

**Faculty Research Grant 2015**

**Final Report**

**Arkansas Tech University**

**College students' food waste related to cafeteria menu items**

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### **Restatement of problem researched**

College students are wasting an average of 1.54 pounds food per week and Virginia Tech University discovered annual rates of 169,055 pounds of edible food waste according to Michigan State University. One of the innovative concepts in college and university foodservices, tray-less all-you-can-eat dining service has minimize food waste about 25 % to 30 % but a lot of college students are not aware of how food waste impacts on environmental sustainability, and global warming, and food costs. This research project was to explore food waste related to cafeteria menu items in college and university dining operations. I, as the investigator, worked with student research assistants to find out reasons of food waste in university foodservices.

### **Brief review of the research procedure utilized**

I, as the primary researcher, developed focus group questionnaire based on research purposes. First, the researcher trained two student research assistant to be moderators for the focus group. The purpose of the focus group study was to collect more information regarding food waste among college students and was used to provide an interpretative data. The focus group interview questions consisted of 17 questions that served as prompts for exploration during the group discussions. Participants were recruited from university dormitories. College students were invited to participate in the focus group interview through an invitation poster. The invitation poster was posted in selected university dormitories. Two focus group studies were conducted and each focus group consisted of six to eight students from the university dormitories. Before collecting data, a pilot group interview was conducted with three students who are using university cafeteria. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form before conducting the focus group. Audiotapes were used to record the group sessions and the researcher took notes to collect accurate data during the focus group study. The recorded tapes were transcribed by the student research assistants.

## **Summary of findings**

I found that participants expressed the following regarding food waste perception in university dining services:

“I noticed a lot of leftover food on the conveyer belt from the dishes and stuff.”

“Food is being thrown away instead of being consumed.”

“Some people, I have done it myself, try it and not like it and throw it away. That’s probably the reason why the majority of the food could be thrown away because it does not taste like it should.”

The focus group interview participants expressed about cafeteria food quality.

“It depends on the cooks I think.”

“It is not unbearable.”

“I think it is pretty average.”

“I mean for the type of place that it is I think it’s pretty good quality.”

Most of participants agreed that there is a relationship between food waste and meal plan price. Researcher found reasons why college student waste a lot of food in university foodservices. According to participants, people eat with their eyes first and college students are not satisfied with food quality, food temperature, and menu item selections.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The sustainability of resources and food waste management have become critical issues for foodservice industry. Researcher found what factors are significant reasons on food waste in college and university dining services. Results indicated that there are some solutions to minimize food waste and increase college students’ satisfactions of cafeteria. This study provided valuable information to university dining managers. The findings suggest that university dining managers may carefully select menu items what college students want and demand and keep a good food quality for minimizing food waste.