

# **Program Review Executive Summary Food & Vending Services Fall 2012**

## **General Comments**

Food & Vending Services is an enterprise function of the College. As such the primary function of the unit is oversight of all processes related to contracting and monitoring food and vending services across the college and ensuring customer satisfaction. Thus the goals of the unit are direct and clear: provide safe and healthy dining experiences for the college community, achieve sustainable accountability, support the college's environmental objectives, and generate income. Achieving these goals requires maintaining customer satisfaction and positive relationships with vendors.

This function is a part-time assignment of a single manager; there are no other staff assigned to the unit. The manager works directly with several college committees such as the District Planning and Advisory Committee (DPAC) College Services subcommittee and the Academic Senate Joint Committee for Environmental Affairs to select vendors and implement sustainable practices. Food services at Santa Monica College consist of 2 cafeteria style restaurants, 3 coffee shops, and vending machines on the main campus. There is insufficient volume at any of the satellite sites to support a full service operation, however, vending machine activity is robust.

In recent years Food & Vending Services, through committees and processes, has implemented more stringent criteria for vendors - largely directed at offering healthier food choices using locally grown ingredients and requiring more sustainable practices. These changes align with institutional goals and committee directives and have resulted in vendor changes based on the new criteria. Now, for example, vendors are required to use bio-friendly green products to clean their facilities, contribute vegetable scraps to the college's vermi-composting system, and use cage-free eggs. The committee particularly notes the prohibition of gum sales in vending machines which has positively impacted cleaning and maintenance of campus walkways.

An interesting dichotomy Food & Vending Services must navigate carefully is bridging the gap between required practice and actual consumer behavior. There are now more healthy choices available and these are clearly identified. There are no longer any traditional fast food options on campus and students have increased their selection of healthy choices in the cafeteria, where the food is fresh. However, even though vending machines have implemented "healthy product" labels, regular products outsell healthy choices by a 10:1 ratio. Price seems to be a huge factor in choice and often healthier products are more expensive.

The unit constantly seeks feedback and monitors customer satisfaction, as well as monitoring vendor compliance with contract specifications. The DPAC College Services Committee administered a satisfaction survey in 2010 that included Food and Vending Services and is planning to do another survey in 2012-13. In addition, informal surveys are regularly conducted, particularly in the cafeteria during peak hours, and through customer initiated feedback – generally complaints. Staff also regularly meet with vendors to discuss purchase patterns and make suggestions for improving selection and service. These surveys are the primary way the unit assesses its effectiveness. More detailed data from vendors about what sells could prove helpful as the unit and planning committees seek to improve food choices, negotiate vendor contracts and selection, and maintain revenue.

A significant change with tremendous impact implemented by Food & Vending Services has been the location of water bottle refilling stations. Over 100 water coolers around campus have been replaced with water refilling stations. The refilling station with the greatest use is the one in the cafeteria. Installed 4 years ago, it has dispensed over 23,500 gallons to date which is equivalent to over 94,000 water bottles saved from the environment. Another positive change has been the cafeteria renovation generating very appreciative feedback from students and staff alike.

While consumers may have many suggestions for new services, there is not a broad understanding of the factors that impact the availability of services and choices. For example, easy access to electricity for vending machines, location of coffee machines adjacent to a water source, availability of a commissary and access to hot water for food carts are a sampling of the requirements that must be met. The unit has clearly given careful consideration to all of these issues when addressing food and vending needs.

A remarkable achievement has been the increase in income generated by Food & Vending Services during a multi-year decrease in enrollment. This can be directly attributable to unit efforts to respond to consumer demand through working closely with vendors to effectively offer a variety of foods and price points. The unit has given careful consideration to future planning and has identified additional services that could be offered when appropriate space becomes available.

## **Commendations**

Food and Vending Services is commended for:

1. Renovation of the cafeteria resulting in increased use and positive feedback.
2. Increasing income from food and vending during a multi-year period of decreasing enrollment.
3. Emphasis on and monitoring of sustainable practices by vendors.
4. Use of and responsiveness to customer satisfaction surveys (formal and informal).
5. Installation of water refilling stations campus wide.
6. Prohibition of gum sales in vending machines.
7. Seeking input from customers, surveying student satisfaction, and making changes based on the results.

## **Recommendations for Program Strengthening**

The committee acknowledges the effectiveness of the unit, especially as measured by continued revenue generation in times of decreasing enrollment. To enhance the ability of the unit to do future planning and provide support for institutional planning, the recommendations for program strengthening focus on increasing data collection and assessment. The committee recommends Food & Vending Services consider the following to further strengthen the program

1. Continue, and increase where possible, efforts to assess customer needs and satisfaction.
2. Explore the value of obtaining more detailed sales information from vendors to better inform decision making about vendor selection and discussion of food choices.
3. Communicate more widely the factors that limit the location of types and locations of vending and food services.
4. Continue to explore alternatives to increasing food service at the satellite sites.

## **Recommendations for Institutional Support**

1. As construction projects are completed and existing space is vacated, consider the value of re-allocating some locations for revenue generating functions.

Program Review Chair           *Mary C. Colavito*           4/16/2013