

An Open Letter to Restaurant Associates on Sustainability and Health

April 26, 2010

Plenary

We write to commend Restaurant Associates on last week's Earth Day celebration, which included compostable cardboard containers and 5% discounts for guests bringing their own dishware and beverage containers. These additions reflect a deep and ongoing commitment to values of conservation and sustainability held widely among students, faculty, staff, and administrators at the Graduate Center. Such efforts should not be limited to a single day of the year but rather standing practices as part of your partnership with our community and the Mission Statement of the CUNY Task Force on Sustainability.

Executive Committee

This Thursday marks the release of the CUNY Campaign Against Diabetes' report, *What's for Lunch at CUNY?: How City University of New York Can Improve Food Choices on Its Campuses and Reduce Obesity and Diabetes*. Among other recommendations, the report calls for low-cost healthy food items and more involvement of students in menu planning.

Steering Committee

Constitution and Bylaws

In the cooperative spirit of our partnership, we request that the following changes be considered to make Restaurant Associates' business practices more sustainable:

Media Board

- replacing Styrofoam containers with compostable containers and utensils;
- offering discounts to patrons bringing their own dishware and beverage containers
- providing free filtered tap water upon request for student-, faculty-, and staff-organized events;
- clearly labeling the tap water dispenser in the Dining Commons soda fountain;
- composting food waste; and
- purchasing more local food;

Health Issues

and that other changes be made to promote the health and wellness of the Graduate Center community:

- posting calorie and fat count information on all foods and beverages;
- posting vegetarian, vegan, and common food allergy notices on food items; and
- involving the Graduate Center community more directly in menu planning.

Cultural Affairs

Finally, it is crucial that Restaurant Associates staff are involved in and knowledgeable about such changes so they can better serve the Graduate Center community.

In the past, costs and administrative burden have been cited as major obstacles to some of these proposals. We understand that some changes may require a reasonable increase in the price of goods and services, but this burden should be shared fairly between consumers and profit-earners, who are linked together in the practice of doing business. Moreover, the Graduate Center's mission of serving the public through higher education should not be lost when considering the financial impact of these changes.

Accordingly, we request that a thorough cost comparison of present practices and proposed alternatives be made public to the Graduate Center community, with opportunity for feedback and comment. This process would give all stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the decision-making structure of our partnership and better inform the Graduate Center administration, which contractually has the power to set policies on recycling and conservation (§5.7) and review portions and prices annually (§7.4).

Implementing many of these proposals would make the Graduate Center a leader in sustainability and health with its food services. We look forward to your response.