



## How to Choose the Right Food Service Provider for Your Fraternity or Sorority

Food service is an area where Greek life shines as a compelling feature of campus life. By offering meals that are equal parts delicious, healthful, and convenient. Fraternities and sororities can better serve their members, stand out on campus, attract prospective students, and foster brother- and sisterhood. “I never had to go grocery shopping or cook anything,” one sorority sister enthused to *U.S. News* about the benefits of joining Greek life.

As in all fields, food service providers in this market vary greatly, and just because a company posts pretty pictures of its plates does not mean its meals are as tasty, nutritious, or budget-friendly once on the table.

How do you discern the cream of the crop from the rest? First, you must know the red flags that indicate the risk of subpar service. Then, you must ask the right questions to understand how your potential food service provider works. This paper will walk you through the process of evaluating and choosing the right food service for your chapter.





# 1: Is the provider's operating model a recipe for success? Service delivery should *de-stress*, not *distress*, clients.

## Program management for food service can be a complicated affair.

There is far more to meal service than just cooking and serving food: beyond meal prep, the food provider must also successfully manage procurement, transportation logistics, food sanitation/proper handling, personnel oversight, and more.

That means your service provider must be able to stay on top of many different moving pieces simultaneously.

Yet micromanagement can equally kill quality. It is a delicate balancing act, and it is essential to investigate whether the provider can thread this needle.

The outcome should be service that is seamless and streamlined. Food appears when, where, and how it is expected, with no action required from fraternity or sorority members.

## One key component to investigate is chef management.

A chef shortage in the U.S. means many food service providers cannot hold onto chefs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that employment of chefs and head cooks is projected to grow faster than average of all occupations through 2024.<sup>i</sup> At the same time, the number of food service establishments is growing by tens of thousands year after year.<sup>ii</sup> The National Restaurant Association's 2016 Restaurant Industry Forecast notes the inevitable consequence: "The labor pool is getting shallower."<sup>iii</sup>

This means that chefs can afford to be choosy in the current marketplace, and food service providers must work hard to find and retain the best.

Unfortunately, many providers struggle with chef acquisition and retention. Turnover in food service is very high, ranging from 32% in 2016 at the

## Fraternity/Sorority Food Service 101

What do food service providers *do* for Greek organizations?

Food service is often a major (and mandatory, according to some members) amenity offered by Greek life. As a result, numerous food service providers cater to this unique sector. Typically, food service providers in this space will send each chapter a personal chef, who will prepare daily meals (including desserts, as requested) and ensure snack foods and beverages are also available. He or she can typically also provide service for special events. Personalized food service ensures students eat healthier meals that better fit their personal preferences and are more conveniently available, while shared household meals also help to cultivate the culture of brotherhood and sisterhood so critical to Greek life.





management level to over 100% at the hourly level, according to according to People Report, a division of Dallas-based TDn2K that monitors and analyzes the restaurant industry.<sup>iv</sup>

If the service cannot hold an actual, professional chef in the service environment through a whole school year, something is wrong. It may be that they hired poorly, or that they are managing poorly, but one thing is certain: it is the house that will suffer.

### **But houses should not have to put up with chefs who are a poor fit either, just for the sake of having a chef.**

The burden is on the food service provider to hire well, treat their chefs right, and ensure a good fit.

Chefs who work in fraternity or sorority houses must be flexible with, and understanding of, college kids who will be dealing with academic and social pressures all year. The chef needs to have a personality that can foster enough of a bond that house members will feel comfortable approaching the chef to make requests or offer feedback on meals. At the same time, chefs must always maintain professional boundaries.

A careful hiring process can go a long way toward finding the right chef in the first place.

Here, background checks, careful evaluation, and other forms of pre-hire due diligence are key to ensure professionalism.

Then, service providers must maintain a constant, open line of communication with the chef, with clearly articulated policies designed to ensure consistency of service quality. For example, the service might have policies mandating that chefs provide the service with a full menu each week.

More to the point, the provider should *follow up* with chefs regarding those lists. If a menu includes lasagna, for instance, service management might ask, "What type of ingredients are you buying?" Meals like lasagna can be easily (and deliciously) made from scratch, but chefs who cut corners might buy prepared

lasagna. The service might employ other policies to ensure chefs meet quality guidelines, e.g. limit them to a list of allowable food purveyors and vendors.

Finally, chefs should also be thoroughly trained and certified in food safety protocols. Each state has its own health department and food safety regulations. The service should ensure chefs hold any certification required in that state.

The certifications will cover primarily food safety topics, proper heating and cooling, hand washing, wearing gloves, and appropriate ware washing and food storage. If the chef is defrosting chicken, for example, he or she must follow proper procedures to prevent bacterial growth.

The certification process is not typically onerous (it is usually just an 8- to 10-hour course), so if they do not hold certifications, consider that a major red flag.

#### **Red flags to consider:**

-  Chefs turnover mid-contract.
-  Chefs are unapproachable.
-  Chefs lack proper credentials and certifications.
-  Food or service quality is inconsistent or questionable.

#### **Questions to ask:**

- ? Can the service provide references?
- ? How does the service monitor and communicate with the house to ensure everything's running smoothly?
- ? What steps does the service take to support (and retain) their chefs?
- ? Does the service have backup or contingency plans when faced with personnel issues?
- ? How does the service maintain quality standards among chefs?
- ? What steps might the service take to ensure high quality?

## 2: Is the price truly palatable?

Too many services overcharge yet underdeliver.

**Better pricing is one reason many fraternities and sororities opt for custom food service.**

Campus meal plans can be ridiculously expensive. According to *Peterson's College Guide*, more than 20% of colleges charge the equivalent of \$9 or more per meal, or *twice* what the average American spends on food. *Diverse Magazine* estimates that the average undergraduate spends 70% more per day on campus food than what they would pay to cook and eat on their own, and even then, students don't always get their money's worth: "Sometimes I look at the meal I'm eating and I'm, like, I have two eggs and toast. This is not worth \$12," one student told the magazine.<sup>v</sup>

That's partially because colleges sometimes pad their meal plans to generate profits that can go toward facilities investments.

Unfortunately, overcharging is rampant even among independent food service providers. That makes it critical to investigate how their pricing aligns with what they will deliver.

Further, many services will overcharge and *still* underbudget for individual meals. These discrepancies can end up being monumental; we have encountered houses that, under their previous providers, were paying five figure contracts but whose provider budgeted no more than a couple of dollars per meal.

That happens when the provider funnels most of the money as profit to the back office; but the result is that the students, who are paying for the food and the chef, are being under-served. And despite paying five digits per contract, the house was constantly running out of food (a major red flag).

In fact, even if you're not being overcharged *per se*, providers may not budget well or wisely, and the house may end up running out of food. Always dig a little deeper into fees and budgets.



### Red flags to watch for:

- ⚠ The service lacks billing transparency.
- ⚠ Food budgets are handled at a flat, non-negotiable rate (or only a handful of flat package rates).
- ⚠ Food offerings do not sync up with prices, e.g. poor food quality served at a premium price.
- ⚠ Food runs out before the end of each purchasing cycle.

### What to ask:

- ? Does the provider make provisions for leftovers and an adequate number of snack items per student?
- ? Will the provider customize the pricing according to desired service levels? For example, we recommend that you require pricing to be customized down to:
  - **Options:** Whether you want juice/milk/soda machines; whether you want a snack package; how often you want dessert, if at all; etc.
  - **Meals:** Whether you want breakfast, lunch, and dinner; or just lunch and dinner; which meals should be hot; etc.
  - **Demographics:** How many students are in the house; etc.



### 3: Is the service made-to-order? Each chapter should be eating the way it wants, while maintaining restaurant-grade, home-cooked quality.

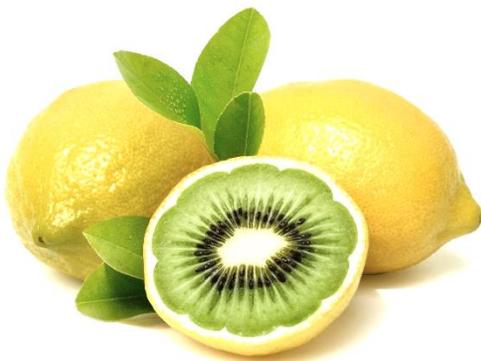
**It's not just pricing that should be customizable: the menu should be too.**

What does *your* chapter want to eat? Eating is not, nor should it be, one size fits all.

Chapters should have a voice in the cuisines they would like to be served. Additionally, the service should work with each chapter's unique logistical and practical needs. For example, if a chapter wants food service but has no kitchen, the provider should find a solution like utilizing a commissary kitchen and delivering meals.

Remember too: the service should mold the shape of its service offerings to fit the culture of the chapter as well, to foster brother- and sisterhood. Meals are often an important shared experience in fraternity and sorority houses, and how members share their meals can and should affect what kinds of meals are served, and when.

Costel Coca, design principal at Anaheim, Calif.-based Webb Foodservice Design, notes the trend of using food service to build a community culture: "It doesn't necessarily have to be about the food, but it's a neutral place where there's engagement with the community, a shared sense of well-being and inspiring food experiences."<sup>vi</sup>



**But quality should not suffer for customization either.**

Every meal should offer restaurant-grade, home-cooked quality. Service providers should never meet their promises (nor overcharge) by substituting low quality meats or other ingredients, or cutting corners in techniques, for authentically good cooking. Probably the most frequent offender here are generic ingredients, like meats that are purchased generic but presented as USDA prime beef. Or the chefs may buy processed products, loaded with unhealthy ingredients like sodium and sugars, that they throw together.

Ask the food service provider to explain their purchasing protocols. Much of this will tie back to budgets; many chefs feel they have no choice but to buy subpar ingredients and processed foods to stay within budget.

#### Red flags to watch for:

- ❏ Options and menu/food customizability are lacking or nonexistent.
- ❏ The chef uses prepared or prepackaged, processed products in their meals.

#### What to ask:

- ? Can the service provider make provision for idiosyncratic logistical issues (i.e., no kitchen on site)?
- ? Can the service provide \_\_\_\_? (Whatever food or meal item you desire).
- ? Do chefs make meals fully from scratch?
- ? What kinds of meats and other ingredients do they purchase?



## 4: Can the service garnish its core services with offerings specific to Greek life?

Greek organizations are distinct from other customer groups, and they have their own special needs. Food providers that cater to fraternities and sororities must be able to meet those needs. For example, service for special and formal events should be part of the contract because they are a standard part of Greek life. Surprisingly, this is rare, however. For example, many food service operators will offer special events only separate from their normal contracts: if you want to host a philanthropy event, formal dinner, parents' weekend, or any such service, they will bill separately (and usually at a premium).

Not only should such events be incorporated into standard contracts, they too should be customizable. For example, for a parent-oriented event, the service should ensure that menu selections will leave parents impressed and pleased. Similarly, food service, menu plans, and snack availability should fit the rhythms of college life. College students live by their demanding schedules, and consistency of service is crucial to your members eating a healthy diet that fits within their daily plans.

## Conclusion: Have you asked your food service provider the right questions?

The right food service provider will prepare meals as healthy as they are delicious, at budget-friendly prices and provided with service so frictionless that your fraternity or sorority organization never need worry about managing the process.

But to deliver such stellar service requires a provider with all the right ingredients.

Make sure your due diligence process weeds out the substandard services and practices that could instead leave you and your members with a sour experience. As part of your due diligence and background research, ask the right questions – digging into practices, procedures, and protocols – and watch for the red flags that indicate the provider could be at high risk of poor service. Favor those providers who can answer every question confidently and provide background testimonials and references that back up their claims.

Finding the perfect provider is key to ensuring *your* house offers cream of the crop dining.

### About Campus Culinary Solutions, LLC

**Campus Culinary Solutions, LLC** was started by two life-long food service professionals recognizing the need for a more flexible and individually unique food service provider to Fraternities and Sororities, dining halls and facilities. With decades of combined food service knowledge, our team has a complete understanding of what it takes to bring a quality experience and food service to Fraternities and Sororities, dining halls and facilities. Campus Culinary Solutions has unparalleled service and attention to detail. Campus Culinary Solutions will provide you with professional solutions to your food service needs. CCS knows exactly what to cook to keep students happy and healthy. Our one and only mission is to feed the college students amazing food each and every meal.

[campusculinarysolutions.com](http://campusculinarysolutions.com)

(877) 205-7744

[info@campusculinarysolutions.com](mailto:info@campusculinarysolutions.com)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/food-preparation-and-serving/chefs-and-head-cooks.htm#tab-6>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag722.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.restaurant.org/News-Research/Research/Forecast-2016>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20170120/ISSUE03/170129982/whats-so-hard-about-assembling-a-restaurant-team-everything>

<sup>5</sup> <http://diverseeducation.com/article/91606/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://fesmag.com/features/foodservice-issues/13586-the-future-of-college-and-university-foodservice-is-now>