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Planning food services for a campus setting

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Abstract

Providing appropriate food services in a campus setting is increasingly important due to more demanding customers and because clients have less time to go off-campus when they need to eat. Using a university campus as an example, this research looks at customer satisfaction with existing food services and explores various methods for determining where to locate new facilities. This campus currently has great needs for additional food services, and it is shown clearly where additional food services are required. Also, the methods used are compared in terms of their effectiveness in finding the solution.

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1. Introduction

This research considers the challenge of planning food services on a campus such as a college, university, business park or large hospital. Food services are an important component of overall planning that affects the quality of life on campus. To demonstrate the techniques and methodologies with real data, a university

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campus will be used as a case study. The US Department of Education estimated that 15.3 million students were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs in Fall 2001 (Matsumoto, 2001). In the next 10 years, colleges and universities are expected to see enrollments increase by about 20%. University food service directors need to stay abreast of this trend and the resulting challenges in ensuring adequate food services on campus. The heart of this issue is estimating demand and determining an appropriate level of capacity to meet that demand, while ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction. Using the campus of California State University, Northridge (CSUN) as an example, this research presents a variety of ideas for meeting this challenge. Since the 1994 Northridge earthquake that destroyed large portions of the campus, building projects have focused predominantly on classroom and office space; little attention has been paid to food services.

The primary goal of this research is to compare demand for food services with the capacity available, and also to do this separately and comparatively for various portions of campus. It proved surprisingly difficult to estimate demand patterns and even quite challenging to estimate capacity, and thus various methods were developed; each method contributes some value to the final result. Thus, a secondary goal is to compare the methods to determine their effectiveness in addressing the problem. In addition, and in order to better understand demand, the student enrollment data used in the above analyses is re-enforced with data from customer satisfaction surveys. Thus, another secondary goal is to understand, at a fairly basic level, customer satisfaction with food services on campus. Final results will demonstrate whether there is a shortage of food capacity, and where on campus new food services should be located.

1.1. Demand and capacity management

For many service managers, one of the first things that comes to mind for managing waiting lines and employee idle time is some form of demand or capacity management (for a comprehensive list of these techniques, see Klassen and Rohleder, 2001). However, food services on a campus are quite different from most other food service outlets and, for that matter, from most other services. In “typical” restaurants, customers attend because of the restaurant—eating is the purpose for going there. On a campus, however, students are there because of classes—eating is done primarily out of necessity. To say it another way, few people go to campus just to eat. This is evidenced by the fact that food services on some campuses are not even open on Friday evenings or weekends.

As such, most popular demand management techniques will have very little effect in a campus environment. For instance, many “typical” restaurants are able to use price differentials at various times of the day or week such as lower prices at lunch or a special on Tuesdays to attract more people during slow times. Alternatively, they may be able to schedule customers by requiring a reservation, which effectively controls demand. These efforts will not be very effective on a campus since students

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