University Dining Services (UDS)

The following assessment compares the effectiveness of UDS’ bi-annual paper Guest Satisfaction survey with that of an online survey.

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ABSTRACT
In the past, UDS conducted two paper-based Guest Satisfaction Surveys each academic year. During 2008-2009, UDS chose to utilize an online survey process through the National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS). UDS made this decision for the following reasons: (1) to continue assessing guest satisfaction, (2) to gather more detailed and specific results, (3) to benchmark with other colleges and universities, (4) to target a wider range and larger demographic of respondents, and (5) to eliminate the use of paper.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
From 2004 through 2007, UDS assessed guest satisfaction by conducting a weeklong paper-based survey at all venues once each semester. UDS collected and processed paper surveys by hand; as a result, the type of information gathered was limited and time-consuming to compile. Once gathered, the three-step process of collating the information, putting the results into a report, and then distributing the reports to Unit Managers for implementation, took 160 hours. In 2007, the year the most recent paper-based survey was conducted, the cost to UDS was $1,970 per survey, adding up to $3,940 for both surveys conducted during the academic year. Each survey reached 1,186 respondents. In comparison, the online NACUFS Guest Satisfaction Survey is more cost-effective and comprehensive, costing only $485 per academic year, and reaching 3,009 survey respondents.

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE
The online NACUFS Guest Satisfaction Survey was conducted between October 26 and November 27, 2008. UDS worked with Student Affairs Information Technology (SAIT) on sending two email blasts to student, faculty and staff UM email accounts. One email blast was sent in October prior to the start of the survey, and the second was sent toward the end of the survey in November. The email explained how to access the survey, as well as the feedback options available to respondents: respondents could rate as many UDS venues as they wanted via 47 multiple choice questions, and could also provide written feedback if they so chose. As an incentive and thank you for participating, UDS held a drawing at the end of the survey, awarding an iPod Touch to each of the six winning respondents.

When the survey was completed, UDS received two reports from NACUFS: a 209-page document with written feedback from respondents, and a 146-page confidential report with statistical analysis of responses to the 47 multiple choice questions. The report explained UDS’ specific results, the combined industry results of the 108 participating universities, where UDS ranked among the 108 participants, and where UDS ranked among universities in UM’s NACUFS region. UDS then took the findings and summarized the detailed report into its own 15-page summary. Results of both the statistical analysis and the written feedback have been given to each Unit Manager for consideration and immediate action planning.

FINDINGS
Not only did UDS experience a significant increase in respondents with the online NACUFS survey, the NACUFS survey also diversified respondent demographics. Previously, 90 percent of respondents were students, with the following class breakdown: 35 percent freshmen, 25 percent sophomores, 17 percent juniors, 14 percent seniors, 7 percent graduate students, and 2 percent categorized as “other.” In comparison, the NACUFS survey yielded a much broader respondent range. Instead of 10 percent of respondents coming from the non-student population, with the NACUFS survey the number jumped to 27 percent. Twenty percent of respondents were administration and staff members, six percent were faculty, and one percent was “other.” Of the 73 percent of respondents constituting the student group, the following class breakdown emerged: 22 percent freshmen, 20 percent sophomores, 19 percent juniors, 28 percent seniors, 10 percent graduate students, and 1 percent “other.”
The survey results evaluated UDS on the basis of three comparisons: (1) the comparison of UDS with all 108 universities participating in the survey; (2) the comparison of UDS with Contracted Food Services; and (3) the comparison of UDS with participating universities in UM’s NACUFS region, which includes Alberta, Colorado, Idaho, Manitoba, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. When compared to the overall results, UDS performed very well. In categories such as “Variety of Healthy Menu Choices” (25 percent Very Satisfied, 33 percent Somewhat Satisfied); “Overall Satisfaction” (31 percent Very Satisfied, 43 percent Somewhat Satisfied); and “Food Overall” (28 percent Very Satisfied, 46 percent Somewhat Satisfied), UDS outscored the combined average of the 108 participating universities by large margins.

UDS also did very well when compared to Contracted Food Services. For example, Contracted Food Services placed with 19 percent of its guests overall in the Very Satisfied category, but UDS placed with 28 percent of its guests in the same category. In fact, UDS scored higher in every major section of the survey when compared to the average score for Contracted Food Services.

In comparisons of UDS with other schools in UM’s NACUFS region, UDS scored above the national average in some cases, while in others it scored slightly below the average. One area UDS fell below the average was in guest satisfaction regarding the “Dining Environment Appearance.” Although 45 percent of NACUFS customers indicated a Very Satisfied rating, only 40 percent of UDS guests were Very Satisfied.

The NACUFS survey has provided invaluable data to UDS, allowing UDS to not only see overall trends, but also to measure the importance of each response. For example, each question was followed by a qualifier asking the respondent how important that question was to them, thus allowing specific answers to carry more weight. On a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating the highest level of importance, “taste” was 4.68, “freshness” was 4.67, “cleanliness” was 4.63, and “value” was 4.54. These were the most important categories to UDS’ respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Because of the detailed nature of the NACUFS survey, UDS has been able to incorporate more specific guest feedback, suggestions and concerns into its operations than the paper survey allowed. One result UDS is very pleased to discover is that the majority of respondents are Very Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied in the categories of “Overall Satisfaction” with UDS, “Variety of Menu Choices,” “Variety of Healthy Menu Choices,” “Overall Food,” and “Overall Service and Friendliness of Staff.”

Unit Managers were given the written feedback for their specific unit and were asked to develop an action plan for implementation, such as the plan for the Think Tank, included below. Associate Directors review all action plans with the director of UDS. When appropriate, plans may be included within Unit Operating Plans.

For example, survey results indicate that 80 percent of Think Tank respondents were “Somewhat” to “Very Satisfied” with the Think Tank overall, although only 39 percent were satisfied with the availability of seating. Eleven guests commended the Think Tank for their positive experiences at the facility, citing the location, efficiency, and service of the operation. Think Tank staff will continue to uphold this level of guest satisfaction through competent, consistent, and cordial service. Competence will be measured by staff vigilance regarding quality control. For example, no matter which barista makes a certain beverage, competence ensures that it will taste the same. Consistency will be measured by availability and quality of product over time, for example by ensuring that high demand products are always in stock. Cordial service is the most important aspect of a guest experience. This action plan maintains high levels of competence, consistency, and cordiality, thereby positively impacting UDS by providing a quality guest experience.

Respondents requested extending afternoon hours. To address this concern, UDS will review annual customer sales at the end of spring semester 2009, analyzing customer counts after 3 pm. From this data, UDS will be able to determine if it is profitable to extend operation hours. If the numbers suggest that it would be beneficial to extend hours, doing so will enable UDS to profit with increased sales and guest satisfaction. Depending upon review results, new store hours will be reviewed at the beginning and end of fall semester 2009.