

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this benchmarking study was to examine meal plan practices of other Universities similar to Illinois State University (ISU). Universities under investigation were Bowling Green State University (BGSU), Ball State University (BSU), Miami University of Ohio (MU), University of Illinois (U of I), Northern Illinois University (NIU), Southern Illinois University (SIU), and Western Illinois University (WIU).

Three characteristics of each Universities meal plan were observed: price, structure, and availability of rollovers and refunds. All data was collected through internet based searches of the for mentioned Universities web-sites.

Bowling Green State University

BGSU is a self-operated University dining services. They offer four meal plans which range in price from \$1125.00 to \$1800.00 a semester ($M = \$1450.00$, $SD = 280.62$). They offer rollovers and refunds on unused dining dollars over the minimum meal plan cost of \$1125.00.

Ball State University

BSU is a self-operated residence hall dining services. They offer four meal plans all costing the same amount (\$1758.00). The plans offer anywhere from 10 meals a week to 21 meals per week in the residence hall dining centers. The smaller meals per week plans have larger amounts of debit dollars added to the account justifying the flat rate. Dining dollars are not eligible to be rolled over or refunded on any of the meal plan packages.

Miami University of Ohio

MU is a self-operated University dining services. They offer a wide variety of meal plans. The passport meal plans range from \$1590.00 to \$1830.00 ($M = \$1716.67$, $SD = \$120.55$). The passport meal plans do not offer rollovers or refunds on any unused dining dollars. The club “M” diplomat meal plans range from \$1570.00 to \$1870.00 ($M = \$1720.00$, $SD = \$129.10$). Each plan has a base cost of

\$1000.00 nonrefundable dollars. Anything above the base cost can be rolled over or refunded. To compensate for the base cost, a 30-60% discount is deducted at the register.

University of Illinois

U of I is a self-operated University dining services. They offer a variety of meal plans which access different residence hall dining centers. Three plans allow the user to gain access to “all you care to eat” operations only. While three additional plans offer both “al la carte” and “all you care to eat” choices. One additional plan only offers “al la carte” options. The seven meal plans range in price from \$817.00 to \$2200.00 (M = \$1814.71, SD = \$466.38). There are no rollovers or refunds given on any of the meal plans.

Northern Illinois University

NIU is a self-operated University dining services. They offer three meal plans ranging from \$800.00 to \$1600.00 (M = \$1200.00, SD = \$400.00). They do not give rollovers or refunds on any unused dining dollars.

Southern Illinois University - C

SIU is a self-operated residence hall dining services. They offer three meal plans each costing \$1301.00. The standard plan allows the student to spend all dining dollars in the residence hall dining locations only. The combination plan allows the student the flexibility to be able to spend a portion of their dining dollars at the University student center. Neither plan allows for rollovers or refunds. SIU also offers a third plan called the campus wide plan. This plan allows for fewer meals per week, compared to the previous two plans, however the student is eligible to receive a refund in the amount of \$1.87 per each missed meal.

Western Illinois University

WIU is a contracted food service campus operated by Sodexo. They have three meal plans ranging in price from \$1122.00 to \$1322.00 (M = \$1205.33, SD = \$104.08). There is a non-refundable

base cost of \$537.00. Unused dining dollars above the base cost are eligible for rollover and refund. To compensate for the base cost, students receive a 37% discount at residence hall dining locations.

FINDINGS

The primary finding generated from this study resulted from examining meal plan pricing. Due to differences in meal plan structure, a comparison was done between ISUs' two meal plans and other Universities most expensive and least expensive meal plans. Figure 1 shows that ISUs' enhanced plan ranked as the 3rd least expensive plan. Figure 2 illustrates that ISUs' basics plan ranked as the 2nd least expensive plan.

Additional findings indicated that most Universities offer both "all you care to eat" and "a la carte" pricing. However, WIU recently changed all their operations to "a la carte" while BGSU moved in the opposite direction implementing "all you car to eat" operations. When asked why they went back to "all you care to eat" operations, they responded, "the students wanted it".

Lastly, although this study looked at only on-campus meal plan comparisons, most Universities offer on-campus and off-campus meal plans. Options range from commuter plans that offer 5 meals per week to attaché plans that allow as little as \$50 a semester to be used however the student chooses.

CONCLUSIONS

- Further investigation of meal plan pricing should be initiated to decide if an increase in pricing is justifiable.
- A study should be conducted to investigate student satisfaction with the new "a la carte" operations on campus.
- Consideration should be given to adopting separate on-campus and off-campus meal plans.

Enhanced Meal Plan Comparison

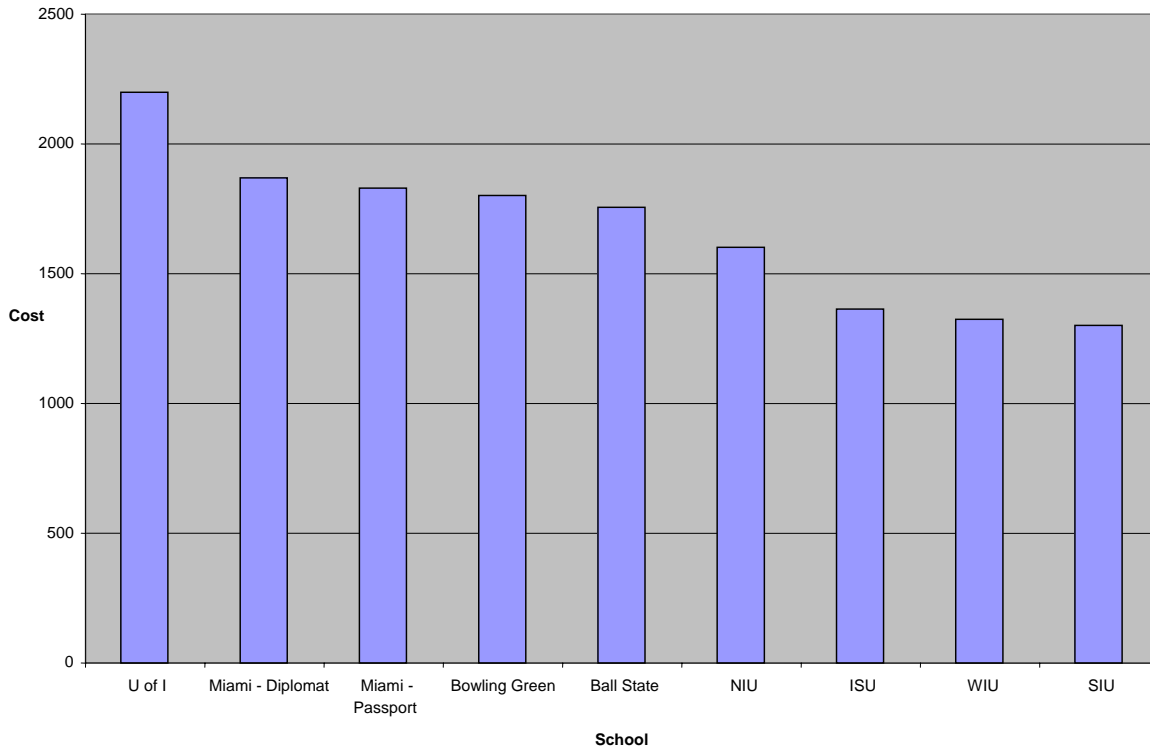


Figure 1. ISUs' enhanced meal plan compared to other Universities most expensive meal plans.

Basic Meal Plan Comparison

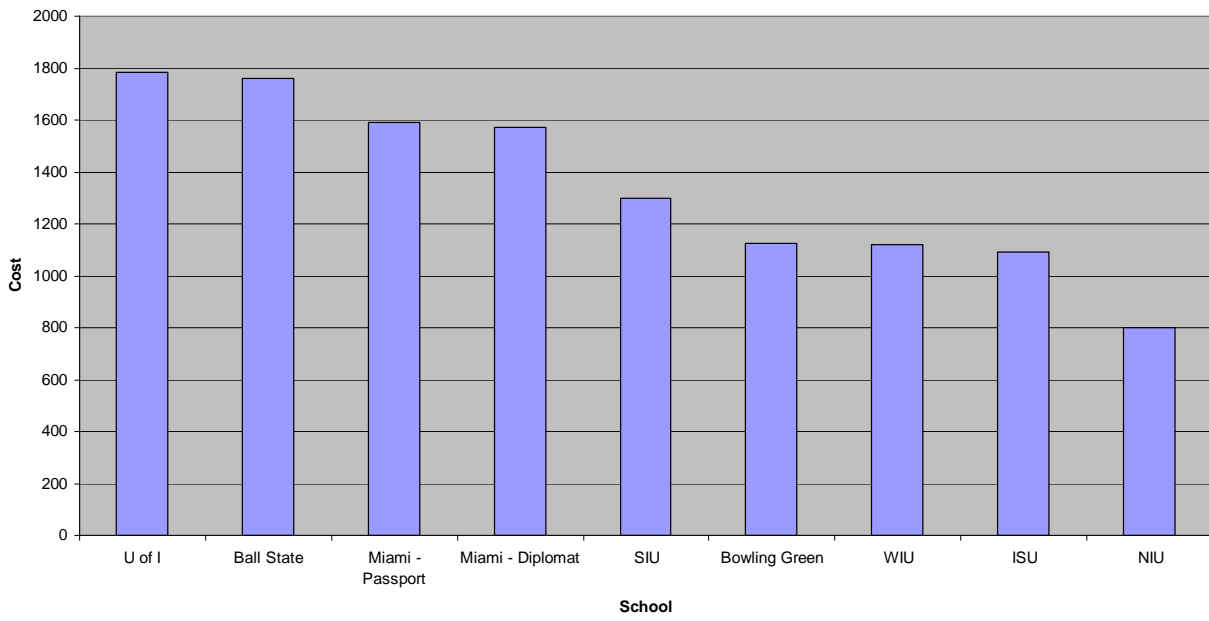


Figure 2. ISUs' basics meal plan compared to other Universities least expensive meal plans.

Appendix A

On-Campus Meal Plan Comparisons

	Cost	Refund	Rollover	B	L	D
Bowling Green State University				TBD	TBD	TBD
Limited	\$1,125	no	no			
BG Basics	\$1,375	over \$1125	over \$1125			
Falcon Feast	\$1,500	over \$1125	over \$1125			
Ultimate	\$1,800	over \$1125	over \$1125			
Miami University				4.00	5.10	5.90
Passport Basic	\$1,590	no	no			
Passport Plus	\$1,730	no	no			
Passport Premier	\$1,830	no	no			
Club M Diplomat	\$1,570	yes	yes			
	\$1,670	yes	yes			
	\$1,770	yes	yes			
	\$1,870	yes	yes			
Ball State University				3.05	5.75	6.25
21 Meal Plan	\$1,758	no	no			
18 Meal Plan	\$1,758	no	no			
14 Meal Plan	\$1,758	no	no			
10 Meal Plan	\$1,758	no	no			
University of Illinois				4.75	6.95	9.95
14 Classic	\$1,785	no	no			
20 Classic	\$2,000	no	no			
12 Classic / 1500 Café Bucks	\$1,785	no	no			
10 Classic / 4500 Café Bucks	\$2,000	no	no			
10 Classic / 6000 Café Bucks	\$2,200	no	no			
All Café Bucks 11500	\$2,116	no	no			
Northern Illinois University				3.75	5.50	6.70
Gold	\$800	no	no			
Platinum	\$1,200	no	no			
Titanium	\$1,600	no	no			
Southern Illinois University				4.00	6.00	6.00
19 Meal Plan	\$1,301	no	no			
15 Meal Plan	\$1,301	no	no			
12 Meal Plan	\$1,301	yes	no			
Western Illinois University				N/A	N/A	N/A
Al La Carte 1	\$1,122	yes	yes			
Al La Carte 2	\$1,172	yes	yes			
Al La Carte 3	\$1,322	yes	yes			
Illinois State University				N/A	N/A	N/A
Basics	\$1,091	yes	yes			
Enhanced	\$1,366	yes	yes			