URI attract and retain the brightest students; enrich campus life and contribute to the financial well-being of the institution. Food is a powerful tool to build connections and to enhance the quality of life and experiences at URI.

During ERT interviews, URI students rated the residential experience a 5 or 6 out of a 10 and acknowledged they would like to see change. This relatively low student rating presents challenges for the URI Dining team, but it also provides a realistic baseline to improve upon in the future. As the program gains increased student satisfaction, the ERT believes there is an opportunity to increase off-campus student participation as well because the present capture rate is quite low.

The ERT had an opportunity to visit both dining halls at different dayparts and noted several things, including:

- Very similar menu offerings at both locations
- Each dining hall had approximately 6 food stations, limiting the variety of offerings
- Signage was hand written and lacked professionalism
- Plate costs were very inconsistent – ranging from \$2.25 to \$3.25
- Servery layout presents challenges
- Silverware was of low quality
- Service utensils were typical of those found in back of house, not guest-facing
- Staff uniform standards appeared inconsistent

Culinary excellence is the foundation of a great dining program. This is an area for improvement at URI. From both market research and practical experiences at other schools, the ERT knows that students are looking for authentic, healthy, local, sustainable and delicious food that is freshly prepared. During its visit, the ERT found little evidence to support these characteristics at URI Dining Services. The feedback from students during our visit was consistent with the ERT's impressions and URI's most recent outcomes in the NACUFS Customer Service Survey.

Food is ever evolving and as students continue to look for convenience, healthfulness, authenticity and sustainability in food choices, URI Dining Services must take its residential and retail programs to the next level.

Recommendation - The ERT believes URI Dining Services must focus on the basics of great food, increased menu variety and great service – all provided in attractive spaces – in order to move the satisfaction needle. Specific recommendations identified as immediate, short-term and long-term are detailed later in this report. The ERT believes that residential dining is the “bread and butter” of any collegiate dining program and should be the URI Dining team’s priority.

- **Retail Dining** – On most campuses, retail dining is a financial challenge and a critically important line of business, at the same time. This appears to hold true at URI, where retail dining is the primary food option for off-campus students, faculty and staff – and, getting it right really matters. Most of this audience turns to the Memorial Union’s Ram’s Den to meet their needs.

Stakeholder feedback during the ERT interviews indicates a need for both a physical space renovation and a comprehensive overhaul of the menu options and hours of service offered in the Memorial Union. As the URI Dining program has evolved, the introduction of combo meals has resulted in the Ram’s Den/Ram Escape and Rhody Market being a meal equivalent option for residential students.

The ERT received feedback about service standards being a concern at several retail locations, which may speak to an observation by the ERT that there is not enough professional staff working in the Ram’s Den or Rhody Market. While it is commendable that the student program is so strong and takes ownership of these locations, this staffing mix may not be ideal when trying to provide great guest service. And, similar to residential dining, the ERT noted a lack of standards with uniforms and signage.

Recommendation - It is the understanding of the ERT that the physical plant renovations in the Memorial Union will occur in approximately 5 years. Therefore, it is more important at this time that the URI Dining Services team focus on menu variety and other satisfaction attributes – such as hours of operation, uniforms, signage, etc. Specific recommendations will be detailed later in this report.

- **Catering** – The Catering line of business provides full-service catering that is used throughout the University. This includes catering at event venues (on and off campus) and sports arenas. Catering does have a right of first refusal on campus, which appears to be judiciously waived as necessary. Catering shares space with URI’s Bakery and Warehouse, which is not ideal and may impact overall effectiveness. The team’s Chef seems to be primarily tasked as the President’s Chef and there may need to be additional culinary talent added to the team in the way of an Executive Sous Chef.

The ERT notes that catering clients interviewed during its site-visit reported that Catering team members are flexible and courteous. But even with this positive feedback from clients about their interactions with the team, the ERT believes there is a disconnect between Catering’s “perception of self” and the client ratings of Catering’s overall performance. Frequently in focus group conversations, clients reported a desire for

better value in menu items, increased variety of selections and more consistency in service received. One client rated Catering a 5 out of 10 because of the perceived lack of value, while another rated them a 6 and gave an example of a recent event starting at 3pm and the catering team not on-site and non-responsive by phone at 2:45pm.

Recommendation - The ERT believes URI Catering should review its policies and procedures to reduce obstacles that impact service; should benchmark its pricing to other universities and caterers in the region and should host an annual Client Showcase. The review of policies, procedures and pricing will allow Catering to determine the competitiveness or lack thereof of its services and costs. An annual Client Showcase allows the team to thank its clients with a food and fun-filled event, while also engaging them in sampling and providing feedback on new menu items and/or service ideas. These recommendations should begin to bridge the gap that currently exists between the Catering team and its clients.

- **Stores** – The ERT visited Rhody Market, the Corner Store and a small convenience store operated by the Book Store in the Memorial Union. The ERT noticed opportunities for better signage (especially related to how combos work) and merchandising at all three. The ERT was surprised to see that the stone oven in Rhody Market was not being used and that there were very limited plant-forward menu options, especially in the combo meal selections.

Recommendation - The ERT believes there is an opportunity to increase sales in Rhody Market by introducing menu items that can easily be prepared and cooked in the stone ovens, which are currently not being utilized. There is also an opportunity to add prepared meals (Rhody to-go) in the Corner Store. And, finally, the ERT recommends that the small store in the Memorial Union be re-aligned to report to Dining Services. Presently, this location does not look cohesive or well organized and it could become a unique “niche” location operated by Dining that helps raise student satisfaction.

4.0 Assessment and Key Performance Indicators

While URI Dining Services has enjoyed stable financial outcomes and consistent leadership over the years, the ERT believes there has been too much focus on “doing without to save money”, rather than on making appropriate investments in people and programs. There are many reasons why University and Dining leadership might focus on financial outcomes instead of other attributes and the ERT is not making any judgement about these previous decisions. It simply notes that they come at a cost - and presently, URI Dining Services is significantly behind its peers in program variety, menu creativity, facility upgrades, service levels and satisfaction. Positively though, URI Dining Services is a program on the cusp of great changes. Making these investments now and into the future will yield long-term benefits for the University and the dining program – and most importantly, for the students.

If not already occurring, all the operational lines of business – residential, retail, catering and stores should begin to track outcomes against peer institutions and against their own baseline performance. In addition, URI Dining Services should take advantage of all NACUFS Survey opportunities, including the Customer Service Survey, Benchmarking Survey and Salary Survey. Metrics from these surveys should allow all lines of business to identify a specified set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to focus on. The ERT suggests the following measurements, at a minimum:

Residential Dining	Retail Dining	Catering	Stores	Program-Wide
Plate Cost	Cost of Goods Sold as a % of Total Retail Revenue	Cost of Goods Sold as a % of Total Catering Revenue	Gross Margin on Store Sales	Total Dining Revenue per Residential Student
Meals per Operational Labor Hour	Retail Labor Costs as % of Retail Revenue	Catering Labor Costs as % of Catering Revenue	Store Labor Cost as a % of Store Sales	Foodservice Revenue per Staff Employee
Meal Plan Utilization/Missed Meal Percentage	Retail Market Basket Price Comparisons	Catering Market Basket Price Comparisons	Convenience Store Average Transaction Amount	Foodservice Revenue per Management Employee
Satisfaction Results			Store revenue per square foot of store space	Employee Benefits Cost as a % of Revenue
			Retail Market Basket Price Study	

5.0 Immediate Action Steps

There are several “quick-win” steps that URI Dining Services can and should take now that will improve outcomes as early as fall 2019. These steps are identified in the same broad categories as other areas of the report - Administrative/Support and Operations.

Administrative/Support

- Hire a Human Resources Expert
 - Provide support to the leadership team with hiring and training staff for the fall semester
 - Provide expertise with issues related to department policies and discipline
- Secure additional training from CBORD
 - The IT, Purchasing and Operations Management teams should all have an opportunity to learn more about the menu management system
 - Send the appropriate person(s) to CBORD Users Conference in October
- Retain a Marketing and Communications Consultant
 - Consultant will assist URI Dining in “story-telling”, Brand Awareness and signage.
 - Consultant will assist URI Dining in development of a Marketing calendar that identifies program highlights for the 2019-2020 academic year
- Retain an Operations Consultant
 - Consultant to assist unit managers with effective Patterns of Management
 - Determine appropriate menu changes based on existing culinary talent, equipment, servery layouts and student preferences

Operations – Residential Dining

- Repair the steam pipe and the floor (in the Fusion Station) in Mainfare Dining Hall
- Authorize team visits to ERT and other campuses – This will provide the “proof” of why change is important. (UMD works well for residential program change and RIT for the retail program)
- Invest in higher quality silverware
- Invest in new China plates, discontinue use of the melamine
- Upgrade serving utensils and serving bowls/dishes/platters at food stations
- Identify a labeling standard at the stations and on any monitors or dining hall signage
- Increase service hours to better reflect student schedules
- Evaluate menus and consider fall semester changes (An Operations Consultant can assist with this)
- Invest in new uniforms – to be considered a top-tier program, employees must have a strong visual presence.
- Introduce and menu weekly “pop-ups” at both dining halls that are fun, unique and offer excitement. (ex – Bubble Tea night)
- Evaluate possible changes to station setup in Butterfield’s main servery – The ERT believes the Home Style, Fusion and Soup stations are very congested

Operations – Retail Dining and Stores

- Increase Combo offerings to include Plant-Forward entrées
- Add menu items (like calzones) in the Rhody Market that can be prepared in the stone ovens
- Add made-daily, fresh grab and go items to Corner Store
- Add new menu items in the Ram’s Den – consider global options and plant-forward selections
- Invest in new uniforms
- Evaluate service line hot holding equipment, replace or upgrade as necessary

6.0 Strategic Direction

Comprehensive programmatic change does not happen quickly. There are a number of short-term (18 to 24 months) and long-term (25+months to 5 years) steps that URI should consider as it transforms the Dining program in the years to come.

Short-Term - The ERT believes URI Dining Services should embark on the following strategies over the next two years:

- Prepare a 5-year Operations Plan
 - Undertake a comprehensive evaluation and situational analysis of the dining program's current impacts with a focus on culinary and operational excellence, customer service, and team culture.
 - The ERT recommends the use of an independent third party.
- Develop a 5-year Strategic Plan
 - Formalize the long-term vision, mission, direction, and goals for the department while focusing on operational, structural and functional components of the dining program.
 - The Plan should establish a strategic framework and road map for:
 - Impacting student success and quality of campus life experience
 - Achieving internal organizational, operational, and culinary excellence
 - Administrative accountability and financial viability
 - The planning process should involve as many stakeholders as possible. This is important to transform the culture of food at URI and assure buy-in and support from internal and external sources.
 - Consider retaining an outside consultant to facilitate this important work.
- Establish a Prime-Vendor model for Procurement of food and beverages
 - URI Dining Services currently has an open-bid process for most of its food items and utilizes a large warehouse for drop-ship deliveries and cost management.
 - The ERT recommends that this entire process be reviewed and compared to a Prime Vendor model. All costs associated with each model should be included – labor, food, direct and indirect expenses. In addition, opportunity costs, such as rebates, price deviations and utilizing national vendor resources such as training should be included in the assessment.
 - Prime Vendor contracts are a pricing mechanism that distributors offer to operators for the items they frequently purchase. The higher volume of purchases through the Prime Vendor allows for this preferred pricing on key menu items. All ERT schools utilize this model. The Prime Vendor model allows for fixed pricing for a set time period or cost-plus pricing, which includes an agreed upon upcharge applied to purchases. The ERT believes the Prime Vendor model will save money, time and human resource dollars. Those savings can be re-directed to other Dining priorities.
 - In consideration of this strategy, the ERT recommends site visits to schools with a Prime Vendor model, use of a market basket price comparison on top 50 items and a comprehensive bid process to determine which distributor is best for URI.
- Review current dining plan structure, consider modifications that provide better value for students
 - URI Dining Services relies heavily on dining plan participation as its primary revenue stream. However, the current dining plan structure does not provide enough value to the off-campus community, even though the pricing seems competitive. It is the ERT's assessment that dining hall hours of operation, menu variety and food quality are not

- strong enough to entice increased participation and that changes to the plans and services offered is necessary.
- Dining plans and pricing are already in place for 2019-2020, but there is an opportunity to research other options; engage students, and roll-out new plans in the future. When evaluating possible plan changes, consider the following:
 - Does the plan meet the needs of the residential and off-campus student?
 - Is there a clear value equation and compelling reason to buy the plan?
 - Consider the number of plans offered - too few is limiting, too many is confusing
 - How will you promote the benefits of the plans and how can your menu offerings sell the plans?
 - Do you want to continue with Combo meals (meal equivalency) or is there a better method to provide convenience and portability in your plans?
 - Upgrade and refresh the layout of the dining halls and enhance offerings as possible
 - Both dining halls require minor renovations to improve traffic flow, increase selection of concepts and improve authenticity of menu. Consider:
 - A redesign of the Butterfield Served – specifically, the Home Style, Fusion and Soup stations
 - Replacing the induction burners at Fusion in Mainfare with three woks with gas burners – the food will cook faster, taste more authentic and provide a level of showmanship for guests to watch
 - Offering Sushi and ramen noodle stations at one or both dining halls
 - Creating some “sub-stations” or mobile “pop-ups” to increase variety
 - Create a Culinary Excellence Program with progressive training and skill certifications for the culinary team
 - While the Director of Dining is also a talented Chef, his plate is full and his attention is divided among many priorities in the department. A program as large and complex as URI Dining Services should have a strong culinary-focused team member responsible for transforming the culinary experience on campus. The ERT recommends hiring a Culinary Director or Senior Executive Chef with oversight for the culinary outcomes of the entire department. In addition, the ERT recommends hiring a Chef De Cuisine for each of the dining halls.
 - While the ERT was not on-site long enough to evaluate the individual skills of the many culinary team members, program satisfaction scores, feedback received and ERT observations indicate a need for structured culinary training. This may include bringing experienced Chefs to campus to provide “Culinary Boot Camp” or advanced skills training, depending on individual evaluations.
 - The ERT recommends, as often as possible, getting the Director, Managers, Chefs and Cooks to other schools to see programs with high food quality and satisfaction. This will encourage conversation about what to change and why to change.
 - Formalize a comprehensive Marketing Plan and determine methods to track impact
 - As URI Dining Services begins to make change, there must be a way to tell the story and share successes with the campus community. Hiring a Marketing Consultant to assist in creating a plan will pay dividends because it will raise student awareness of the efforts, build brand loyalty and showcase outcomes.
 - Utilize a Social Media strategy to connect more closely with students
 - Relationship Building
 - URI Dining Services already enjoys the support of the campus community, but relationship building is never done and must always be a priority. A comprehensive community

- engagement program would add value to the department and the institution.
- Stakeholder Groups might include:
 - Students
 - Staff, Faculty and Administration
 - Parents
 - Alumni
 - Local Community Members
 - Local Government
 - Peer Institutions
- Ensure that the engagement program includes a feedback mechanism. Specific ideas include:
 - Create a Student Ambassador Program that connects URI Dining Services with students. Provide opportunities for formal and informal feedback and idea-sharing
 - Conduct a semi-annual guest satisfaction survey – evaluate quality, service, cleanliness. Share findings and actions to address concerns
- Assume oversight of the Convenience Store currently operated by the Campus Book Store
 - URI's Book Store operates a very small convenience store in the Memorial Union. The ERT recommends that this be re-aligned to Dining Services and that they offer products or menu items that are unique and perhaps “quirky” to give the campus community something new and fun, without significant financial risk to the department.
- Open new retail concepts and Food Truck already planned and in the queue.
- Evaluate organizational changes and implement as soon as possible
 - By their nature, collegiate dining departments are flat, and people often wear many hats. At URI Dining Services though, the department is too flat and the program has grown enough that thoughtful consideration of a reorganization is appropriate.
 - The Director of Dining Services has too many direct reports to strategically lead the department. By ERT's count, the Director has 10 direct reports - a better, more realistic number is 5 or 6.
 - The Associate Director's scope of responsibilities appears to be too broad. This results in him being too far removed from operations to make any significant changes, even though change is really needed. Presently, the scope includes Warehouse Operations, Catering and Residential Dining.
 - There does not appear to be a person responsible for oversight of all the financial matters of the department. The ERT noted seeing or talking with team members who hold positions of Chief Clerk, Fiscal Clerk and Assistant Business Manager, but a department of this size should have a Budget and Financial expert reporting to the Director who oversees the functions of Accounts Receivable and Payable, Revenue reconciliation and billing, departmental transfers, budget development, financial reporting and audit response.
 - Menu Management Systems are complex and require a “Super User” or Administrator – it was unclear to the ERT that any one person in URI Dining Services has the expertise or time to be that person.
 - The department needs Human Resource representation – searches, interviews, hiring, training and discipline all require a lot of time. On many campuses, departments similar in size to URI Dining Services have a dedicated team member who oversees this critical work.
 - Professional Management staffing in Retail and Residential units needs to be re-evaluated. The ERT noted that there are only six professional staff members (management and hourly combined) in retail operations in The Memorial Union and that dining hall General Managers appear to have significant shift-running responsibilities while also being involved

in departmental strategic initiatives and menu-writing and planning. Having this much scope without adequate support makes it unlikely that significant change can occur.

- Catering is a highly visible department with high profile guests and events. The ERT noted that the Senior Food Service Administrator leads the sales team, executes events on-site and serves as the liaison to approve or deny catering waivers. In addition, the Catering Chef is almost fully focused on the culinary needs for the President which leaves other events without a strong culinary influence. The ERT believes this line of business would benefit from the addition of a General Manager or Assistant Director.

Long-Term – The ERT believes URI Dining Services should embark on the following strategies over the next five years:

- Revisit, adjust and update the 5-year Strategic Plan.
- Renovate Ram’s Den in the Memorial Union
- Implement Shared Services Opportunities
 - The Division of Student Affairs, like Dining Services, has been hindered by the requirements of the State as it relates to hiring, changing job descriptions and increasing salaries. Given this reality and given the financial benefits of an effective Shared Services philosophy, The ERT believes there would be value in considering a progressive roll-out of Shared Services in the areas of:
 - Finance – Create a Director of Finance or Business Operations to oversee a unified cross-functional team that handles:
 - Accounts Payable
 - Accounts Receivable
 - Purchasing
 - Payroll
 - Financial Analysis
 - Information Technology – Investigate the benefits of having a centralized IT team to oversee Dining, Resident Life, Memorial Union software and hardware functions.
 - Marketing and Communication – Consider the pros and cons of centralized resources for website maintenance, social media presence, print and digital platforms.
 - Hosting an External Review Team was the first step in determining programmatic change. As URI Dining Services implements the recommendations shared in this report and others independent of this report, a more thorough evaluation of the program outcomes should be considered. Such an effort will validate work and/or suggest corrections to ensure that URI Dining continues to exceed its own expectations while remaining financially viable.

Appendix – Comprehensive List of Comments

Comments from Dining/Catering team members during interviews:

- We don't have an HR system person
- We had so many vacancies at opening
- I'd like to see centralized student employment process
- Sneeze guards need to be reviewed
- Maintenance of equipment is a problem – double door steamer broken since Christmas
- Menu changes, Net nutrition and Text to Talk have been positive changes
- Extra step at dining hall door with ID card slows things down
- Some maintenance tasks should be sub'd-out, they lack good communication and follow-through
- We do a good job with allergy students
- Our culinary strength is good
- Butterfield closes between meals, some complaints
- Butterfield deli works well for small groups
- We've only had two full-team meetings in 10 years
- I don't know the Mission or Vision for Dining Services
- Managers need to come up with menus
- Hiring takes too long – 2 weeks for HR to post, 2 weeks for public, must go in-house first. At least a 6-week process
- Hiring process is broken – 10 Cooks Help started on the first day the dining hall opened
- Summers used to be busy, not anymore
- Storage/refrigeration and freezer space are inadequate at Butterfield
- Our students are the boss, most important, they come first
- Catering clients change events at last minute
- Clients still call-in versus online ordering
- Catering prices have been stable over three years, offer custom menu and pricing too
- 100 to 200 requests for Catering waivers each year
- Pierre has helped get new china, dishes, décor for Catering
- Catering doesn't do weddings anymore – not core to mission, some clients abused the property, no venues on campus nice enough for weddings
- Sit down dinner max count is 275, Ryan Center up to 500
- Most Catering is coffee breaks, lunches and/or receptions
- Might be worth offering a 2nd tier of affordable pricing for clients
- There is a non-compete clause with the town
- Catering could use own kitchen space
- There is a lack of summer conference spaces
- For five years, Catering has been profitable
- What about finding a way to capture leftover catering food for those in need?
- Student labor works well
- Catering is not a good environment for new people in classified positions
- There is a systemic deficiency within the State system for hiring
- Technology has surpassed the system

- Too many delays getting positions filled
- Purchasing needs to be more nimble
- Cronyism in hiring process – not always a level playing field
- Need more urgency in hiring
- Dietitian meets with parents and students about allergies
- Purchasing bid process means we can't be nimble
- Too many silos in Dining Services and on campus
- Always feels like we are trying to catch up
- Specials aren't built into the menu - and then, there are issues ordering products
- Fusion is popular, but not open on weekends
- Timing of big events is difficult
- Maybe Chefs should create the menus
- IT process and getting products here are difficult
- Need more training on CBORD stuff
- There's always a delay getting things approved through Legal
- We need more effort with Social Media outreach
- The Organization is not top-heavy enough
- Graphic Designer's scope seems to have changed and includes things he's not expert on
- It's difficult to run the unit with all the added scope
- Attitude of the staff changes when we are away from the units
- State retirement system changes mean people must work longer before eligible, impacted new people negatively
- Purchasing took away the ability to get weekly bids, gave meat and cheese, but should be for other foods too
- Retail, Catering and Dining Hall purchasing is a lot to manage
- When moved to Retail, was told I couldn't spend money
- Using lowest bid creates problems with quality
- Customers want fresh seafood, better meat
- Our Principal Cook gives 110%
- Our Retail competes against each other, not bringing in new customers
- Training and communication are very, very weak. There is no crossover
- Not everyone gets to attend meetings, need a way to share information better
- Staff in the building say that the program is too laid back at Ram's Den
- Maintenance needs to do better
- Students want more Vegan, but love their mozzarella sticks!
- Can't wait to change out Asian at Ram's Den, not good
- Faculty and Staff really like comfort food, like meatloaf and Sheppard's pie
- It would be nice in the future if each concept at Ram's Den could be closed independently so we can keep popular ones open
- Emporium is run down, but it delivers to campus until 1 or 2am
- Menus feel the same to students, especially in our dining halls
- Students want salads as part of Combos, but too expensive, Combos need to be quick. Students average one combo per day
- Website support is non-existent

- Catering and retail purchases don't go out to bid, means a lot more invoices and POs
- Must be a better way of doing POs, processing takes time, needs better process
- Graphic Designer is doing more than design work, supports others in the Division. No one to help sort out divisional priorities.
- Seems to be a lack of communication down through the organization since Pierre
- Training in new programs is not good
- Bargaining unit - there is a lack of continuity planning
- Retail needs work, should be exempt from purchasing requirements, could benefit from Retail RFP
- There is no time for training – example shared of being in job for two years with no training, had to learn as one goes and this impacts job satisfaction
- Vacancies are difficult, especially with lateral moves allowed and no temporary services used to staff units
- Steep learning curve on new budget system
- Job descriptions haven't changed in 20 years, volume of work has increased greatly
- Parking changes for hourly staff are a problem – example of having to park far from the unit, climb hill in the dark when shift is over. Worst in winter months, weather conditions can make the walk unsafe
- There are no training tools in the units, need to have a buddy system in place to learn

Comments from Students and Student Employees during interviews:

- There is nothing open at late night in Memorial Union, it got dark in the space at 11pm, scary
- No place on campus for all people to sit, gather
- We need to know when to go to the dining halls – we're too busy
- 20 to 30 minutes to wait is "ok" at Fusion, but no more than 10 minutes at deli
- Staff is friendly during long wait at Fusion
- Healthy food is based on the person
- Students want more combo options and number of combos
- Students should be able to fill up water bottles in dining halls
- Students charged \$0.25 for a cup of water
- Need fresh new ideas for food
- Mac and Cheese at Rhody is good, chicken patties are good. Barbecue ribs are not good
- Student employees like the comradery
- Some State worker jobs could be student jobs and that would give more satisfaction
- Student wages should be a little higher since elsewhere you can make the same and do a lot less
- Management tries to be flexible and understands student needs
- There is no student handbook
- Dish room machinery is dated, something is always broken, dangerous
- Dish room conveyor belt has mold and gets stuck a lot
- Students must pay on Rock Bot, sometimes students play something over and over to annoy others. Student employee playlists would be better
- Ear buds in dish room shouldn't be such a problem – why can't we have one in and one out and still be safe?
- Upper class students need partial plans, otherwise waste of money
- I want food to make me feel good, fresher food
- Food concepts at Ram's Den are dated, fried and greasy
- Social Media and Dining updates are not being seen – example, none of the students in the focus group knew there was a Dietitian on staff
- Would like an All Combo Plan, no dining hall swipes

Comments from Campus Stakeholders during interviews:

- Symbols that denotes allergens would be useful for catered food
- Catering prices are too high
- There should be flexibility with Catering costs within Student Affairs
- Catering needs to be flexible with requested changes
- Meal plans for RAs in the summer is a challenge because housing is free, but dining is not. This is a burden for some students
- Finds Dining Services more flexible this year than last with more effort to feed people during off-times
- Dining Services has won a few awards with special events and increases in locally sourced foods – should make sure campus knows this
- Local procurement has increased, but Dining needs to tell its story better. Sustainability Office did not know about local eggs. Example – share info in URI Bulletin
- Dining Services needs to improve signage, make sure it is far-reaching. Example – a campus partner was unaware of the addition of Air Hockey and Arcade games in Ram’s Den
- Opportunities to expand who will work in Dining Services, consider internships and teaching the business side of the Dining business
- Strong outreach with food insecurity on campus, suggests looking at vending machine data to ID possible students in need and without resources
- Loves Dining Services and Catering, sometimes needs to ask for waiver or exception and they are helpful
- Client perspective – things are too pricey in Ram’s Den, would like a ½ sandwich and ½ soup combo for \$5.00!
- Deli has made some improvements lately
- There is a delicate balance between time and money and the Ram’s Den needs to have things ready in advance of the rush
- Cost of a case of water from Catering is high
- Catering suggested quantities and food sent for those quantities doesn’t feed the number it says it will
- Some partners would use a dining plan and visit dining halls if the price was right for staff and faculty.
- Catering costs and posted menu don’t reflect what the Catering team can make. You need to know to ask for custom menus. So, the items should just be listed in the menu

- Recipe quality and variety needs work in Catering
- Consider allowing carry-out in residential dining by implementing a Weigh-It Out program. Price per container type opportunity
- Department's are not allowed to feed staff and faculty with State funds unless its training or awards, and those amounts are limited. Catering prices are too high for many departments
- Dining hall hours of operation would limit value of any staff/faculty dining plans
- Dunkin Donuts is always busy, maybe need more national brands, like Subway, where you can enjoy mobile ordering, loyalty programs, etc.
- Would love to see Panera quality in Dining Services. Better soups/salads/sandwiches to go. Likes Blount Soup brand. Hot food options need to be better
- Better pricing – a burger/fries and soda is about \$10.00. Better combo pricing
- Seems like prices have increased lately
- Difficult for sports teams and clubs to get meals, should be an easier way for them – especially when traveling. Specific examples cited – Athletes, Marching Band, Nurse Clinicals
- What about leftovers in Catering? Heard feedback about not being able to take food from events. Catering gives a 15-minute window and then packs up and removes for food safety. What about donating? 12% food insecurity on campus, likely closer to 18%
- Need better service during off-times. Example shared of no place for 500 to 600 students to eat during one break period. Summer hours at Ram's Den are too limited, only M-F 8-2pm, yet 300 to 400 students living on campus all summer
- Over 20 years have seen the program improve, quality get better
- Likes the convenience of Dining Services, Catering desserts are always good
- Would like to see more compostable packaging
- Having a point person for students with allergies has been a game-changer
- Need more variety in Ram's Den, annoyed that there is so much fried food, it's carb-heavy too. Would like to see creative, customizable options.
- Customer service in retail is lacking. Noticed student staff texting at register while nothing is labeled, etc. The price and service equation is off
- There is a lack of awareness for the needs of graduate students
- One soup should always be vegetarian or Vegan
- Have lost trust in Catering, too many times there are items missing from order and there is a lack of responsiveness. Not about the food, which is good

- It would be good for Dining Services to think of ways to assist students who come to campus with physical or mental health barriers – depression, anxiety, overwhelmed with environment, mobility issues. How can Dining be more responsive?
- Catering doesn't come back to clean up. Example shared of an event at the Pharmacy Building when food was left in bowls and glass and no one came back for it
- Staff start closing stations earlier than actual closing time. Example shared was summer closing at 2pm, but stations begin to close at 1:30pm
- Showcasing veggies, ingredient lists, sustainable items and unique offerings is noticed at Ram's Den salad bar
- Nutritional support and collaboration are strong
- Pierre's communication and willingness to work together is excellent
- Haven't heard no from Pierre, he works to solve problems
- Need to work together more with Enrollment Services to determine who is on campus and when. Example shared of long-lines when students housed on campus and Dining not prepared
- There is no pizza option for take-out, missed opportunity
- To compete with Emporium, offerings need to be desirable, portable and priced appropriately
- Dining's responsiveness has improved, they're heading in the right direction, like Pierre's leadership
- Catering does a nice job with creativity, flowers, décor, special menus.
- Students with eating disorders sometimes need a buddy system, also true for international students. Would be nice if there was a way to address this, but facilities pose a challenge. How can we let students know Dining space is a safe space?
- Need more seasonal, healthy options at reasonable costs, especially in Catering. There is fatigue of current menu
- There is not a great "opt-out" option for students who find existing dining hall menus don't fit their habits, more sensitivity is needed for this issue
- Only healthy option in Ram's Den is the salad bar
- Student organization group catering is expensive. How do we get better value to students, with more choice and ethnic food waivers?
- Appreciate Pierre's efforts to serve students over Thanksgiving break
- Food selections for the President's House are good

- Quality depends on the Catering event, example of rented out pubs (?) and pizza was served in the cardboard box and without heating lamps
- Consistency and predictability are important, good food quality is not enough
- Some events are hit and miss – example of frozen items rather than fresh
- Online ordering system is problematic
- Clients have to follow-up a lot with Catering. Example of a major event that happens annually, requested menu changes were not incorporated, client caught it and had to clarify in person and email. Billing takes months
- Catering details often must be corrected by the client, but fortunately, the on-site staff seem to always come through!
- Off-campus pricing is much better, need to evaluate this - apples to apples
- Partner observes a lot of food waste in Dining Services and wonders how to stop the waste and ultimately save money for students?
- Partner needs someplace to eat and sit down with Donors, remembers fondly the America's Cup Room?
- Thankful for Dom and Pierre
- Dining Services should use more product from 3 farms, remember the land-grant mission
- Catering team goes above and beyond, but could be better trained and held accountable
- Need more support and attention to detail from Catering team
- Add more Rhode Island menu items to Catering selections
- Catered events in the Memorial Union need more attention with set-up. Example shared of no Pipe and Drape used to hide the view of back of house during a recent event
- Clients are looking for lighter, more sophisticated menu options
- Bar service fees should be reviewed. Example shared of no flat-fee offered when billed on consumption, but instead a \$2.50 fee per person for bar set-up
- Dining options in the Memorial Union should be open later, when the Den is closed it gives a bad impression to building visitors
- Afternoon breaks don't need to be as elaborate and this would allow for a less costly overall event cost when also having meals through Catering
- More ethnic foods desired