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Changes made to dining hall, meal plans

UIndy dining facilities renovated, meal plans change with the addition of flex dollars and new plans

By Anika Yoder
MANAGING EDITOR

The 2023-24 academic year is kicking off along with changes and updates to the University of Indianapolis Dining Hall. The UIndy Office of Student Affairs announced in an email on March 9 that upgrades would be made to the dining hall, according to an article from The Reflector. Upgrades, according to the article, included complete remodels of the kitchen, serving stations and dining area. The email from Student Affairs said that renovations were aimed towards sustainability and community orientation.

In addition to facilities upgrades, UIndy Student Affairs sent out an email on Aug. 3 which outlined the introduction of "Flex Dollars" as well as a new unlimited meal plan. The email said that the unlimited meal plan option will replace the 19-meal plan and Flex Dollars will provide increased spending options for students. According to Vice President of Student Experience, Success and Belonging and Dean of Students Amber Smith, meal plans with Flex Dollars allow for the plans to have actual money to spend in addition to swipes on the meals.

"So that means that, before it was all swipes, you had to use your meal plan. Now you have some actual dollars that are with every meal plan," Smith said. "So if you want to buy a candy bar, you don't use a swipe, you can use some [flex] dollars."

Each meal plan has a certain amount of money on it according to Student Affairs, with first year students living in residence halls required to have either the 14-meal-a-week plan or the unlimited plan. Other plans include the 10-meal and five-meal plans.

Each plan gets a certain amount of Flex Dollars per semester associated with it:

- Unlimited plan - \$300
- 14 meal plan - \$150
- 10 meal plan - \$100
- 5 meal plan - \$50

UIndy Dining General Manager Amy Dugan said that updates to meal plans will not affect a lot of the way dining works, but that UIndy Dining wants to support the university in the new meal plan structure and wants to drive a lot more of the community to the new dining space. Renovations have put the

focus on that food that is being prepared throughout the day.

"We still want to make certain that we are enhancing our offerings. Across campus, programmatically, it doesn't change who we are," Dugan said.

According to Smith, students had expressed concern about not being able to know when entering retail locations how much they would be getting with their meal swipes. A way to allow for students to be able to grasp how much they can get with a swipe is that more meal bundles will be available at dining locations, Smith said.

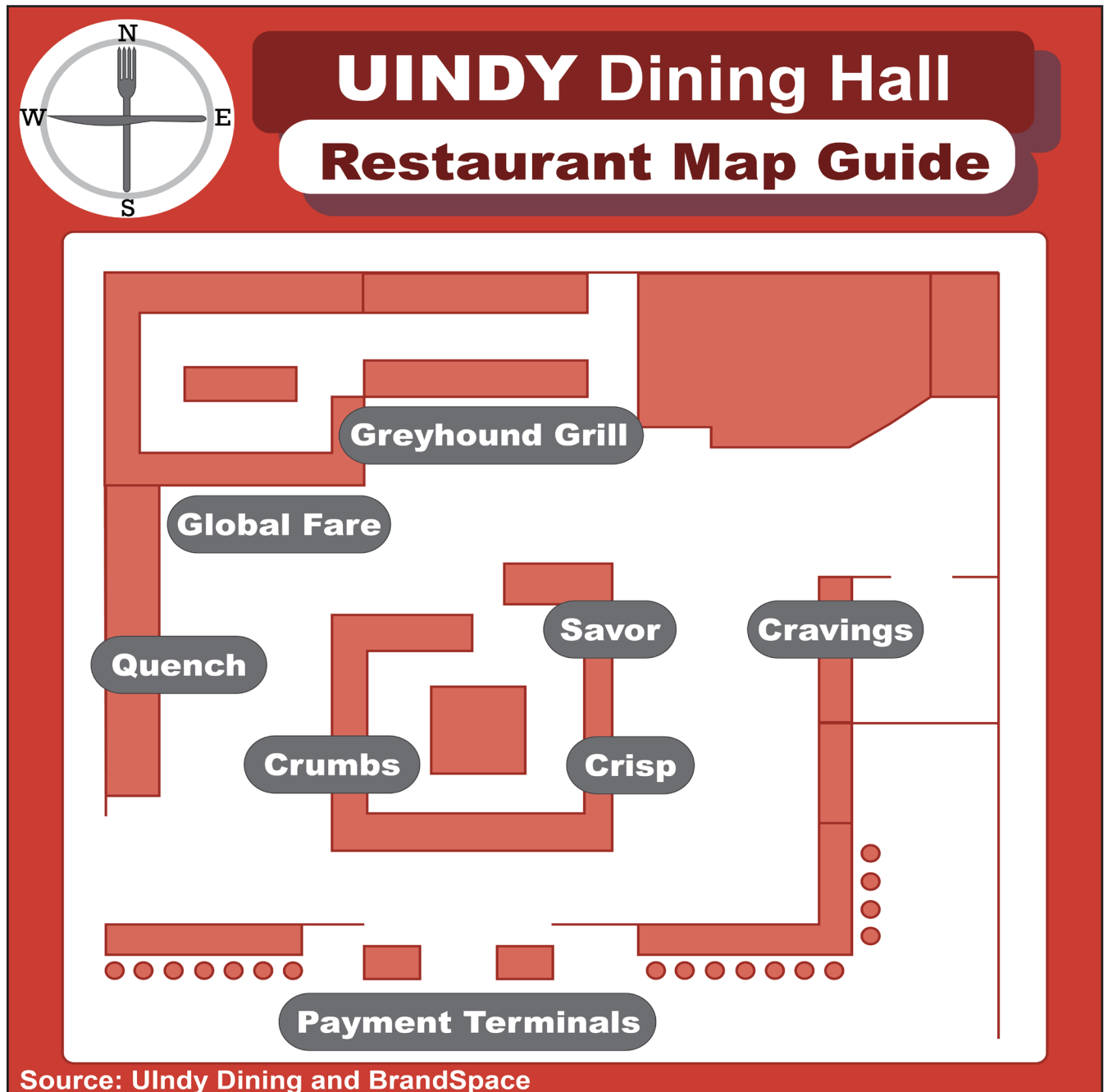
"So similar to how you have McDonald's and Burger King, you have these things that are already pre-packaged," Smith said. "[Dining is] working to do that within all of the retail locations. So that way students can quickly see 'This is what my swipe will get.'"

According to Smith, students before the new meal plan system would end up with either too little or too many swipes on their plan nearing the end of each semester. As a result, students trying to use up their swipes would overload the resources available by Dining or they would not be able to eat on their plans if swipes had been used up too early, according to Smith. As a way to remedy this, Smith said now meal swipes are renewed every week, as opposed to a lump amount of swipes being used until they run out at the end of the semester.

"What will happen is all of the swipes that you have for that week are there every week and it starts over every week," Smith said. "However, if you are in a situation where let's say you miss a week of school and technically you have that week, we will work with you to get that loaded back onto your card so you don't lose those meals."

There will be a different variety of food as well, Smith said, with the renovations allowing for more options like oven pizza and milkshakes along with food preparation being visible for patrons. Halal foods will also now officially be offered on campus according to Smith.

Along with the introduction of the plan updates, students are allowed three swipes at each retail establishment for a total of six per day. The unlimited plan is the exception to this, as they can swipe into the Dining Hall as often as they would like, with the three-swipe limit at retail locations still applying to this plan as well. However, students can use Flex Dollars if their total runs over the amount on a swipe, Smith said.



Source: UIndy Dining and BrandSpace

Graphic by Breanna Emmett

The University of Indianapolis' Dining Hall underwent extensive renovations this summer, which were aimed to make dining more sustainable and create a more community oriented space. The dining hall is expected to be open by the beginning of the semester.

According to Student Affairs, eating in the Dining Hall will be translated to an all-you-can-eat period of 45 minutes, which can be tracked with a meal ticket taken when swiping in the hall, Smith said. QR codes for students to scan will be available at all dining establishments on campus, according to Smith, for students to submit questions or concerns.

"I'm just really excited about the changes," Smith said. "And we will continually make changes because we want to be responsive to what students are needing and wanting. Also add responsibility to make sure our students have access to food."

Renovations are expected to be completed for students by the beginning of the fall semester, according to Dugan. Minor additions are being added, Dugan said, with tile work, but new furniture is added in the dining space.

"We're super excited. It's really beautiful," Dugan said. "The equipment's here, the stations are set, and we are really, really close to being able to open up and we're definitely going to be opening for the first day of classes. So really excited."

Smith said she is really big on space curation and creating spaces where people can be in a community through the way that the design is laid out in

the dining hall. The space encourages community and encourages people to connect together to be in the same space to share ideas or to just simply be together, according to Smith. With a lot of changes coming to dining and the university, Smith said that there will be adjustments made, but students will be able to adapt and will hopefully like the changes.

"Change is different, but it doesn't have to be hard," Smith said. "You know, it's definitely going to be different. We know that there'll be some things we're getting used to. But I think that there's way more pluses than minuses."

Tanuja Singh starts tenure as UIndy President

By Mia Lehmkuhl
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

University of Indianapolis President Tanuja Singh started her tenure July 1, according to a press release from UIndy 360. With having a little over

two months of experience as president, Singh shared her thoughts about being on UIndy's campus.

"I absolutely love it," Singh said. "It's a beautiful campus, but it's also a very efficient campus—a walkable campus."

Singh said that while she was a candidate for the presidency, she

was impressed by how UIndy strives to introduce students to multiple facets of life beyond college. She said UIndy connects students to not only basic skills needed for a career, but fundamental life skills that contribute to a life-long-learner mindset.

"[Students] are very engaged," Singh said. "They seem like they are the kinds of students who are going to school and really wanting to make an impact... They care about the world."

Singh shared goals that she wants to accomplish during her time here, and that dialogue has already been started across campus to get the ball rolling. Singh said she aims to strengthen enrollment and retention. She also said she wants to bring a more diverse student body to UIndy by expanding where the university recruits from.

"... My ultimate goal would be that, if you come to UIndy, irrespective of your major, if you are a music major or a history major or a business major or a nursing major, you've had at least one experiential learning opportunity," Singh said. "Whether you've done an internship or that you've worked on a project, and it could be in your major or it could be in an area that interests you. So I might be, you know, a business major, but I might have an interest in music."

Singh said that one of the biggest

challenges in higher education is a shrinking undergraduate population. According to Chalkbeat Indiana, a nonprofit news organization that focuses on coverage of education, data shows that about 53% of graduating Indiana high school students went to college in 2021. This data includes high school students who went to some form of college directly after graduating. This number is very close to what was recorded for the state in 2020 (53.4%), according to Chalkbeat Indiana. However, in 2015, it was 65% according to WFYI, and

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to growing [UIndy]."**

this year it is currently at the lowest in a generation.

"So for the undergraduate population, the idea is to expand beyond just our immediate markets in the country, and then also make the offerings at UIndy more attractive to international students," Singh said. "At the graduate level, there is growth, we need to capture that growth."

Singh also said how higher

education has changed significantly since she was a student. She said she wants UIndy to be more current, relevant, connected and accountable going forward.

"[College] used to be the only place to go to, right? People went to a university, got their degree and generally you graduated and your skill sets remained stable for many years," Singh said. "If you look at the reports that are coming out from the World Economic Forum and other publications, just the skill sets are changing every few years. So learning has become lifelong learning."

Singh said that while a lot of what she hopes to accomplish cannot happen within one academic year, she is starting dialogues across campus now. Despite this, Singh said she is most looking forward to seeing students back on campus this fall and that she is excited to engage with the student body.

"We are on a path to progress. We are really looking forward to growing the university, you know, making the university really well known for the kinds of things that I talked about earlier," Singh said. "So [I am] very excited to be here. Just delighted. Love the city. Love everything about the university and I'm very excited to lead it along with my great group of people."



Photo contributed by the University of Indianapolis

Tanuja Singh began her tenure as the tenth president of the University of Indianapolis on July 1. She said one of her goals are to strengthen enrollment and retention at UIndy.