



December 2022

Cultivating Reciprocity

at Chestnut Dining Hall



INTRODUCTION

Food Services at Chestnut Residence Dining Hall experienced challenges last year related to changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Food Services approached the Innovation Hub in the fall of 2021 seeking support to design impactful student consultation and co-design for the future of Food Services operations at Chestnut. The Innovation Hub takes a design thinking approach that focuses on student-led consultation and co-design of the student experience. **Design thinking uses empathetic methods that foster open and generative sharing among students.** As such, the Innovation Hub aims to be an unbiased partner in the Chestnut Dining Hall Project.

To learn more about the ongoing student needs at Chestnut, we conducted a series of student-led feedback sessions and interviews. The qualitative design thinking approach helped us gain an understanding of student dining experiences and build ongoing and collaborative relationships with students. After collecting and analyzing feedback, we developed a report designed to aid in planning collaborative community dialogue events at Chestnut in fall 2022.

These fall events utilized a co-creation approach to facilitate opportunities for Chestnut residents and Food Services to collectively imagine the future of Chestnut dining. The feedback and ideas generated by students during these events has informed this latest iteration of the report.

METHODS



At the Innovation Hub, **we strive to understand students' experiences, as told to us through their stories, and allow that understanding to inspire design.** We explore the 'problem space' —moving beyond the what questions to the why's and how's. To understand student experiences, we use methods such as interviews, discussion groups, and interactive exercises to encourage students to describe their experiences to us in their own words.

For the first phase of the project, we interviewed **8 Food Services staff members** about their experiences with students and perspectives on the dining hall's new implementations. We then arranged feedback sessions with the students at Chestnut. Unfortunately, the turnout was low for these sessions, with only **3 students** in attendance. We proceeded to interview **11 students** who were living at Chestnut. We asked students about their dining experiences at Chestnut, their communication with Food Services, and further probed about any challenges they faced, as well as their interactions with staff members.

In our examination of the data, **we used grounded analytic techniques to gain a deeper understanding of the core needs** that students and staff communicated, and developed a vision based on our insights. We synthesized stories which students and staff members shared into personas to contextualize their needs. We also developed design principles that guide how to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between students and staff members at Chestnut Dining Hall.

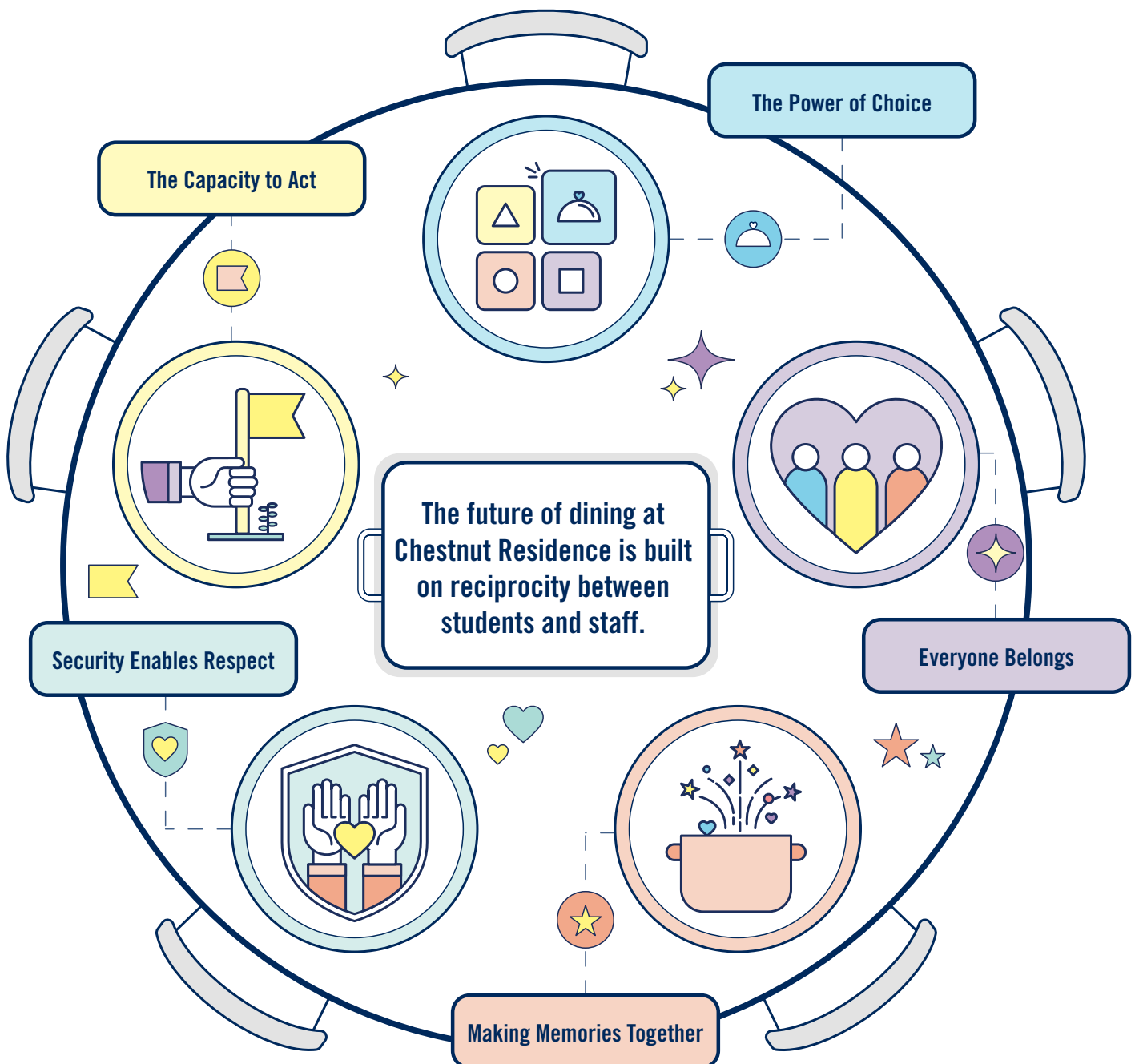
For the second phase of the project, we hosted co-creation sessions to share key findings from the June 2022 report and hear students' thoughts and reactions. We also engaged students in idea generation activities to understand how they imagine the future of Chestnut Dining. We spoke to **32 students across 3 co-creation events.** Insights from the co-creation sessions and ideas generated by students are contained in the *Co-Creating the Future of Dining at Chestnut* and Design Principles sections of this report.

OUR FINDINGS



The future of dining at Chestnut Residence is built on reciprocity between students and staff.

We found that the staff and students at Chestnut are committed to improvement and wish for their needs to be respected. There is great potential for a mutually beneficial relationship between both parties.



THEME 1

THE POWER OF CHOICE



Flexibility

Throughout the data, it was clear that students value flexibility when eating on campus. Students spoke of the need for **flexibility around where and when they can eat** based on other commitments and factors in their lives.



Students told us that they appreciated the flexibility to eat at locations closer to their classes, especially on days with back-to-back lectures.



During the all-you-care-to-eat model (AYCE), some students shared that the meal hours didn't align with their schedules. Students sometimes were not able to return back to Chestnut before the end of the mealtime, or if they did return, the food selection was depleted by the time they could get there.

Choice

Throughout the interviews, students expressed that **having choices in what they eat** matters to them. Students told us that they want options and choices when selecting food available to them.

Many students shared that they wish to maintain healthy eating habits while away from home. Interviewees acknowledged the food variety but stated they felt that there was a lack of food alternatives for individuals with dietary preferences or restrictions.



Some students shared they would rather eat outside of the Residence for what they considered healthier food options. For example, students said there are more choices for vegetarians/vegans outside of Chestnut, or that healthier snacks are more affordable outside.



Fairness

Students expressed the need for **fairness and consistency in the pricing** of the food they have access to at Chestnut with what is available outside.



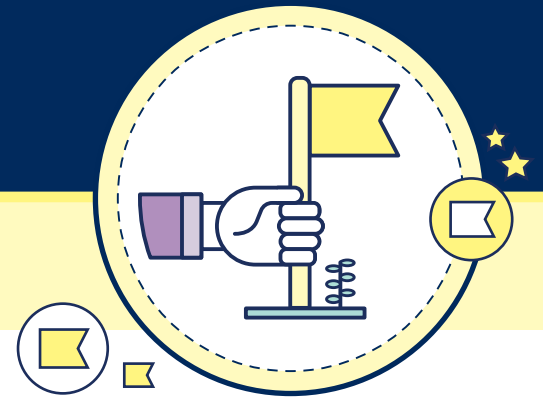
Students told us that they find the price of food puzzling when an identical item varies significantly between grocery stores and Chestnut, which left them feeling uneasy.



Staff members acknowledged that adjustments could be made to pricing and that some changes were already underway.

THEME 2

THE CAPACITY TO ACT



Control

Student responses demonstrated their **need to control their own schedules and eat meals at times that were convenient to their schedules**. Students with atypical schedules spoke of the need for accommodation around odd mealtimes.



Students expressed frustration with dining hall options during later hours of operation because of the lack of hot food during those times.



Staff members shared hesitancy to consistently produce hot food during non-peak hours to reduce food waste.

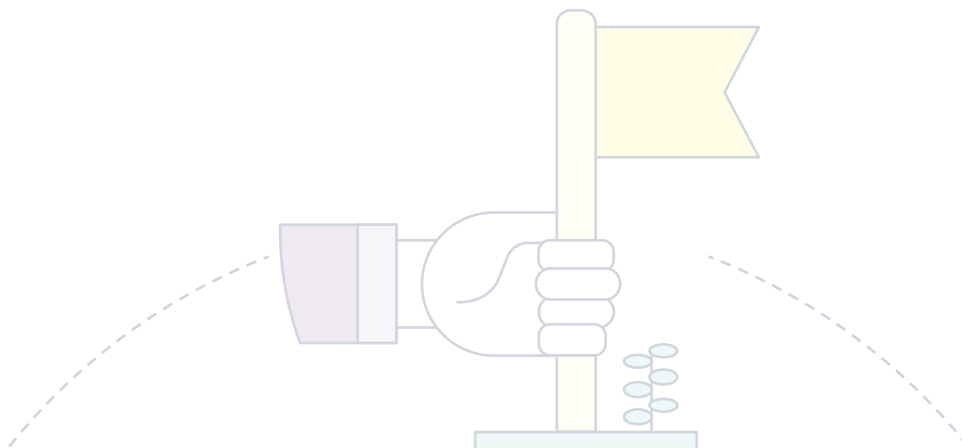
Agency

Students expressed that they **need to have agency in making decisions about eating on campus**. Students want to decide where and what they eat based on many factors in their lives.

Students shared appreciation for being able to choose where to eat with the implementation of the declining-balance model. In some examples, students wanted the ability to make food choices aligned with their cultural preferences.



Staff members shared their belief that Chestnut's food options are culturally diverse but acknowledge that not all students will be satisfied.



THEME 3

SECURITY ENABLES RESPECT



Safety and Security

Students want to feel secure to ask for what they need and know that Food Services staff are listening – they have many diverse needs and need to feel they can have a dialogue and get their needs met. Both students and staff expressed their **desire for spaces to safely and confidently communicate their concerns and requests** about Chestnut dining.



One student described how their food source mainly relied on the grill, because their diet is halal. The student wished for more halal options but felt their needs might not be met because they are in the minority of the students at Chestnut.



Some staff members felt that students were very hostile to the staff, often misinterpreting or taking their response out of context. Interactions with students involving miscommunications made connecting with students and getting to the root of their concerns challenging.

Mutual Respect

Chestnut staff told us they value student feedback but expressed the need for students to **recognize their efforts to make improvements**. Similarly, students value voicing their opinions and expressed the need for more transparency around Food Services practices and processes.

A staff member shared that students often vent their frustrations but do not provide suggestions for improvement.

A few students shared that they were interested in information about local sourcing and food advocacy, but experienced finding the information they wanted difficult.



THEME 4

MAKING MEMORIES TOGETHER



Connection and Community

During interviews, students described previous **positive interactions with friendly and considerate staff as being memorable moments**. Students highlighted that when staff are approachable and reliable, reaching out to staff members is easier.



A student described that the staff provided a lot of useful information on meal plans and food served in Chestnut when they moved in. They appreciated the friendliness and responsiveness of the staff, as well as how easy it is to contact them.



Another student appreciated a staff member who reminded them that their meal plan balance was getting low at the check-out while getting lunch one day. They felt a sense of community in that moment.

Joy and Celebration

Throughout the interviews, students shared that celebrations bring tremendous joy to the students at Chestnut. Students expressed the **need to feel a sense of belonging and joy** while living on Residence during their academic journey.

One student mentioned the special events in the dining hall such as festival meals and a monthly cake day to celebrate people's birthdays that month. Students found these gestures very thoughtful as the festivities provided an opportunity to celebrate with people outside of their established friend circle.

Another student described how they will excitedly notify any passers-by in the Residence that there are free cakes during the cake days, and they will all go to get cakes together. Cake day was one of their most memorable experiences at Chestnut.



THEME 5

EVERYONE BELONGS



Inclusion

Students expressed that **feeling included is an important part of life at Chestnut** and an even more important part of the dining hall experience. Students expressed the need for Chestnut to feel like their **home away from home**.



Many students in Chestnut shared their belief that there is a good variety of food options in the dining hall. However, the options aren't always inclusive of students with dietary requirements such as halal, vegan, and vegetarian. Students also shared that they wish for better cultural representation in food choices.



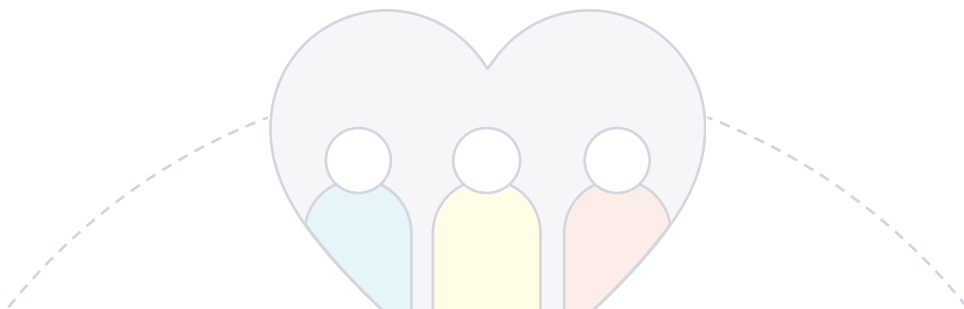
Both students and staff expressed that the dining hall is more than a place to eat food, it is an important cornerstone for interactions and socializations. Interacting and socializing during the pandemic was challenging, and many felt that the opportunity for an inclusive safe space for meetings and interactions had somewhat disappeared due to restrictions.

Acknowledgement

Both students and staff told us that they **value having their beliefs and ideas for Chestnut acknowledged**. Students and staff expressed the need for acknowledgement as a way for students and staff to show each other respect and courtesy.

Both student and staff stories showed that while some conversations are happening, many individuals from both groups feel that they are not being fully acknowledged. Some students shared the feelings that their ideas and concerns were not being fairly considered. Staff members shared feelings that their efforts to meet needs are disregarded.

The turnout for events to support communication between Food Services and students has been low, further demonstrating these challenges.



PERSONAS

Personas bring students' stories to life by presenting narratives based on their experiences. Each story is written based on the data we collected. Personas offer a humanized view of the data, highlighting themes and insights. Reflection on these personas while brainstorming solutions can be useful to test if a proposed solution might meet individual needs. Consider how these personas would interact with the ideas.

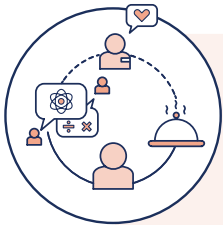


YASMIN, First-year international engineering student leaving home for the first time

“While I am thrilled to have the opportunity to study abroad, moving to a new country for school is not easy – it is my first time being away from family for an extended period. I am having trouble adjusting to a new environment because I am unfamiliar with Canada’s culture, people, and food.”

I often feel homesick because I miss the sort of food I ate growing up back home. As someone who has dietary restrictions, it was great to know that the food at the dining hall accommodated individuals who can only eat halal. However, I feel like I am eating the same thing over time, and I wish there were more variety in the food selections.

I want the feeling of “home away from home” through the food and community at Chestnut Residence. After a long day of lectures and coursework, I want to choose the food I enjoy eating that reminds me of home. I always appreciate it when friendly individuals greet me and improve my day. Although the feeling of “home away from home” is important to me, I also want to experience other cultures through the food and community at the Chestnut dining hall.



JACOB, Second-year arts and science student coming to campus for the first time

“The transition from remote to in-person was very daunting and I wasn’t sure what to expect. My first year of courses was entirely online and coming in to second year was my first time living in Residence and away from home.”

I was anxious about meeting people after the pandemic because I was coming in to Residence in my second year. I’m grateful for the early interactions I had in the Chestnut dining hall. I still remember the first time I walked into the dining hall. The staff member who cashed me out called me “darling” and I felt so warm and welcome.

At this point, I had only met my roommate and had no friends. We sat down at a table with some other students and as we started chatting, we discovered that some of us were taking the same program. **I was so happy to meet people who are also taking the same courses as me and it made me feel less lonely in this new environment. I feel like the dining hall was where I made my first friends at university.** I’m still friends with most of the people I met that day, and every so often we all eat together in the dining hall.

Most of all, I appreciate that sense of community and having neighbours I can call friends. Having a tight-knit community at Chestnut helps me battle moments of loneliness.

PERSONAS



MIN, Fourth-year engineering student struggling to adjust to recent changes

"I am in my fourth year, and I've been living at Chestnut since I began university. Chestnut has always been a great place to live, and I really enjoy living here. Specifically, I love cake days because they give me a chance to connect with new people."

When COVID hit lots of things changed. The dining hall used to be a place where my friends and I would hang out, chat about life, and have a few laughs. Those were some of my favourite moments of my undergrad. Nowadays, the environment of the dining hall has become bleak because of the pandemic.

No one is interested in socializing and there aren't any smiles anymore. Those small interactions really made my day and helped me get through a lot of disappointing marks and missed meals. **I especially struggled with the change in the meal plans. The switch from the All You Care to Eat program to the Declining Balance meal plan was a big shock to me.** It really changed how I spend money on food because I feel like I am paying more in the declining balance model, and I have to reconsider the way I eat throughout the day.

Before the pandemic, I never worried about the portion size or cost of food. Now, with the new model, I have to completely rework my eating habits to accommodate the changing value of food. Despite all the changes, at least cake day still feels the same. It's a great way to celebrate and bring students back together after tough times.



FRANESCA, Food Services operational staff in their 6th year of employment

"After working at Chestnut for 5 years, I have felt the real ins and outs of the job, especially throughout the pandemic. I truly and deeply care about the students and their needs and improving student life is something I strive for."

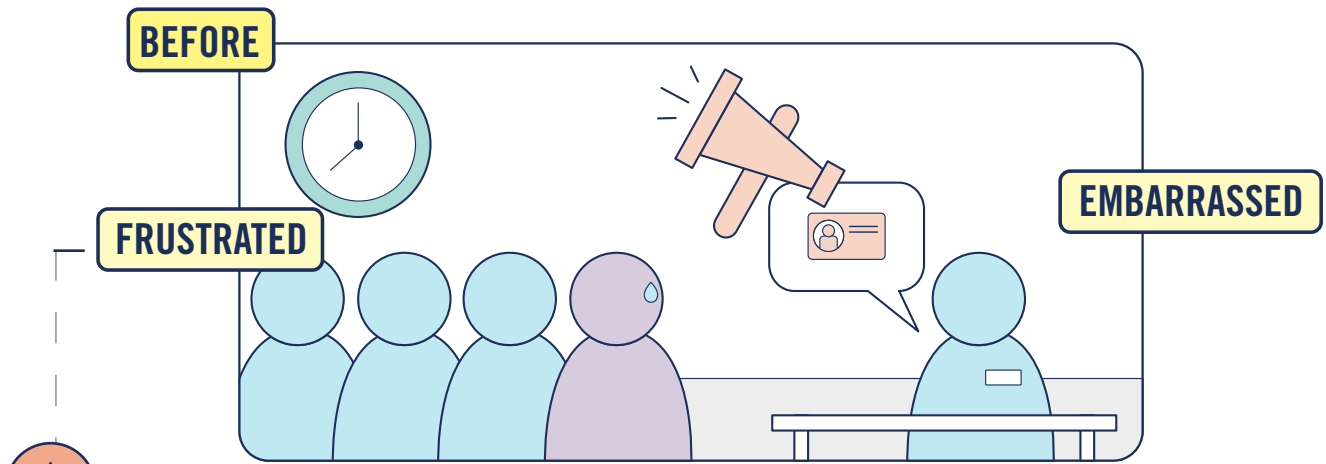
The pandemic has deeply affected our students and staff. It led to drastic changes in how Food Services determine food supply, operational cost, and delivery model.

One big change was our decision to move away from the All You Care to Eat meal plan to a Declining Balance model. We experienced pushback from students expressing their disdain for the change. Students didn't understand that we had no choice. We had to make a change and accommodate the new reality caused by the pandemic.

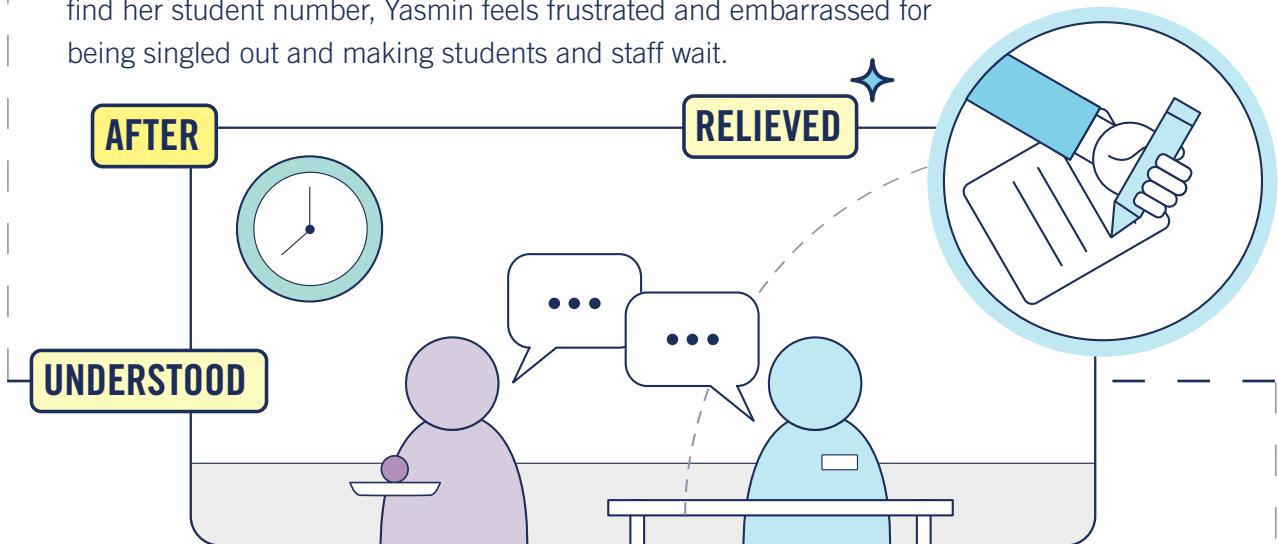
Staff members at Chestnut are constantly working to make things better for students. We really care about the students and want them to have a great dining experience. **I wish students would understand how committed I am to my job. I want to bring high-quality and nutritional options to our students.** At the end of the day, I want students to have a sense of community at Chestnut and know that we as staff care about their wellbeing. Our end goal has always been about the students and their needs but it's tough to meet those needs when there is no middle ground.

JOURNEY MAP

The following story shows a day in the life of the persona Yasmin. This journey map highlights three moments from Yasmin's day before and after design principles are applied to three key moments in the day. A journey map is representative of student stories by mapping out a student journey.



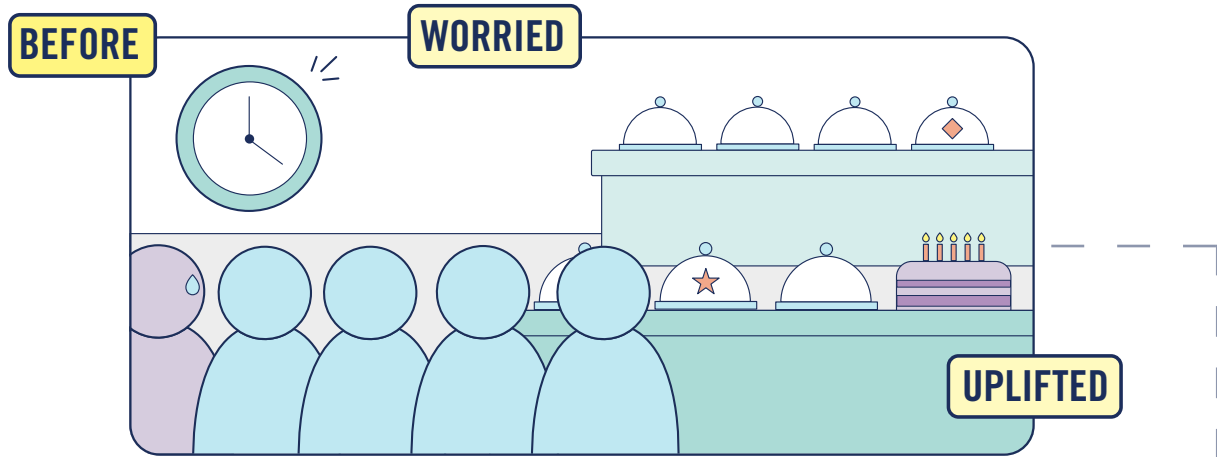
Yasmin forgets her T-card and asks the staff member if there is another way to record her T-card as she enters the dining hall. The staff member was annoyed and pointed out she should have remembered her card. Although the staff member was able to find her student number, Yasmin feels frustrated and embarrassed for being singled out and making students and staff wait.



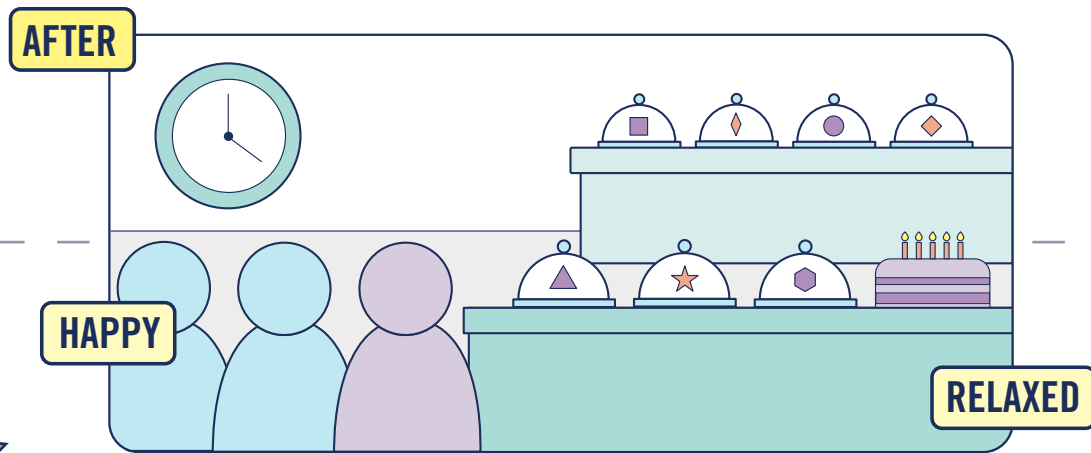
Yasmin forgets her T-card and apologizes to the staff member. The staff member let her know they can record her student number and charge her later. Yasmin feels understood and relieved no major inconvenience was caused.

Constructive Communication Creates Change - Constructive communication changed the interaction between Yasmin and the staff member to one of respectful dialogue, so everyone leaves the dining hall happy.

JOURNEY MAP



Yasmin is running late for lunch and is worried she won't find food that meets her dietary needs. After seeing a long line up, Yasmine feels forced to buy something she doesn't like. Yasmin feels uplifted after a staff member tells her today is cake day..

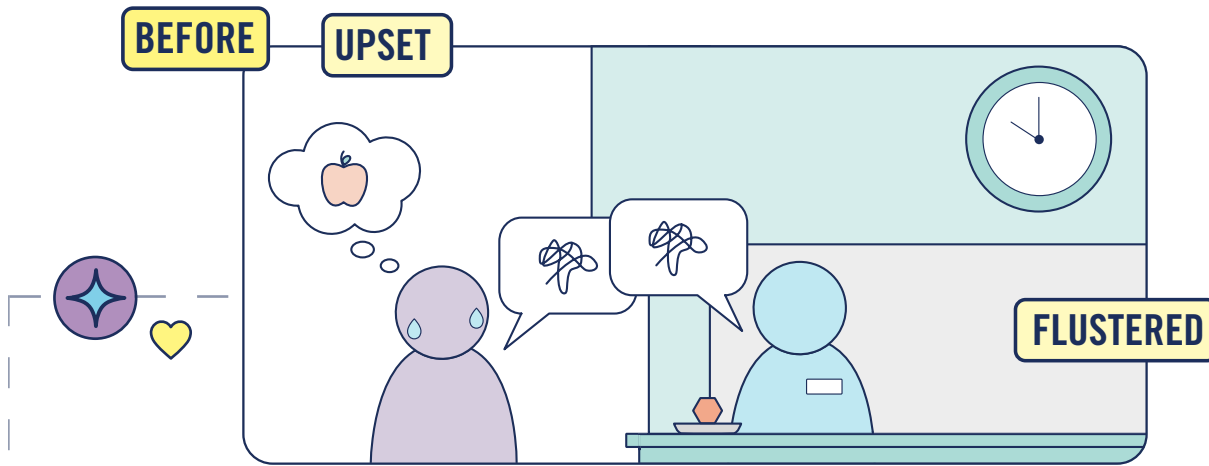


Yasmin is running late to lunch but is not worried about not being able to eat her favourite meal that meets her dietary needs since the food is available all day. Yasmin feels happy leaving the dining hall since today is cake day.

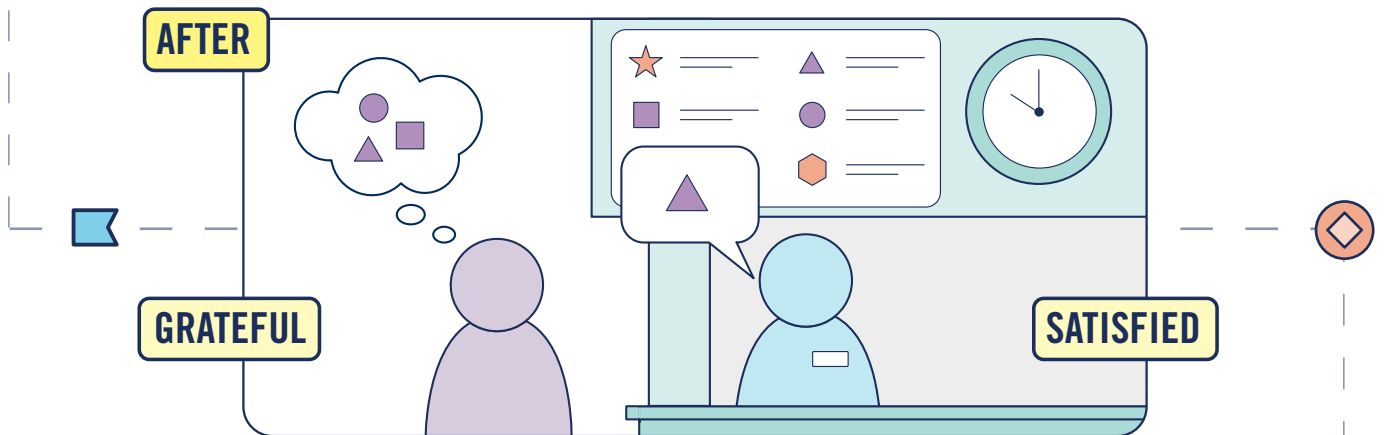
Accommodate Everyone - The dining hall was able to accommodate Yasmin's class schedule, which allowed her to be able eat what she wants.



JOURNEY MAP



After a night lecture Yasmin sees everything is closed in the dining hall except the grill station. Yasmin is finding difficulty communicating with the staff member about finding alternative food options because they are wearing masks. Yasmin leaves the dining hall feeling upset after her interaction with the staff member and realizing she received the wrong order.



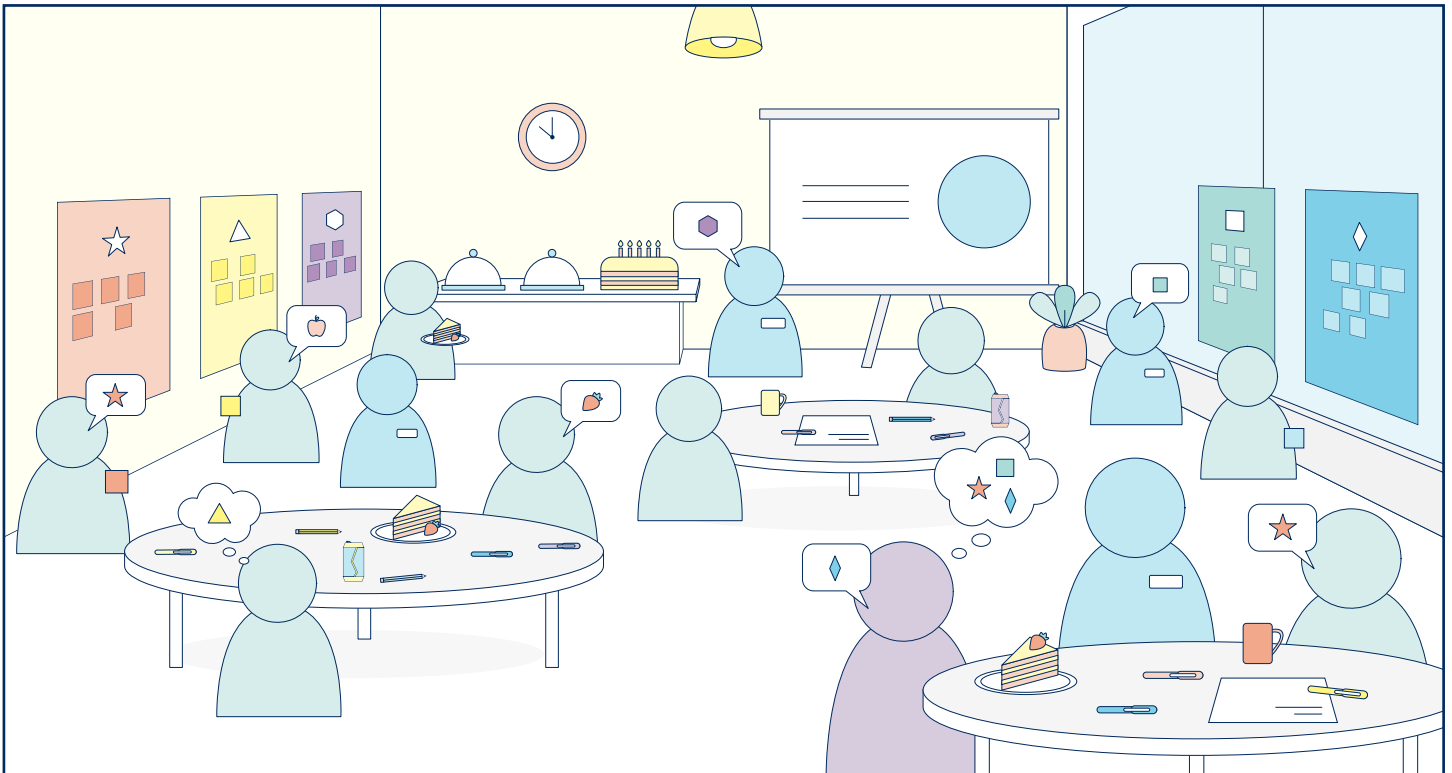
Yasmin arrives after her night lecture to thankfully see many food options that align with her strict dietary needs. Yasmin receives a recommendation from a staff member and decides to try the food out, feeling grateful for the recommendation.

Reflect on Diversity – The food reflects the diversity of Chestnut students and Yasmin feels like she has agency and community at Chestnut Residence.



CO-CREATING THE FUTURE OF DINING AT CHESTNUT

The Innovation Hub in collaboration with Food Services at Chestnut Dining Hall held 3 two-hour co-creation sessions, **Future of Dining at Chestnut: Co-Create the Future** which took place on October 13th, 15th, and 21st 2022. These events consisted of a presentation by the Innovation Hub and Food Services staff members, a question and answer session between students and Food Services staff members, and two ideation activities where students were able to express their thoughts and feelings about Chestnut.



During the events, students engaged in fruitful dialogue between fellow students and staff members. Students were excited to have a forum to express their opinions and provide feedback, which they did enthusiastically. Chestnut residents were happy to learn about Food Services' collaboration with the Innovation Hub, knowing their voices will be heard. Students were highly engaged and shared innovative and thoughtful ideas. Based on the discussion during the sessions, some examples of what is currently working well and what is challenging emerged.

STUDENTS TOLD US...

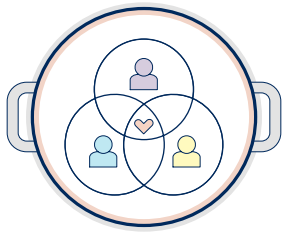
What's Working Well For Students

- Students shared their **admiration for Chestnut Dining Hall's events**, such as cake days and wing nights. Students expressed desire for more celebrations, such as cultural holidays.
- Students expressed **appreciation for the friendly staff at Chestnut**. These relationships make students feel more comfortable and relaxed while they dine.
- Students told us that they thoroughly **appreciated being asked for feedback** about their dining experiences and reported interest in future opportunities to share their feedback.

What's Challenging

- Many students thought that Chestnut's **weekly food options are very limited** and recognized challenges with accommodating everyone's personal preferences.
- Students want **choice and control when deciding food options**. Students would like agency in making choices about or adjustments to the food they eat (i.e. flavour or portion size).
- Students appreciate the variety of programs and services provided by Food Services at Chestnut but feel there is **not enough awareness or information about these services** in order to use them.

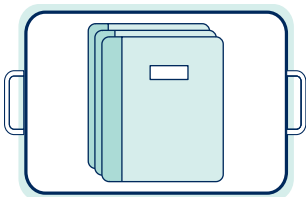
DESIGN PRINCIPLES



ACCOMMODATE EVERYONE

Chestnut residents have varying schedules and dietary needs. Think about integrating opportunities for students to use the dining hall more frequently and to customize food to accommodate all students when designing for the future.

- Add a condiments station in the dining hall with various spices and condiments
- Expand the variety of vegetarian options for students with dietary restrictions
- Offer more beverage selections
- Invite guest chefs to demonstrate their experience in preparing cultural cuisines
- Allow options for custom plates and different portion sizes
- Extend dining hall hours on weekends and during exam periods
- Adjust dining hall hours to accommodate different eating schedules
- Consider religious practices and holidays when adjusting schedules
- Increase diverse plant-based options

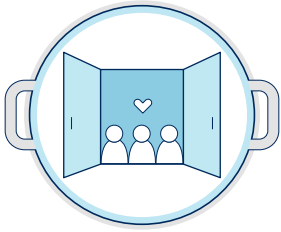


INFORMATION EMPOWERS

Provide information that allows students to make informed decisions for themselves. Giving clear insights about upcoming events and food options at the dining hall increases students' awareness of what is happening in the dining hall.

- Make information sources more accessible to students
 - Use social media as students frequently use social media platforms (i.e. Instagram)
 - Post physical advertisements and posters in communal spaces such as the elevator and hallways
 - Make event advertising more visible as students do not want to miss out
- Present menus in the dining hall that shows food items for the upcoming week
 - Include images of food so students have a visual reference
 - Empower students to be knowledgeable about their potential meal options
- Enable more direct communication with Dons as a way to spread information
 - Facilitate information sharing through dinners with Residence Dons
 - Utilize the close connections between residents and Dons to communicate with students

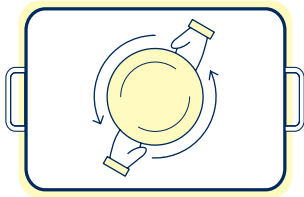
DESIGN PRINCIPLES



ALL ARE WELCOME

Welcoming environments encourage students to be themselves and engage with others. Giving opportunities for students to interact works towards building a community where students feel supported.

- Decorate the dining hall with flags from around the world to create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- Add couches and TVs for students to connect and socialize comfortably
- Offer special communal meals for midterms and finals to help students de-stress
- Hold communal events to bridge the gap between students in various academic programs
- Promote diverse student stories regarding their cultural backgrounds to help students find community through food



BUILD MUTUAL TRUST

Openness and honesty from Food Services staff will go a long way to build trust with students. Establishing trust while respecting boundaries supports students and staff members in achieving their goals to better their experiences.

- Offer tours of the kitchen so students can see how food is prepared
- Provide more information about pre-packaged food (i.e nutritional information)
- Put menu information on bigger name plates that include nutrition facts
- Clearly provide the list of ingredients used, allergy warnings, and dietary restrictions
 - For example, halal or kosher classification should be made very clear to avoid the consumption of foods that don't align with dietary restrictions
- Provide detailed explanations of the food options on the website
- List food sources in multiple locations for interested students
- Mention flavour profiles of dishes on menu description cards



DESIGN PRINCIPLES



CLEAR COMMUNICATION BUILDS TRUST

Transparency allows students to better understand new changes and reasonings behind policies at Chestnut. Clear communication helps to establish trust between students and staff.

- Communicate new changes and improvements to programs and services in the dining hall
- Provide tutorials on new programs and services offered by the dining hall
 - For example, tutorials about how to use the mobile app and meal plan calculator
- Provide more information on dining hall processes to students including:
 - Food preparation
 - Precautions for food safety
 - How the leftover food is stored
 - Proof of hygiene/cleanliness
 - Reasons behind the pricing (i.e. price adjustments)
- Provide opportunities for 1 on 1 sessions between students and Food Services staff members for students to learn more about processes at Chestnut Dining Hall



CELEBRATE TOGETHER

Celebrating in community helps students decompress from stressful times throughout the year. Giving opportunities for students to enjoy themselves and celebrate together builds appreciation for staff and joy in students.

- Serve relevant cultural dishes during cultural celebrations, festivals, and holidays (such as Chinese New Year, Ramadan, Thanksgiving, Diwali)
 - Learn more about cultural holidays by surveying or asking students to help inform programming
 - Ask students what dishes they would like to see served at these events
- Serve and offer seasonal meals to provide more reasons for students to celebrate
- Introduce new and unique foods to students during experiential events such as taste testing and sampling events
- Ask Residence Dons to invite students to special events to foster community at events
- Offer more incentives like raffles or free merchandise at special events to help increase attendance

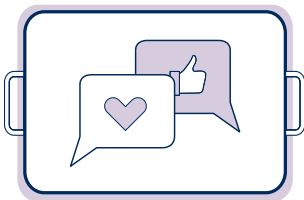
DESIGN PRINCIPLES



REFLECT ON DIVERSITY

Chestnut residents come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. The food served at the dining hall should reflect the same level of diversity as seen in the student body.

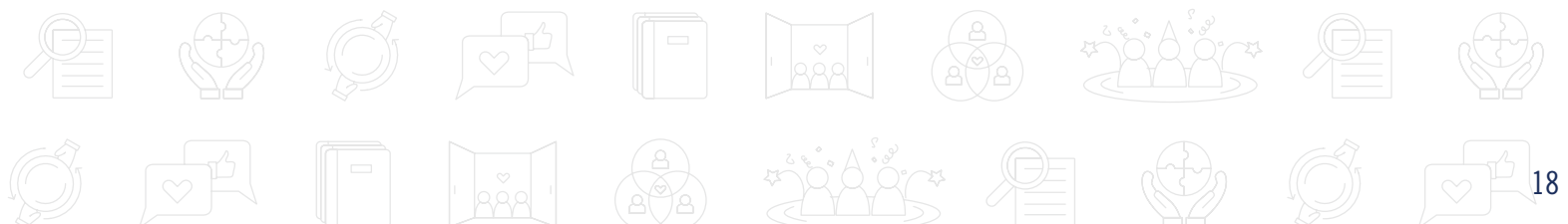
- Continue to increase the variety of food options by incorporating more cultures
- Offer more breakfast options that reflect cultural dishes from other countries
- Hire chefs with experience making or can identify with certain cultural dishes
- Increase flavour profile of menu by adding spicier food options and offering hot sauces
- Provide more opportunities for students to share input on their food preferences for the menu
- Integrate feedback into theme days, celebrating the diversity of the student body
- Source food products from outside sources for cultural events



CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION CREATES CHANGE

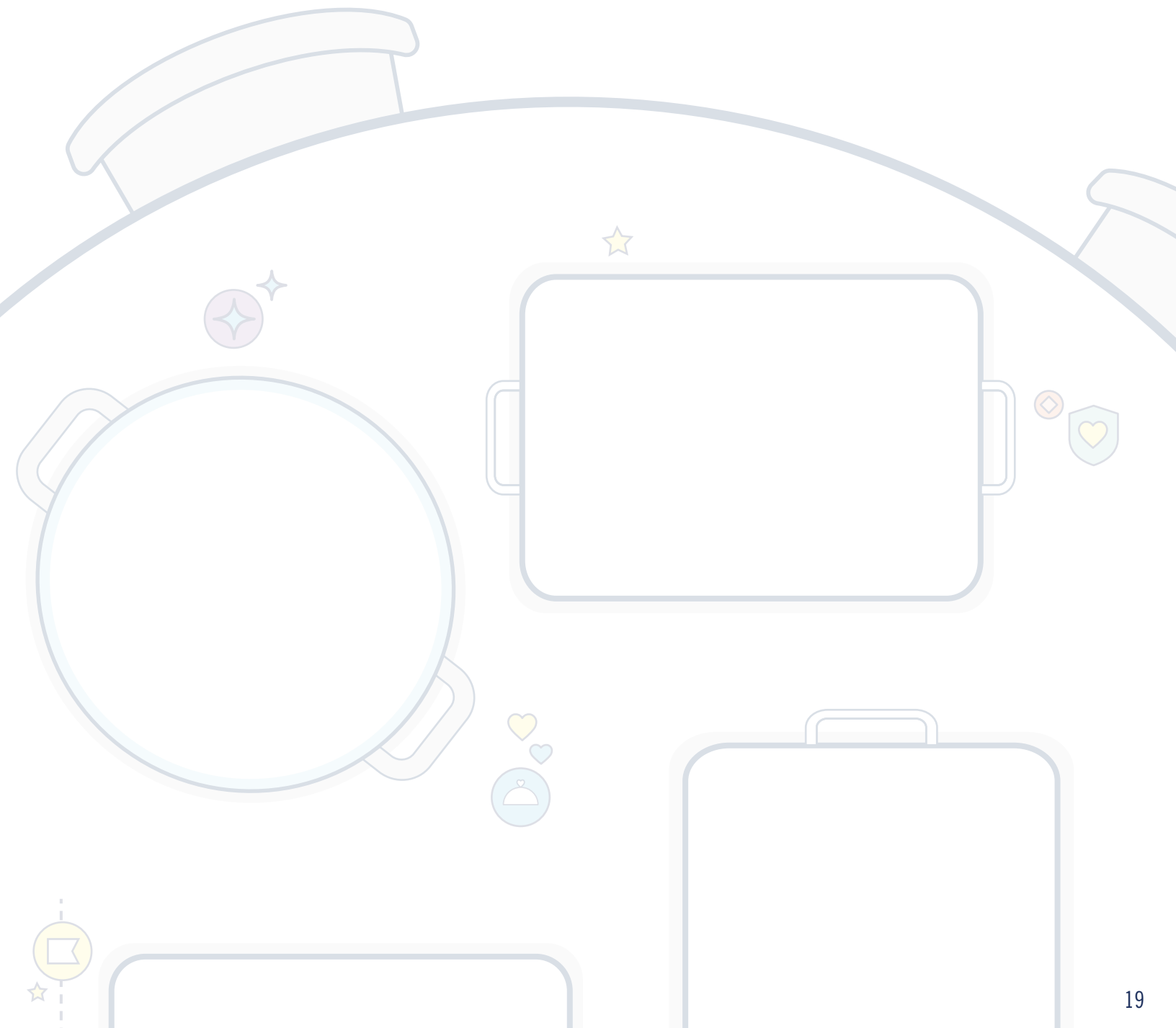
Both students and staff appreciate suggestions and feedback when they are constructive. Designing opportunities for consistent dialogue between students and staff ensures that all opinions are heard and considered and can create a culture of feedback.

- Continue hiring staff members that are friendly and open to feedback
- Regularly survey staff and students to better understand their interactions
- Act on student feedback by implementing appropriate changes or communicating when changes are not feasible
- Send regular communications with details about how the dining hall is being improved
- Organize regular staff office hours and ensure a variety of offerings
- Encourage student feedback by:
 - Providing a rating machine in various locations around the dining hall
 - Placing a suggestion box by the cashier stations
 - Offering individual and group feedback sessions
 - Voting for a “Dish of the Month”



NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, **a mutually beneficial relationship between students and staff members is essential for harmony at Chestnut.** Fostering the relationship can give both staff and students a greater sense of belonging at Chestnut, where both parties feel acknowledged and respected by each other. Additionally, fostering a mutual beneficial relationship will allow staff members to communicate more effectively with students and be able to better accommodate the different needs of a diverse student population. **From our co-creation events, we learned that students are keen to help make the dining hall space inclusive to the needs of all students and to reflect the diversity that already exists in the student body.**



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