Dining Service Controls Advised

By James Moody

"We didn't find anything startling in the whole report," said Helen Doroghty, General Manager of MIT's Dining Service, commenting on a recently completed study of MIT's operations.

"What we are being told," commented Dave Cantley, Stouffers Regional Manager and former MIT General Manager, "is to put more pressure on all phases of the operation, to improve our controls. . . . No magic, no new way, just do the old job better."

The study was conducted by Arthur Dana Associates, a food service consulting firm based in New York. It involved 33 days of on-site observation, discussions with management, employees, customers, and administration, detailed cost analysis, and a review of operating data.

The emphasis of the report is on controls. The measures of the success of these controls is the food cost percentage, the percentage that the actual food cost pays for food. Dana calculated the theoretical food cost, and proposed a set of controls to achieve this. His goal is to minimize accounting practices which will facilitate calculation (and minimization) of the food cost percentage.

Improvements can be made in the appearance and setting of the dining halls, which will hopefully attract more business. Plans can be added to Lobdell to divide the room into smaller spaces. With the tables arranged in diamond fashion (as they now are), people will feel like they have more room.

There were several problems with the Dana report, according to Cantley, Doroghty, and Arthur B. Bradley, Assistant Director of Housing and Food Service. Some of Dana's recommendations were apparently the result of hasty analysis and conclusions drawn from a single observation, such as a tough piece of chopped meat, or an overcooked hamburger.

Dana's theoretical food cost percentage may be low by as much as 6%, since he neglected to include in his calculation such things as hamburger rolls and condiments. "He just made a mistake," Doroghty noted, and added that she is working quickly to come up with a new set of goals that are more realistic.

Doroghty felt the report would not help MIT solve its deficit problem (which may be as high as $250,000 this year). He could see no way to increase business by 20% and reduce food cost by 6%. He felt these were both unrealistic, although he will continue every effort to reach these goals.

Looking ahead, dining service hopes to implement tighter controls and more accountability from all of its personnel, with the goal of providing the best possible service at the least deficit. In the face of higher food costs, MIT has decided to increase the deficit, rather than increase the cost of a common contract. A la carte prices have risen to cover increased costs. Compulsory plans for next year are still under investigation.

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