

# Food Service and Retention Rates

Your dining program has significant and far reaching financial implications for your institution. Can you afford to continue to believe that student complaints about food service are just a rite of passage?

Noel-Levitz published a research study Linking Student Satisfaction and Retention including cafeteria usage concluding “Across all the models and class levels, the satisfaction indicators added significantly to our ability to predict student retention,”\*

[https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/vpsa.ndsu.edu/Assessment/Dining\\_Services\\_2012-13\\_Assessment\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/vpsa.ndsu.edu/Assessment/Dining_Services_2012-13_Assessment_Report.pdf)

The Noel-Levitz study begged the question; how significant is the food service impact? Do schools with a higher ranked foodservice program also have higher retention? Our research proves it does.

Schools with A ratings had on average 89.7% freshman retention\*

Schools with B ratings had on average 86.0% freshmen retention

Schools with C ratings had on average 76.4% freshman retention

Schools with D ratings had on average 74.8% freshman retention

## TABLE 1:

Food Rating Impact on College Retention:

1. Food quality is an important factor with respect to college retention rates. Students do consider the quality of the food at their university/college when making decisions about continuing their education at that particular institution. From the data, it is clear that the colleges and universities that have the most efficient and highly rated food services are able to retain their student body, while schools that have poor overall quality are more prone to lose students.



## Additional graphs and information below

Administrators have long understood that a good food service operation positively impacts residence hall occupancy. Auxiliary services such as food service and housing are often cited as the deciding factor between families choosing between schools of the same academic caliber.

Having an exemplary food service program is not only the right thing to do; it will pay for itself in voluntary meal plan sales, increased residence hall occupancy, increased admissions and in student retention.

Whether you have outsourced your food service program or are self-operated, Tabletop Solutions can help you identify and rectify issues that may be keeping you from having an exemplary dining program. We look at food quality, variety, ambiance, customer service and the perceived value of the dining plan and give you practical cost effective solutions for improvement. Our R.O.I. is typically 30%, but does not include the impact our improvements make outside the food service arena! We chose the motto “Happy Guests and Healthy Bottom Lines” because the two are mutually inclusive!

## Our Consulting Package Special Offer

Is retaining even one student worth \$5,000? We’d like you to get a feel for our services and have put together the following promotion:

Two Day Operational Review & Site Specific Solutions for Improvement:

\$5,000 plus travel

Two full days on campus

Meet with stakeholders

Operational review of primary food service locations

Menu review

Determine Baseline

Meet with administrator to discuss findings

Issue report which includes practical site specific solutions for improvement

Optional – (Contract compliance audit for accounts with contracted services also available for third day at an additional \$2,000)

## Offer ends April 1, 2015

Additional Statistical information on the impact of Food Service Rankings on Retention:

### TABLE 2:

Variance and Standard Deviation:

2. What more can we learn from the presented data? Well, we can learn that the average retention rate may not completely indicate the effectiveness of the institutions to maintain their student body. We must also consider the variance of the population, which is derived from the mean, in order to get a better indication. Although schools with an A+ food service rating do not have the highest average retention rate, they do have the smallest variance and, in turn, the smallest standard deviation. So what does this mean? It means that all institutions that received an A+ food service rating will have retention rates extremely close to 89.91.

Let us now consider another example, let's say the B+ group. This group has a total variance and standard deviation much higher than the group of A+s. This means that the average, which looks very good on paper, is actually quite misleading. Some of these schools could have very high retention rates, which may raise the bar overall, but gives a very inaccurate interpretation of the entire B+ population.

The Variance and Standard deviation of each of these groups is important to consider because it shows how effective the food service and retention processes are across these schools, not just the sum of their retention rates.

T-Test Analysis; After calculating the mean and the standard deviation of the college retention rate of the surveyed schools, we can now find out if a particular school's rating is significantly higher than the average of the entire survey population. This is done with a T-Test analysis, which factors in the standard deviation of each group of schools to assess their overall performance. This particular test was performed with a 95% confidence level and a critical test statistic of 3.3829.

### **Descriptive Statistics:**

2. After analysis, we can see that only the A+ and A food service ratings show T-Test statistics that illustrate retention rates that are significantly higher than the average. Although the A- and B+ have high averages, the variation of the schools in these groups causes us to reject the idea that these high averages illustrate a statistically significant difference from the average retention. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the C food service group is the only group in the survey that was significantly lower than the average retention rate.

3. T-Test analysis is crucial in order to determine if a shown mean has legitimacy. With this survey of schools, although some groups had above average retention rates, these rates were easily skewed by a few results, meaning that the averages shown were not truly indicative of the schools' performance.

\*Best schools for food – Fox News

\*\* Notes: No school with lower than a C+ rating for residence halls was used in our study. We pulled from several sources; schools with the highest and lowest retention rates, schools with the highest and lowest foodservice ratings. We also pulled in schools we had worked with in the past and filled in with random selections.