

The Historical Evolution of the UBC Food System

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Group 17

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Abstract

A historical evaluation of the UBC food system was carried out using archival material and discussions with UBC alumni. The goal was to investigate the evolution of the UBC food services throughout its existence and determine the sustainability of the system. This report includes recommendations for future research to guide more in-depth investigations into the challenges of the system [REDACTED]. The information obtained from historical data was used to demonstrate the changes that took place and give insight as to how the system could be improved in order to become more sustainable in the future. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Introduction

In an effort to promote future sustainability of the UBC food system, we took an in-depth look at the historical development and evolution of the system. Our intention was to identify previous challenges that the students presented to the food services, including the problems that the system encountered, and to offer possible recommendations to improve the future success of the food system at UBC.

We initially investigated the general history and evolution of UBC to gain background information that would help us to better understand the challenges of the food system. We then researched more closely **through content analysis**, the important historical developments of the UBC food services by reviewing Ubysey news clippings that provided student perspectives. By investigating other archival material that gave administrative accounts of the UBC food system history, and discussing food service issues with UBC alumni, we were enlightened to the student perspective. The majority of the acquired research information came from student concerns with the food services that were in place at the time, and the actual changes made to the expanding campus to help meet the students' demands on the food system. The main issues that will be discussed are those that arose during the decades after the university became adequately established (the mid-1940's to 1970's).

The focus of the research was to determine the evolution of the UBC food services, the goals of the system, how they changed over the years, as well as the overall sustainability of the UBC food system throughout its historical existence. We concentrated mainly on the social and economic sustainability of the food system, with some reference to the environmental aspects.

This was because environmental sustainability was not an issue that previously garnered much attention. We also made inquiries as to why the food system developed the way it did, and how transitions were made over the years to accommodate increased awareness in the sustainability of the system.

The objective of this report was to learn from past achievements and problems within the system in order to provide us with suggestions for future development and further research. Our hope is that this investigation into the history of the food services at UBC will lead us towards a sustainable future. With attainable goals that reflect what we have learned, a successful transition towards a sustainable food system can be achieved.

Underlying value assumptions in the report

Since the UBC food system is a service for the students, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] our approach to the evolution of the food system was student-centered. Our paper draws from student opinions on various facets of the UBC food system that the alumni were concerned about. Student values reflected their individual rights; students were able to initiate change, and frequently spoke out against issues that negatively influenced their university experience. The concerns of the students changed throughout years, but generally encompassed social issues of overcrowding and lack of social space corresponding with a rapidly growing student population. As well, economic concerns of high food pricing were on the minds of UBC students. Students felt exploited as food service management sought to make a profit. Only in more recent years with the growing awareness of environmental problems, have students started voicing their concern on ecological matters regarding the UBC food system, such as decreasing the amount of waste produced. Overall students have been interested in getting quality food at a cheap price.

As a group, we were interested in a more integrative view that encompassed not only individual rights of the students, but also the UBC community as a whole. In this regard, we were interested in the economic, environmental and social aspects of students and the food system. Our group considers a desirable UBC food system to be one that realizes student rights and does not exploit them. Moreover, the system should work with the UBC community to enhance the food system's sustainability. The ideal UBC food system would create minimal

waste, provide students with facilities, not only to eat but also to study and socialize, and have healthy, inexpensive food.

The Approach to Research

Much of the research was carried out in the archival and special collections department of the UBC Main Library. Alumni were also contacted to obtain first hand information regarding eating establishments and food options/preferences on campus through the various decades. The findings were then categorized into decades and the most important events were described below.

UBC food system evolution

UBC was established in 1915 and had a few buildings, administration offices and a cafeteria. Enrollment skyrocketed in the late 1940's, causing a trend in increased construction and the establishment of food outlets. Enrollment has increased from 379 students in 1915/16 to a total of just over 53,000 students in 1999/2000¹. These numbers do not include staff and faculty that were present on campus; this group must be noted as a part of the university food system.

1920's

In this decade, the university was just getting established and enrollment slowly increased. In the 1920's, students were able to purchase breakfast, lunch and dinner on campus. There was a lunch counter and a cafeteria in the basement of the renovated auditorium. These renovations eliminated hasty meals and improved the cleanliness of the facilities. The cafeteria also began serving dinner in this decade. This move was propagated by a high demand from students who remained on campus during the evening. The cafeteria and the lunch counter both employed a dietitian.

1930's

After a generous government grant \$625,000 in 1930, depression hit in 1932, salaries were subsequently cut, courses dropped and summer sessions cut back. Despite the steady increase of the university budget, financial problems still existed. Expansion was needed due to overcrowding. With the advent of war in 1939, the university was seen as a source of manpower, technology and science resources. A lunch counter was opened in the late 30's,

offering much needed food services of full meals and snacks to students from 7am to 8pm (Ubysey¹, 1938).

¹ http://www.library.ubc.ca/spcoll/ubc_arch/enrolmnt.html

1940's

During the early 1940's, the university's importance was amplified as on-campus military training was carried out and the government used labs and equipment during the war efforts. When the war ended there was a frenzy of construction and development at the university. The campus expanded with many new buildings (although some non-permanent), most of which was funded by students. After WWII, the government funded construction for defense related and other research and buildings were erected to house the veterans coming back from the war. Due to increased enrollment (tripled through the late 40's) and more people on campus, snack bars and other food outlets were added to relieve congestion at mealtimes. Twenty new buildings were completed between 1947-51 (reference).

1950's

In 1950, there were 15 food dispensing units on campus but no provisions were made in the university's budget for food services (Ubysey², 1950). It was deemed necessary to eliminate food services, as the costs of operation were not covered by meal prices. Deals on meal tickets encouraged students to purchase tickets and therefore aided budget-conscious students (Ubysey³, 1950). Dr. MacKenzie, then president of UBC, made it clear that food in the cafeteria and other university-controlled institutions would be prepared under scientific and sanitary conditions. The cafeteria was seen as an overcrowded and poorly ventilated area. This situation was due to the large number of fraternity, sorority and other organizations who used the cafeteria as a meeting place. In 1957, the consolidation of Food Services with UBC housing was accompanied by the serving of 7500-100,000 meals a month (Logan, 1958).

1960's

In the early 1960's campus expansion was fuelled by "baby-boomer" students starting their university careers. This led to the construction of the Totem and Gage residences and the Student Union Building (SUB). 20% of the 32000 ft² SUB building was designated for Food Services (Ubysey⁴, 1963). The SUB included two cafeterias accommodating 900 people, two small meeting dining rooms, and two snack bars seating 800 people. In addition, a drinking lounge and a vending alcove with six units were included to relieve some of the pressure from

the primary food service facilities. Eventually the AMS would take over these food services. Despite selling in excess of 8000 cups per week (Ubysey⁵, 1963), coffee on campus gained the recognition of being infamously bad (Ubysey⁶, 1964).

1970's

Prices of meals in the SUB were hiked to the dismay of students, staff and faculty. Inflation was used as the scapegoat, as students felt the SUB had raised prices in order to offset mortgage payments (Ubysey⁷, 1974). Student grievances continued as the price of a cup of coffee was increased to \$0.15 yet cups were 15% smaller than previous years. In 1971, International House started selling hot lunches consisting of different ethnic foods. Sandwiches started at \$0.35 with full lunches costing up to \$0.85 (Ubysey⁸, 1971).

1980's

In the 1980's, incentive programs were implemented to decrease amount of food packaging, such as foam cups (Blue Chip handed out an average of 500 a day). These programs were offered as incentive programs as students could receive a discount if they brought their own cup. Recycling was not available and students at the Student Environment Center believed that a lack of student awareness was at the route of the problem. Students in Place Vanier residence were also up in arms about costs of the meal plan. Additionally, residents were concerned with the quality of food served, in regards to subsequent meals comprised of leftovers. A petition was held the but no change came about. In the early 80's, it was noted that UBC had the highest student pub beer prices in Canada (\$1.15/bottle) and the Pit made an annual profit of \$60,000 (Ubysey⁹, 1980).

1990's

According to the 99/00 UBC calendar, there were 18 food service operations on campus. The early 1990's saw 28 acres of campus clear-cut and Hampton Place developed on the southeast end of the university lands. This 1600 resident development was designed for high-income investors and sustainability issues cropped up from the start. An extra 1600 people, who were to live but not work on campus, added to traffic congestion and placed further stress on the food system and other UBC land use issues.

2000 and Beyond

Currently there are 27 food units open at UBC through Food Services (Parr, 2002). These include cash operations (including franchises such as Bread Garden), residences, mini-

markets, restaurants and catering services. The residences serve 1000 students, 3 times a day year round. Many employees are students, and input from current students is continually integrated into menu selections. In the mid 90's, Food Services operated without profit but since have increased efficiency and have thereby eliminated operating losses (UBCFS, 2001). There are future plans to develop south campus, including the addition of a campus grocery store. From an ecological perspective, current students are concerned with environmentally unfriendly packaging, the large amounts of waste being generated, and the lack of composting (AGSC 450, 2002). In terms of social sustainability, with many students and faculty on campus until the late evening, there are concerns with the current hours of operation for food facilities (Farrell Research Group, 1996). As well, more recently, students are concerned with a lack of "healthier" food alternatives. As a result of the less disposable income of students, the economic sustainability of the food system is questioned; we must face the issue of how money spent on food, as well as the value of money spent. Finally, in order to progress in an effective and efficient way, we must determine what are the main goals of Food Services. Within their 5-year plan, Food Services have expressed future goals of "providing products, service and retail environments [for their] customers, to improve the look and feel of specific outlets, and to generate a net income of at least \$400,000 per annum..." (UBCFS, 2001). Does this denote the goal of increasing profits? Meeting student needs? Increasing quality of food? From a student perspective, these questions still remain unanswered.

Recommendations

- **Social Sustainability**

The sustainability office needs to continue recognizing that food and its consumption are large parts of campus life; they can not be separated from education or the extracurricular activities that occur on campus. Therefore, the sustainability office in conjunction with UBC food services must continue to build food outlets that provide adequate seating facilities as well as places where students can eat, study and hold group meetings simultaneously. This can already be seen by (1) the expansion of the SUB cafeteria, (2) the Chapman commons in Main Library, (3) Agora, and (4) Ridington Computer Lab in Main Library. The University should be commended on these popular campus sites and encouraged to continue to develop and integrate such places. As well, to promote social sustainability the UBC food system needs to offer a wide

variety of healthy alternative food options. Lastly, given large geographic space of UBC, it is important to evenly distribute food space across campus.

- Ecological Sustainability

The sustainability office must devise a plan for combating the large amount of waste that is generated on campus due to its food and beverage services. The university needs to expand their campaign regarding discounts for students who bring reusable containers, coffee mugs, utensils. These campaigns need to be better advertised so students are aware of the associated incentives and initiatives. The sustainability office also needs to get on the “composting” bandwagon. Much of the food waste is transported off campus when it could be composted on campus and then used by Plant Operations to maintain soil quality of the gardens and university grounds. Additionally, the food system can work towards continuing the relationship between waste management of food service outlets on campus.

- Economic Sustainability

In order to promote the economic sustainability of the UBC food system, prices should be reasonable to meet the budget-conscious students’ expectations. In order to keep prices low, it should be an expectation of the university to support its food facilities in some regard. However, the low cost of food should not compromise student access to nutritious and adequate meals. An alternative approach may be to consider increasing the number of student employees at food service venues and cut back on the cost of union staff to operate the food service facilities.

Further Questions

1. What is the role of the SUB within the UBC food system?
2. What challenges does the SUB face in regards to sustainability on campus?
3. Evaluate the evolution of franchises on campus.
4. Why is there currently more apathy amongst students today when compared to the passionate outcries of the earlier decades?
5. How has franchising affected consumer choice over the years?
6. What are the changes that have resulted from the political and social agendas of the university?
7. Link the evolution of waste management with that of the UBC food system.

8. How has the use and distribution of vending machines affected consumer choice (i.e. healthy alternatives)?
9. How has the way food is produced on campus changed? (i.e. what off-campus industries are incorporated in the UBC food system and what is the capacity of their involvement)
10. Over the years, to what extent has the UBC food system made an effort to use locally based products?
11. How would the interpretation of the historical evolution of the food system look if it were taken from a non-student centered perspective? (i.e. through the eyes of a franchise? AMS? UBC Food Services?)
12. Describe the transitions between the relative emphasis placed on the different sectors of sustainability.

Conclusion

Despite individual differences between decades, several problems have persisted throughout the history of the UBC food system. These problems have included overcrowding and the unfair pricing practices. Primarily, any change towards the betterment of the food system on campus has been the result of student voice. Student grievances on these issues brought students to work together in an effort to improve the sustainability of the system. Whereas the problems of the past centered on primarily social and economic sustainability factors, today there exists the need to focus on all three aspects of sustainability: economic, social and ecological. By working with UBC Food Services, community members on campus (whether they are students, residents, staff or faculty) can work towards a more sustainable food system that is more environmentally friendly, economically viable and social responsible than at present.

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