

Food

Branch out, experience off-campus dining choices

So you are now back at Iowa State for the semester. If you are one of the 5,000-odd students who live in the on-campus dorms, you have probably started to have your first meals at the Iowa State dining centers. They're good, aren't they? The dining centers have evolved even since I lived in the dorms and now have even more options, different layouts and better food.

But there are many more places to eat in Ames that are outside the safe confines of the university. I love eating lunch at Clyde's (you can find me there most days), but when I'm not restricted by the need to use a certain number of meals by the end of the semester, I am more free to spend the same amount of money for a meal down the street at Pita Pit, Jimmy John's or Jeff's Pizza in Campustown. Or there are many places you could get a sandwich or some rice for much cheaper in the same area.

According to the Iowa State Dining website, meals that you pay for with meal plans can cost anywhere from \$6.15 to more than \$9 per meal. In contrast, you could walk over to Campustown and get a



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Jimmy John's sub for less than \$5.25, a Subway foot-long for \$5 or \$7, or a pita for less than \$6.50. One of my favorites is Jeff's Pizza's lunch menu, which gives you two items (pizza slice, salad or Bosco sticks) and a drink for only \$5 — and the pizza slices are huge!

Not to mention that there are other options if you take a bus or a car to Main Street or to Duff Avenue. There you can find great national chains like the new Buffalo Wild Wings, Panera Bread, Perkins and Applebee's, as well as amazing local places like Hickory Park, Great Plains Pizza or Olde Main Brewing Co. to choose from. To some extent, our situation is just like visiting the state fair or Disney World, where food "in the park" is much more expensive than restaurants only a few miles outside the park because

vendors can charge a captive audience much more money.

And don't get me started on Dining Dollars. I have never completely understood a system where rather than giving students dollars on their card to use at C-stores (like a credit card), dining incrementally increases the cost of C-store goods and then sells discounted Dining Dollars with which to buy them. So if you buy hundreds of Dining Dollars, you don't pay more than normal for your C-store items, but if you simply come in because you need some pens for class and have no Dining Dollars, you pay extremely high cash prices for them.

So if you live in the dorms, just remember that you have until this Friday, Aug. 26 to upgrade or downgrade your meal plan before it is locked in stone. Maybe you will decide that you love the dining centers and will go from the 225-meal Gold plan to the 275- (Cardinal) or 304- (Cyclone) meals-per-semester plans. On the other hand, you might decide you want to explore your meal options in Ames more often this semester and downgrade to the 175- (Silver) or 125- (Bronze) meal plans instead.



Photo: Rebekka Brown/
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Students who want to spice up their culinary tastes have many options off campus, including Ames classics like Stomping Grounds, Jeff's Pizza and Pita Pit.

I personally recommend using fewer meal plan meals this year and exploring the food options Ames has to offer. In the last five years I've slowly been talking my mother into allowing this (she thinks if I don't have a plan I won't eat), but maybe you'll have an easier time judging the convenience of on-campus food versus the expense and justifying a change.

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Shelby Gorsh, of Cedar Rapids, stops at Jeff's Pizza for a meal while passing through Ames.

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