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Making a meal: On-campus dining is about to change

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Mohamed Ali (of no relation to the boxer) began as head of ISU Dining in January of 2016. He felt he came into a broken system and was ready for change.

Many students are not.

Ali has proposed a number of changes, including a new unlimited meal plan, an elimination of meal bundles and a new dining center, Friley Windows, for the upcoming academic year.

**Meal Bundles**

Meal bundles have always been the easy to-go option students can use as an alternative to sitting in a crowded dining center.

Using a meal bundle costs the same as using one meal in a student dining plan.

Ali is proposing to phase out meal bundles.

He realizes there will be student backlash, as Conversations late night meal bundles are a tradition almost as near and dear to the hearts of Cyclones as Lancelot and Elaine.

"Some students aren’t happy with the lack of bundles," says Ali.

"My biggest problem with the proposed plan is that they don’t have a to-go option... They won’t be doing Conversations late-night bundles as far as I heard. That sucks," says Michael Feste, a community adviser in Maple Hall.

Ali’s reasoning behind this is that some students pay as little as $6.72 per meal with the current plan, and that this is a loss of money for ISU Dining.

Meal bundles cost more for ISU Dining to produce since they are usually made to order for students. This means higher food and labor costs.

So while some students are paying $6.72 a meal (and that is only if they eat all of them?) many other students are paying much more.

**Meal Blocks**

Ali seems to deflect attention away from the off-campus students, but these are the students who are actually losing money.

Meal blocks are the preferred option for students who aren’t required to buy meal plans because they offer more flexibility since they don’t expire at the end of semester.

The current plan for students buying meal blocks is as follows: 100 meals for $1,019, 75 meals for $733, 50 meals for $521 and 25 meals for $264.

With this plan the price per meal ranges from $10.19 to $10.56.

Ali says that nothing would change for students who are buying meal blocks — while there are no changes in the structure, there are changes in price.

The proposed plan for meal blocks in 2017-18 increases the price per meal substantially, with prices of: 105 meals for $1,103, 85 meals for $915 and 50 meals for $550.

If you purchased 85 meals they would cost $10.76 a piece, 50 meals would cost $11.00 a piece. Yikes.

Most of the time it doesn’t add up to the price of a meal unless you get the least healthy combination. So you’re usually suffering price-wise for making healthy choices.

And for either meal choice, it’d be more economical had you paid in cash if you were spending 11.00 dollars per meal due to an off-campus meal plan.

Most of the time, it would be more economical for students to pay with cash or dining dollars— but ISU Dining doesn’t want you to think like that, because they depend on students not using all of their meals to make money.
“I couldn’t give their money back — that would be like financial suicide,” says Ali.

DJ Khaled Major Key: they don’t want you to succeed. Neither does ISU Dining. They plan on students not using all of their meal swipes. Which is why students end up either losing money, gaining 15 pounds or gaining upperclassmen friends trying to sneak them into Seasons.

“I’ve been here now nine months, and after three months I got calls from people who were mad saying, ‘I’ve lost 80 meals,’ ‘I’ve lost 50 meals,’ ‘I want my money back,’ — a lot of people lose their meals,” says Ali.

Instead of giving the students options to purchase smaller meal plans, or just pay for what they eat, ISU Dining is proposing students eat as much as they can.

**Cyclone Plan**

ISU Dining has released an unlimited meal plan set to go into action in fall 2017. The proposed plan, called the Cyclone Plan, would give students unlimited dining hall access from 6:45 a.m. until 11 p.m.

But will the unlimited meal plan rip off students?

Yeah, kind of.

Ali plans to make the dining centers a place students go every time they want to eat. Meals, snacks, a soda, whatever. This is a response to students feeling like they are wasting their meal swipes if they go to the dining centers for something small, like just ice cream.

“What happens is the students don’t use their meals, they’ll go to UDCC and say,

“Do I want to spend my eight dollars for coffee and a bagel?” No,” says Ali.

If this were all true, then yes, it could potentially save students money. But would any actual student walk all the way from Buchanan to Seasons every time they want some chips while they watch Netflix?

The new meal plan does have a proposed to-go option, it is just considerably more limited than it is now.

Cyclone meal plan will include Flex Points, which can be used as to-go meals. However, students will no longer have the freedom to use all of their meal swipes as to-go meals.

**Friley Windows**

Ali implied that the prices are being raised to help cover the costs of the new dining center, Friley Windows.

“Where else are we going to find $9 million for Friley Windows?” he says.

Friley Windows was a dining center that closed in 2003 with the opening of Union Drive Community Center. The University is renovating it with plans to open in August of 2017.

Windows is being built in response to rising student population. The current student population at Iowa State is 36,660 students. ISU President Steven Leath stated in an address in 2013 that he hoped to see student population rise to around 40,000.

That brings up the question, in students and in unlimited meal plans — is more always better?