

# Is Marriott Corporation Doing The Job?

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Staff

6

*Picture this: It is noon-time and your 11 o'clock class has just let out. Hoping to catch a quick bite to eat, you decide to drop by Lenoir Hall before your 1 o'clock class.*

*You enter the two sets of double doors and find yourself caught in a mob scene: masses of people are rushing back and forth through the turnstiles guarding the area where the food is served. As you wade in among the hungry throngs filling the entire area from the entree station to the beverage fountains, you abandon any etiquette you may have learned about crowd maneuvering; you fail to say "excuse me" even once, despite the numerous and inevitable collisions that occur between yourself and your peers.*

*You fall in behind a line of people waiting for the lunch entree (or so you think), but you cannot be sure because it is com-*

*bined with the grill line in a confusing fashion. When you finally get your chicken breast, broccoli with cheese sauce and rice, you decide to make your way over to the fountain drinks. After being jostled, pushed, bumped into, and just generally tossed to and fro, you reach the tap drinks and press your glass against the lever for ice. No ice. Resigning yourself to a less-than-cold soft drink, you push the Coke tap. But before the extra carbon has fizzed away, someone, who obviously lacks your patience, is pressing you to move along; the person's eyes seem to say, "Come on, I have a 1:00 class too."*

*Grudgingly, you pick up your tray and join the thick stream of life flowing to the cash registers, your cup only three-quarters full. The wait in the register line is considerable. When the cashier at last swipes your meal card through the appropriate slot in the machine and issues her assembly line*

*"thank you," you begin the daunting task of finding a seat. All of the tables you pass are either taken or "reserved" by the practical students who leave their book bags on them while they get their meal. Just as you make up your mind to dine with a single lone stranger, who is sitting at a table with three empty seats, a couple is vacating a table in the smoking section. Deftly moving around tables and over chairs in the narrow walking space, you barely beat out another person with designs on your table.*

*Sighing with relief, you sit down and glance at your watch. The time is 12:40 p.m. You realize that you should have gotten your food to go, but you are not willing to brave the crowds again to obtain a take-out box. So you sit, eating food that is tolerably warm and reasonably good (although the broccoli is a bit undercooked). With a tiny sardonic grin on your face, you think, "Another day in paradise. . ."*

Paradise Lenoir is not. Neither is Chase Hall. But Marriott Corp., which took control of Carolina Dining Services five years ago, could become the first food service contractor ever to succeed financially at the University. According to Chris Derby, director of campus dining services, Marriott has consistently earned a profit in recent years and will eventually overcome the large initial investment that has kept the operation in the red.

The University has had a history of failed dining service contractors, Derby said. "We're the first contractor that has really made it work for the clients, customers and students," he said. "There's been a long history of contractors

about key areas of concern.

## Dining hall space

Freshman Tarnesha Robinson, who dines regularly in Lenoir and occasionally in Chase, said her only outstanding gripe with the dining service is related to lack of space. Many of her friends have also complained about the 30 or 40 minutes it takes to get lunch in Lenoir, she said.

"There is not enough space in either of the cafeterias," Robinson said. "It's really difficult to come in here and get lunch."

Shilpa Shah, a junior and regular diner, sees rush hour crowding as something that cannot be helped. "It's obviously too crowded and you can't find a table," she said.

## Cover Story

on this campus who couldn't make it work."

When Marriott's contract expires this year, they will definitely be in the bidding for a renewal, Derby said. He has spotted representatives on campus from other companies who might bid for the contract, including ARA, who ran the dining services before Marriott won the bid in 1986. "We like serving the Chapel Hill campus," Derby said. "We still feel it's a contract worth bidding for."

Much of Marriott's marginal success can be contributed to its close monitoring of student opinion, Derby said. Every semester, Carolina Dining Services distributes surveys, and two weeks ago, they sponsored group discussions that allowed participants a chance to air their opinions on campus dining.

"The most important part is understanding the customer," Derby said. "We can never get enough input. I feel very strongly that we run a good quality program on this campus."

Do students share Derby's opinion of Marriott's services? Below are the responses of campus diners who were questioned

"That's probably unavoidable."

Junior Viola Walker, a regular Lenoir diner, said the new arrangement of the meal lines add to the confusion during busy periods of the day. Last year, the lines for the lunch entree and the grill branched off in different directions, but now the two are parallel and often converge. This leads to a buildup of people who block the drink machines, Walker said. "You have a lot of congestion in that area."

Even Derby admitted Lenoir is too small to handle its rush-hour clientele. Some suggestions for improvement now being considered include:

- An indoor stairwell connecting Lenoir's upstairs and downstairs floors. According to Derby, this would encourage more people to take advantage of downstairs seating.

- More tables that seat two persons. Derby noted that often a single person will occupy a four-person table, leaving three empty seats.

- Pedestal-style tables like those in airports. These do not take up much room but require the diner to eat standing up.

Whatever the measures taken

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