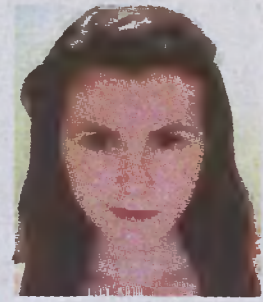


Students should not be forced into expensive meal plans

Guilford College is a school based on recognizing individual needs and catering to them. But is that principle carried outside of the classroom?



BY QUINCY MALESOVAS
STAFF WRITER

Maybe on paper, but not on plate. Guilford College meal plan options are not reasonable in terms of the variety or price. The food choices are inconsistent, and most plans are unnecessarily pricey.

Junior Britton Dunn feels as though mandatory meal plans are an anomaly for students like him.

"I am on a scholarship and have a lot of financial aid, yet I still have to pay for these exorbitant meal plans that I don't really want," said Dunn.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, an adequate low-cost grocery budget for a single, college-age person would be about \$40 to \$60 dollars a week. A liberal budget would fall between \$70 and \$80 dollars.

The average first-year students' meal plan is double that, at roughly \$150 per every week they are on campus.

"It makes me spend more money than I have to and more money than I can really afford," said Dunn. He is currently on the 100-block plan, but still believes it would be cheaper to buy all of his own groceries.

Not every student personally feels the burden of meal plan expenses, but many still look at the cost critically.

"I can understand that this is a private school, and of course it's going to be more expensive," said first-year Imani Ames. "But my parents and I together spent less than that on food (before Guilford)."

She is on the Quaker 19 plan, costing a whopping \$2,415 per semester.

The only ways students can get out of a meal plan are to move off-campus, a difficult process within itself, or provide a doctor's note validating exemption.

Going through the exemption process can be tedious — especially for students without a general

practitioner in the area. For this reason, many students are stuck with an inflexible meal plan that they must grapple with to meet their needs.

The lack of variety is one thing that often causes complaints from students of all backgrounds.

"There often isn't a gluten-free grain available," said senior Sophie Laine, who avoids the protein for health reasons.

She compensates by supplementing her diet with grains she buys herself. This requires an extra trip to the store each week

and more money spent on top of an already costly meal plan.

Vegetarian and vegan students feel the same struggle with dish variability. Some days there may be three plant-based protein sources available, and other days there are none.

Part of what students are paying for in these high-priced plans, is the convenience of walking into a Guilford dining venue, and eating without giving it much thought. When there is insufficient variety, however, that benefit becomes compromised.

Junior Vince Schueren lives in the Pines, where he contributes \$15 weekly to a house grocery fund. He has a 100-block meal plan in addition to house meals, which he feels works out well for him.

But he does note that if living in a space where groceries were bought individually, his total food budget would be unreasonable.

"Meal plan prices are adjusted annually based on cost increases (for example, consumer price index increases for food)," said Director of Dining Services Snehal Deshmukh in an email interview.

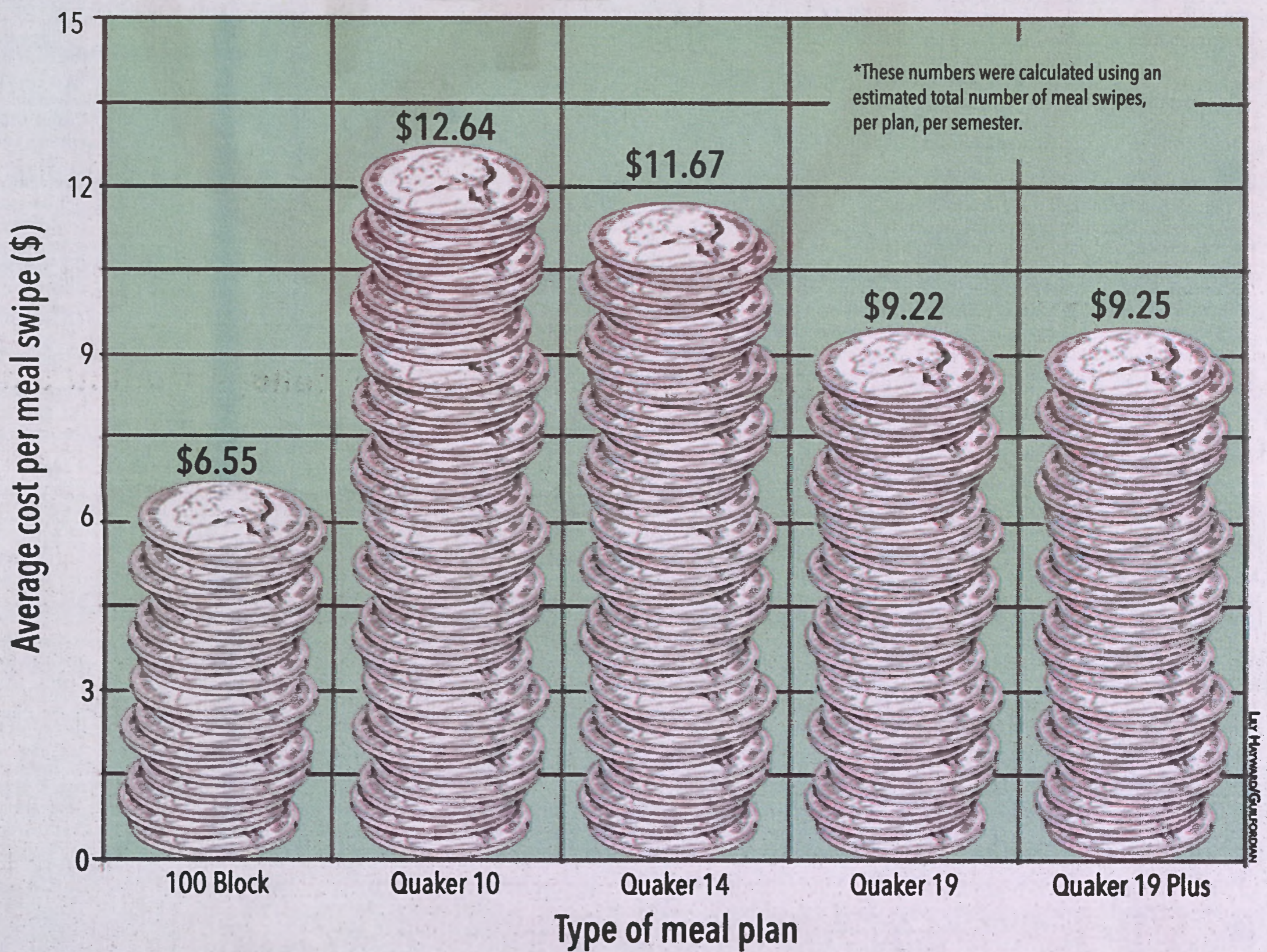
While dining services are considering their own bottom line for expenses, they are failing to recognize that students also feel the effects.

For those who are not feeling the burden of a lagging economy, \$2,000 or more meal plans might be just fine. For the rest of us, they feel unfair.

Meal plan options should be reconsidered for the sake of all students.

We are unique. We have different priorities. Dining options should reflect that.

How much does one meal cost?



Citizen journalists prove to be invaluable resources whose rights must be protected

Wisconsin activist and filmmaker Miles Kristan stood in front of Wisconsin Rep. Peter Barca's office and held up his camera as police officers walked towards him. Moments prior, he had asked Barca and one of his staffers about Barca's relationship with a Republican politician.



BY MATTHEW JONES
STAFF WRITER

"Oh s—, they've got four cops coming after me," he says into the camera. "You guys, they've got four cops coming after me for asking questions on camera."

Kristan belongs to a growing class of bloggers, filmmakers and activists often referred to as citizen journalists. Although they are not professionals, they write about and record important issues and events. This raises an important question: should they be treated as journalists or regular citizens?

When a person blatantly disregards journalistic standards, they should be treated like any other misbehaving observer. But when they do engage in serious reporting, citizen journalists deserve the same treatment as professional reporters. This encourages citizen journalists to continue covering underreported stories and writing investigative reports.

Citizen journalists have contributed to many of the last year's biggest news stories. From Ferguson to Syria, they captured video, wrote blog posts and provided eyewitness accounts that proved invaluable.

"While the term citizen journalists is often spoken with air quotes around that second word ... they still play an important role in getting out early information," wrote Erik Deckers in a post for problogservice. "Ever since George Holliday

recorded the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles 20 years ago with a Sony Handycam, private citizens have become citizen watchdogs against the police, the government and, in some cases, even the media themselves."

Unfortunately, people who do this kind of reporting are often antagonized by police and other officials because of their amateur status.

Antonio French, a St. Louis alderman, was at the forefront of amateur reporting during the protests in Ferguson this past August. He filled his Twitter feed with widely re-distributed video, pictures and commentary on the police response. But several days into the protests, Ferguson police arrested him and charged him with unlawful assembly.

"He is a citizen journalist of the best kind: a credible witness who has helped inform the wider public about a critical matter," wrote grassroots journalism expert Dan Gillmor in a column for The Guardian. "Can anyone plausibly doubt that he and the two professional journalists, who were briefly taken into custody after police demanded they stop recording, were targeted because they were documenting law enforcement actions?"

The issue also extends nationally. The Free Flow of Information Act, introduced to Congress in 2013, aims to protect journalists by creating a federal shield law that would allow journalists to keep the names of sources secret.

But, the bill includes an amendment that would exempt unpaid journalists from its protections.

"This bill is described as a reporter shield bill," said Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein in a committee discussing the amendment. "I believe it should be applied to real reporters."

Without a shield law to protect their sources, many citizen

journalists would find it tougher to do investigative work.

"Many people still have the stereotypical notion of the blogger as the pajamarati, typing and ranting away in their parents' basement," wrote journalist Larry Atkins in a piece for The Huffington Post. "Many bloggers and website operators do engage in real reporting. The definition of who is a journalist or reporter should be interpreted broadly in light of the changing media landscape."

This is not to say that all citizen journalists are reporters; some step outside clearly drawn boundaries for journalists. Kristan is a perfect example of this.

Kristan had badgered Barca incessantly before his arrest, even holding Barca's office door open so he could continue shouting at him. His latest arrest was a surprise to few in Wisconsin; Kristan had a long history of aggravating government officials, including dumping beer on one Republican politician.

"No doubt what the Republicans have done with their agenda angered a lot of people in this state," said Democratic Rep. Cory Mason of Racine, Wisconsin in an interview with The Journal Times. "But regardless of that, it is not acceptable to pour beer on someone's head if you don't agree with their politics."

There must be action to protect citizen journalists and other amateur reporters who, unlike Kristan, do engage in legitimate reporting. Changing the language of and passing the Free Flow of Information Act would be just one step towards creating a more permissive atmosphere for amateur reporters.

Allowing citizen journalists to flourish will benefit all Americans by strengthening investigative reporting and keeping readers informed in ways not possible otherwise.