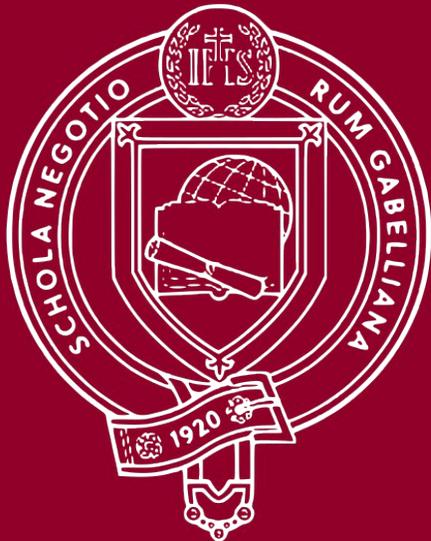# FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

RAM CAFÉ

ELEVATING THE EXPERIENCE

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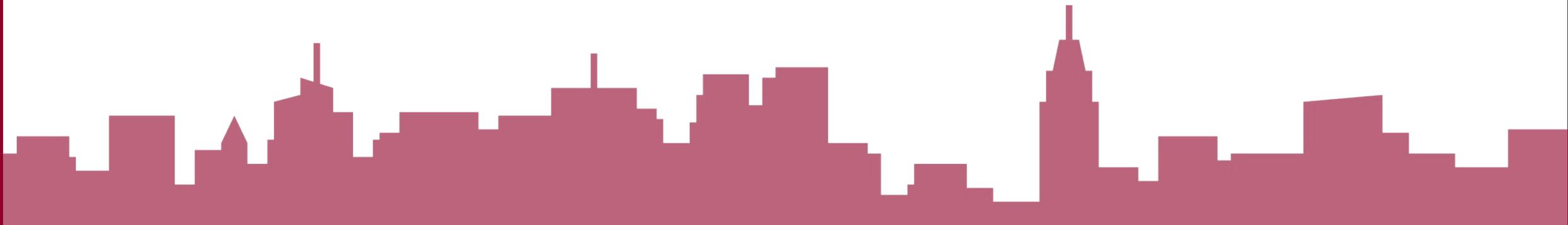# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
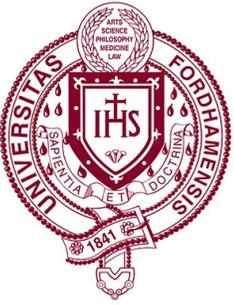
As a prominent culinary establishment on campus, the RAM Cafe holds a significant position in the campus dining landscape. Acknowledging prevalent dissatisfaction among students concerning the cafe's offerings, we initiated a brief survey to delve into their concerns, with a particular focus on aspects such as variety, value for money, and taste. This survey aims to provide an unbiased assessment of student sentiments, offering valuable insights into the specific areas where the RAM Cafe may require refinement. The collective findings of this survey will serve as the foundation for actionable recommendations, fostering positive changes for the benefit of the entire campus community.

HISTORY OF RAM CAFE

To cater to the dining needs of the Fordham community, an on-campus dining facility named "Fordham Dining" was established. Currently, Fordham Dining operates at three primary campus locations: Lincoln Center, Rose Hill, and Westchester. The focus of this research is the Lincoln Center campus, given that most of the students are located there.

Among the 6 food outlets on Lincoln Center, Ram Cafe stands out as a popular choice due to its strategic location and meal offerings. It provides a diverse range of food options, including Rice Bowls, Grilled Flatbreads, Toasted Wraps, Mac and Cheese, Smoothies, Salads, subscription meal plans, and a wide selection of packaged food items. With a commitment to continuous improvement and a mission to offer the best food choices to students, Ram Café holds promising prospects from a business standpoint.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Primary research indicates that students at Fordham University need help managing meals alongside their academic schedules, despite the dining services Fordham Dining offers. The cost of the Ram Cafe Meal plan at $8590 for an academic year exceeds the average higher-end range by 56%, according to U.S. News. The research further reveals that taste, value for money, convenience, and nutritional value are crucial factors influencing students' meal decisions, alongside concerns about cross-contamination due to diverse dietary preferences.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH INFORMAL INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

Non-Buyers

1. **Taste Dissatisfaction**: 1/3rd of respondents, including four students, express strong dissatisfaction with the taste of food sampled during orientation.
2. **Food Preferences Impacting Choices**: Two international vegetarian students cite limited vegetarian options as a significant deterrent, expressing discomfort with compromises in their dietary choices.
3. **Trust Issues in Food Preparation**: Concerns about cross-contamination and trust in the cooking process are highlighted, particularly by one vegetarian student fearing shared vessels with non-vegetarian dishes.
4. **Negative Orientation Experience**: All four non-buyers, irrespective of nationality, were discouraged from returning to the Ram Café due to their unappetizing experience during the orientation, emphasizing the lasting impact of initial impressions.

Non Subscribers

1. **Exploration Intent**: Three of four non-subscribers tried Ram Café meals initially to explore, not for regular consumption.
2. **Cost and Size Issues**: Non-subscribers avoid due to perceived high costs and dissatisfaction with portion sizes; one prefers a cheaper food truck option.
3. **Time Constraints Matter**: Limited break times impact choices; one non-subscriber couldn't decide and consume within a 20-minute break.
4. **Resistance to Meal Plans**: All avoided meal plans due to high costs, reluctance to commit to a large sum, even considering proximity to the college.
5. **Proximity Consideration**: Some might consider meal plans if living nearby but find the unlimited plan at $4,135 still expensive.

SUBSCRIBER 1

1.Satisfied Subscriber: Film and Television student enjoys the flavorful rice meal. Subscribed to the unlimited plan with 21 swipes per week.

2.Meal Choices: Acknowledges not all meals are great; sometimes opts for the salad bar (included), with certain items incurring extra charges.

3.Meal Flexibility: Views 21 meals as potentially excessive but appreciates the option for takeout.

4.Crowded Lunchtime: Notices café congestion during lunch, impacting the dining experience.

5.Pricing Perception: Finds the semester cost of $4,000 relatively high, considering operational costs, and desires a lower price point.

SUBSCRIBER 2:

1.Master of Finance Subscriber: Chose $1,580 meal plan for convenience as an international vegetarian in proximity.

2.Initial Ram Café Disappointment: Portion size and food quality fell short for a single swipe.

3.Switch to Community Hall: Now eats all meals there, finding $1,580 reasonable after the switch.

4.Cost Breakdown: $1,580 covers 100 meals and $300 in vending machine dining dollars.

5.Preference for Community Hall: Unlimited food options address quantity concerns, with advantages like convenience and swiping for friends.

6.Room for Improvement at Ram Café: Despite advantages, sees potential for enhancing the overall dining experience.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

EMPLOYEE INTERVIEWS

1.**Employee Awareness**: Both interviewed employees lacked knowledge of meal plan details, suggesting potential gaps in staff training.

2.**Challenge in Conversions**: Lack of employee awareness poses a challenge to converting first-time visitors into meal plan subscribers.

3.**Information Accessibility Issue**: Currently, the primary method for students to learn about the meal plan is through the dining website, creating a potential awareness barrier.

4.**Marketing Deficiency**: Fordham University and the Ram Café are not adequately marketing the meal plan, impacting student awareness and potential subscription rates.

5.**Recommendation for Improvement**: Employee training and enhanced marketing strategies are crucial for increasing awareness and conversions for the meal plan service.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH
IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

1.Historical Roots: Meal plans shaped by U.S. university culture since the 1930s.

2.Modern Adaptation: Evolving from traditional three meals, aligning with contemporary student lifestyles.

3.Usage Snapshot: 16% of Lincoln Center students are on meal plans.

4.Diverse Offerings: New options like Argo Tea and Rolls and Bowls have been introduced.

5.Financial Consideration: Meal plan prices set by contractors, influencing student choices.

6.Collaborative Decision-Making: Menu variety is determined in consultation with the food committee and dieticians.

7.Dietary Inclusivity: International and dietary-specific options, e.g., halal and vegan, are incorporated.

8.Dynamic Adaptation: Meal planning reflects a responsive, research-driven strategy to meet evolving student preferences.

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PROBLEM DEFINITION

The Ram Café at Fordham University's Lincoln Center campus faces several challenges that hinder student satisfaction and limit the number of students using their meal plans. These challenges include diverse dietary preferences, a competitive environment with alternative dining options, the need for convenience and flexibility, and pricing and affordability concerns. To address these challenges and improve student satisfaction, it is necessary to study the existing system to understand students' preferences regarding diet, taste, and spending habits. By gathering valuable insights, the Ram Café can refine its menu offerings, enhance the dining experience, and increase the number of students using their meal plans.

SPECIFIC COMPONENTS

1.Taste: Students have expressed dissatisfaction with the taste of the food at Ram Café, which has discouraged them from returning and purchasing another meal.

2.Value for Money: Many students find the meals at Ram Café expensive and feel that they do not provide good value for money.

3.Dietary Preferences and Cross-Contamination: Some students have specific dietary preferences, such as being vegetarian, and are concerned about cross-contamination of vegetarian food with non-vegetarian food at Ram Café.

4.Perception of Nutritious Options: Students' perception of Ram Café's offerings as "nutritious" is unclear and needs to be evaluated.

SPECIFIC COMPONENTS

5. Competition and Alternatives: There are numerous food options outside the school, which students may prefer over Ram Café.

6. Convenience and Flexibility: Students prioritize convenience and flexibility in their dining options, and Ram Café needs to meet these needs.

7. Pricing and Affordability: Affordability is a critical factor for students, and the pricing structure of Ram Café's meal plans needs to align with students' budgets.

8. Awareness and Marketing: There is a lack of awareness and marketing about the meal plan service at Ram Café, which hinders students from considering and subscribing to it.
These components contribute to the overall problem of low student satisfaction and limited usage of Ram Café's meal plans.

RESEARCH METHOD

A group of students from Fordham Gabelli School of Business conducted a survey. The study focuses on Fordham students' dining preferences. The survey includes 16 questions about the participants' preferred dining locations, go-to food options, meal planning habits, factors influencing dining choices, satisfaction with Ram Cafe, dietary preferences and meal planning habits, factors influencing dining choices, satisfaction strictions, and demographic information such as age, gender, and academic level. The survey includes multiple-choice and rating scale questions to gather data on participants' preferences and opinions. We employed convenience sampling by distributing the survey link to different peer groups within Fordham University for participation.

SURVEY RESEARCH DESIGN

The survey research design in this study aimed to gather information about Fordham students' dining preferences and experiences. The researchers asked various questions to understand factors such as dining location preferences, go-to food options, meal planning habits, factors influencing dining choices, satisfaction with Ram Cafe, and likelihood of future visits.

The survey began by asking participants to select their top three dining or snacking locations near campus, which helps identify the most popular options among students. The researchers also asked about participants' go-to food options, providing insights into the specific types of food students prefer.

To understand meal planning habits, participants were asked how far in advance they typically like to plan their meals. This information helps determine whether students tend to plan their meals ahead of time or make spontaneous decisions.

Q2 When you are on or around 5 blocks of the campus, which dining or snacking locations do you prefer the most (Select your top 3 options).

☐ Ram Cafe (1)

☐ Other Cafes/ Vending Machines on Campus (2)

☐ Food Trucks (3)

☐ Pizza restaurants around campus (4)

☐ Convenience Stores (such as 7 eleven) (5)

☐ Fine Dine Restaurants (6)

☐ Fast Food restaurants (such as Mcdonald's, KFC, Wendys) (7)

☐ Home cooked meal brought from home (8)

☐ Others, please specify (9)

Q4 How far in advance do you typically like to plan your meals?

○ Same day / few hours (1)

○ A day in advance (2)

○ A week or more in advance (3)

○ I rarely plan my meals and decide on the spot (4)

SURVEY RESEARCH DESIGN

The survey then explored the importance of various factors when choosing dining options. This includes factors such as proximity to classes, price and affordability, variety of food options, taste and quality of food, speed of service, availability of healthy options, social atmosphere and ambiance, and alignment with dietary preferences. These questions help identify the key factors that influence students' dining choices.

The researchers also asked about participants' budget and pricing preferences, as well as their preferred pricing options (pay-per-item, fixed meal plan, buffet/all-you-can-eat). This information helps understand students' financial considerations and their preferences for different pricing models.

To assess satisfaction with Ram Cafe, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction levels and provide feedback on factors such as taste, quality, value for money, speed and convenience, nutrition and wellness, portion size, variety of food options, and cleanliness/hygiene. This allows the researchers to identify areas where improvements may be needed and understand overall satisfaction levels.

Q6 Below is a list of factors that influence the choice of dining for students like you. Please rate each of these factors on a scale of 1 to 5 on how important they are to you when you are on or around 5 blocks of campus.

	Extremely important (1)	Somewhat important (2)	Not sure (3)	Somewhat unimportant (4)	Extremely unimportant (5)
Proximity to my classes (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Price and affordability (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Variety of food options (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Taste and quality of food (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Speed of service (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Availability of healthy options (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Social atmosphere and ambiance (7)	○	○	○	○	○
In sync with my dietary preferences (8)	○	○	○	○	○
Promotions or discounts					

Q8a Considering your budget and dining preferences, please indicate the maximum price you would be willing to pay for a standard meal on campus.

- ○ $5 or less (1)
- ○ $6 - $10 (2)
- ○ $11 - $15 (3)
- ○ $16 - $20 (4)
- ○ $21 or more (5)
- ○ Not sure/No preference (6)

SURVEY RESEARCH DESIGN

The likelihood of future visits to Ram Cafe was also assessed to determine students' intentions to continue dining there. Participants were asked to provide reasons for being less likely to visit Ram Cafe in the future, which helps identify potential areas for improvement.

Lastly, the survey collected demographic information such as age, gender, and academic level to analyze any potential variations in dining preferences and experiences among different groups of students.

Overall, this comprehensive survey design aimed to gather insights into Fordham students' dining preferences, satisfaction levels, and factors influencing their dining choices. The data collected will help inform potential improvements and better cater to the dining needs of the student population.

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Q17 How likely are you to go to Ram Cafe for any meals in the future?

○ Highly likely (1)

○ Likely (2)

○ Neutral (3)

○ Unlikely (4)

○ Highly unlikely (5)

ARRANGEMENT OF QUESTIONS

The progression from general to specific topics provides a comprehensive understanding of participants' dining habits, preferences, and concerns.

Welcome and Introduction:
The survey is initiated with a welcoming message to engage participants.

General Dining Preferences:
Explores broad dining preferences, including preferred locations and go-to food options.

Meal Planning Habits:
Shifts towards understanding participants' meal planning habits and factors influencing their dining choices.

Budget and Pricing Preferences:
Inquires about participants' budget considerations and pricing preferences.

ARRANGEMENT OF QUESTIONS

Ram Cafe Experience:
Assesses the frequency and satisfaction level of dining at Ram Cafe, rating factors like taste, quality, and variety.

Future Dining Intentions:
Explores participants' likelihood of future dining at Ram Cafe and reasons for potential disinterest.
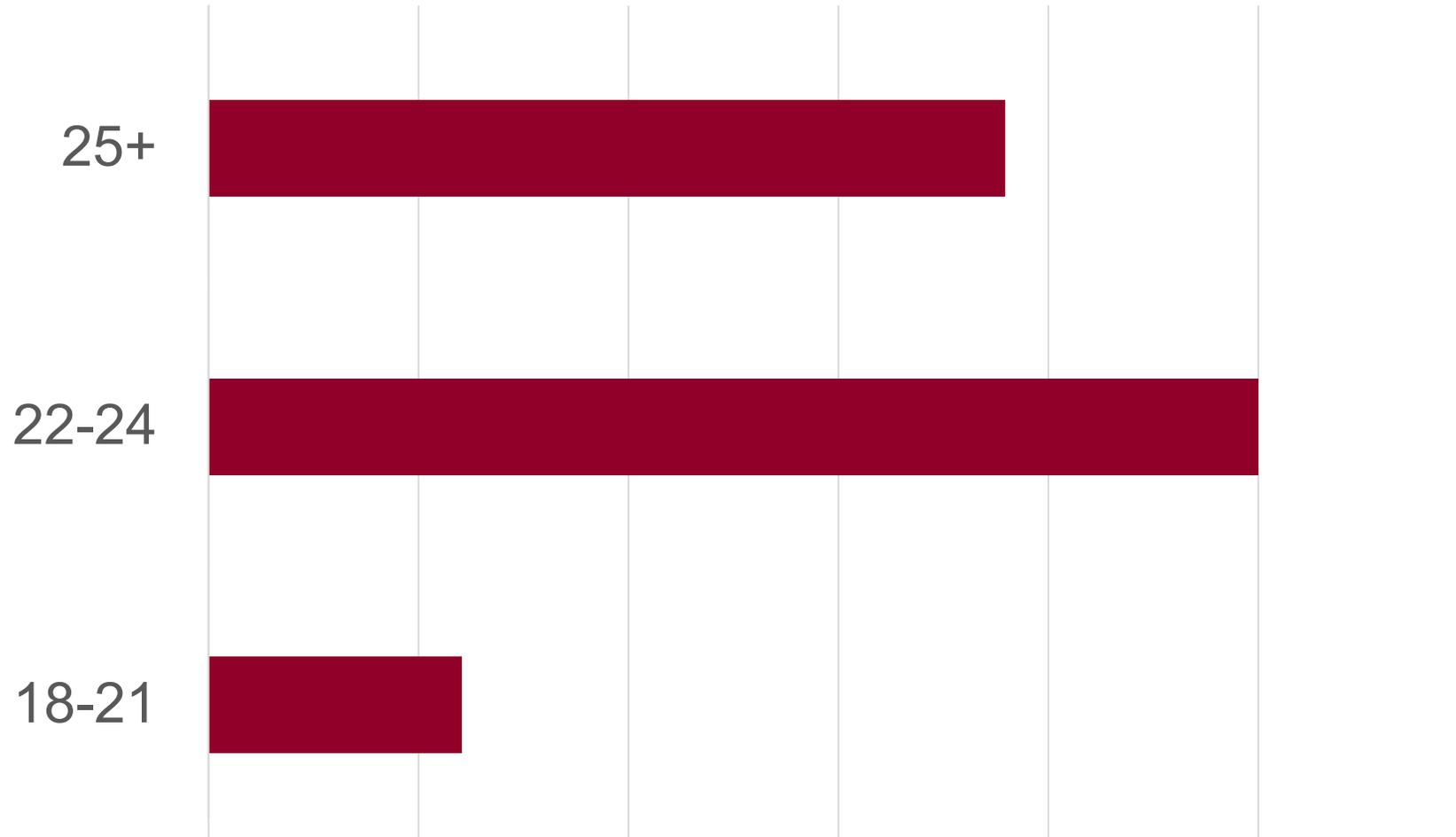
Cuisine and Dietary Preferences:
Investigate favorite cuisines and any dietary preferences or restrictions participants may have.
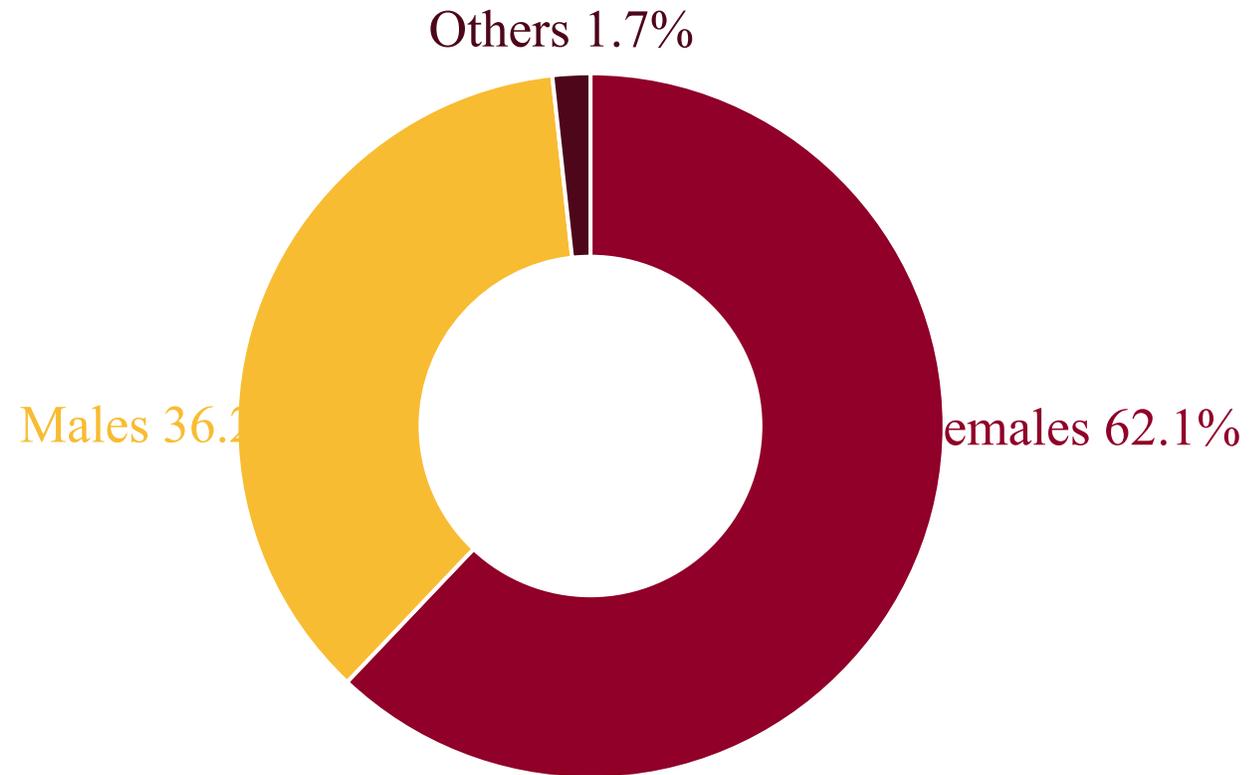
Demographic Information:
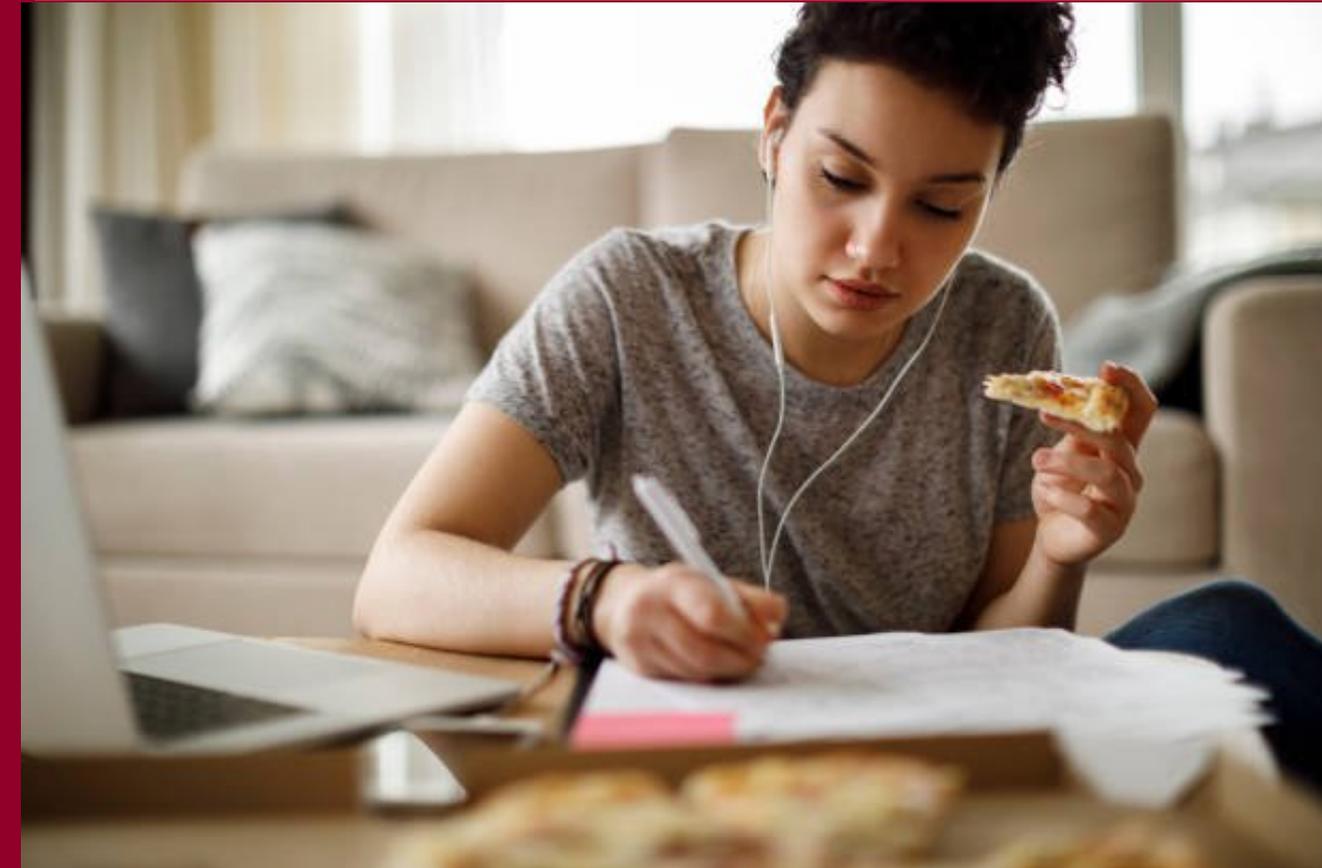Concludes with questions about participants' age, gender, and academic level.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS - AGE

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS - GENDER

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS – ACADEMIC LEVEL

98%

of the students are
graduate students

58%
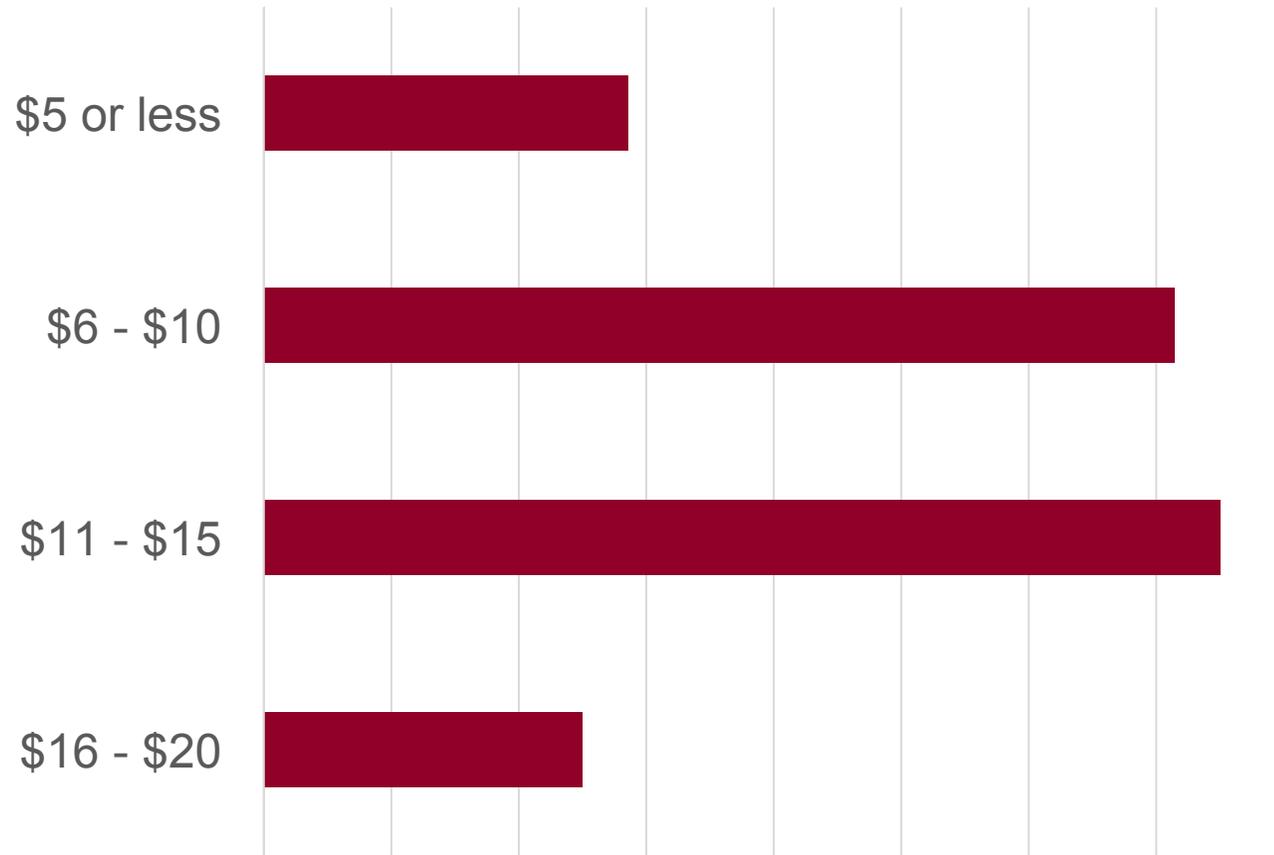
of our respondents plan their meals on the same day
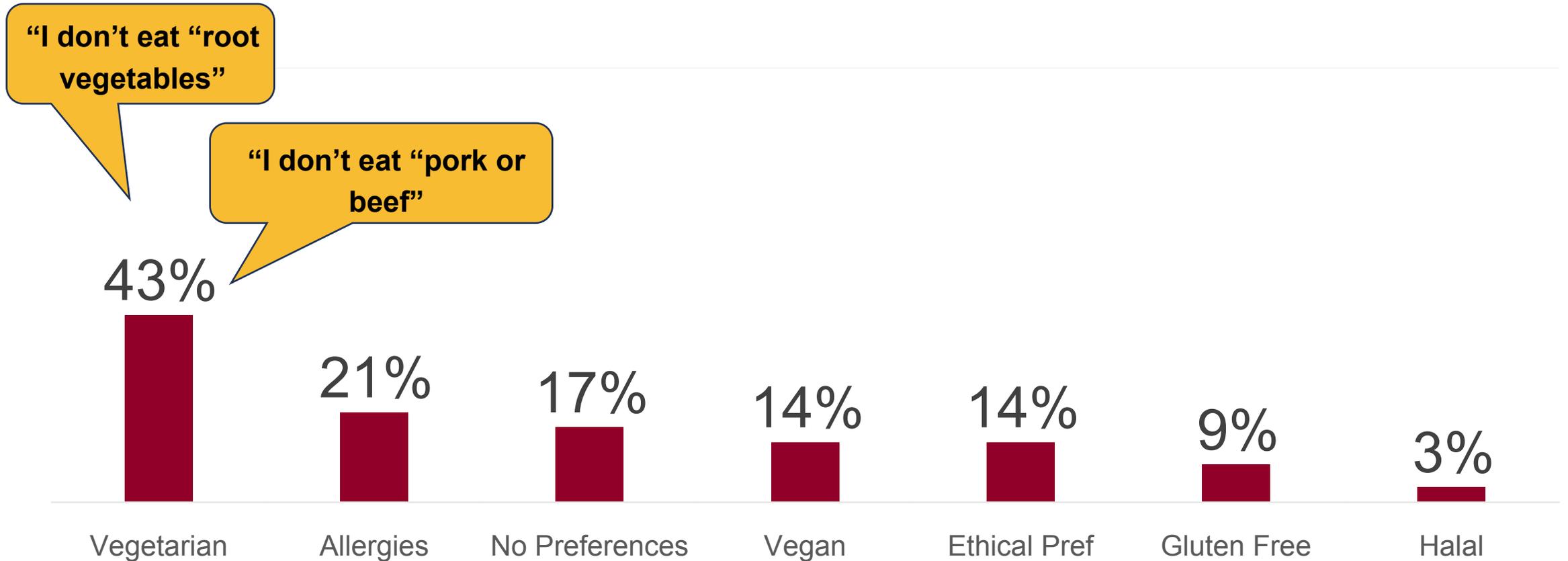
54%

of the students visited RAM Café this month

PREFERRED CUISINES

23%
Indian

19%
Italian

18%
Mexican

N = 41

On a 5 point scale ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied, how would you rate Ram Café on Food Variety?

2.9/5

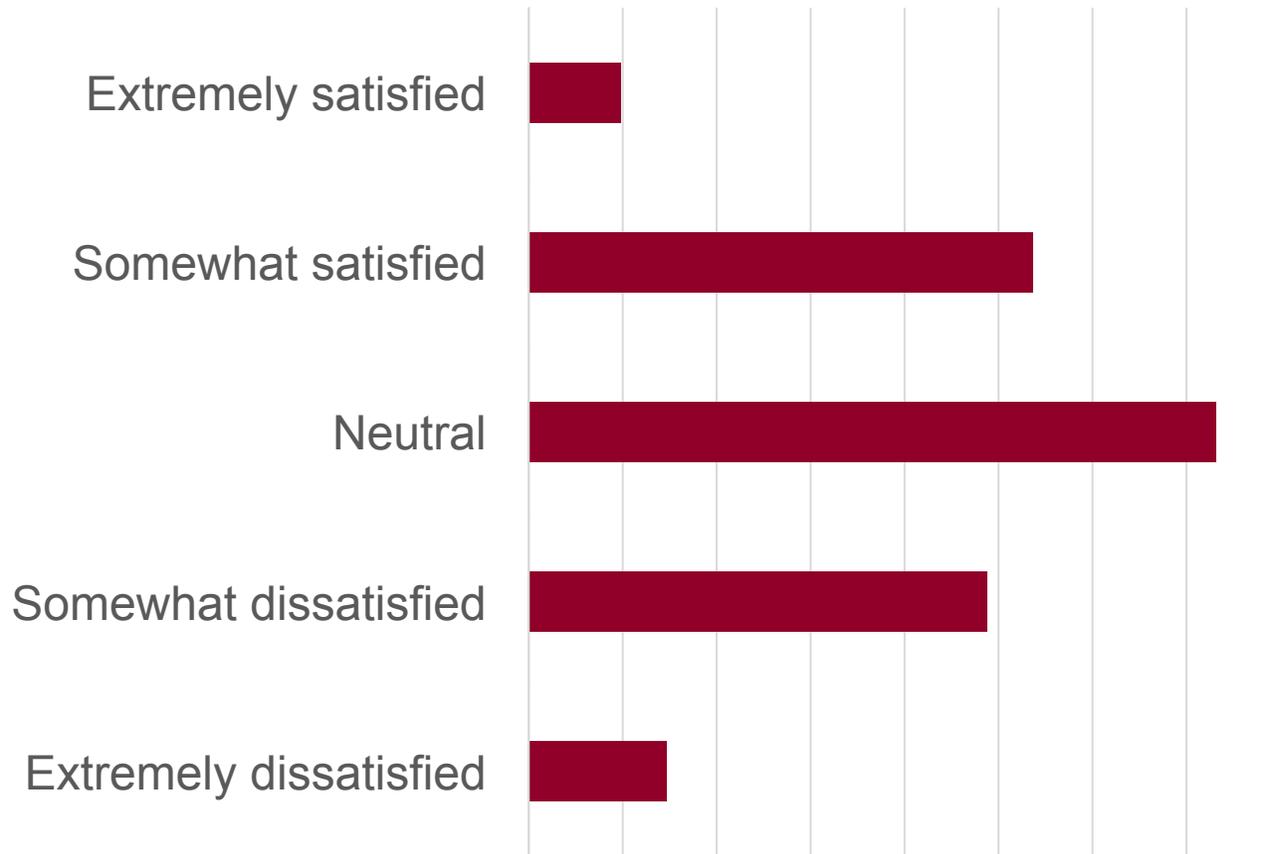Respondents are dissatisfied with Ram Café offerings

GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF FEATURES

Taste and quality of food
Price and affordability
Speed of service
In sync with dietary preferences
Proximity to my classes
Availability of healthy options
Variety of food options
Promotions or discounts
Social atmosphere and ambiance

Extremely Important

Extremely Unimportant

Taste, Price and Speed are most important to students

N = 57

GO-TO FOOD OPTIONS IN ONE - WORD

N=58
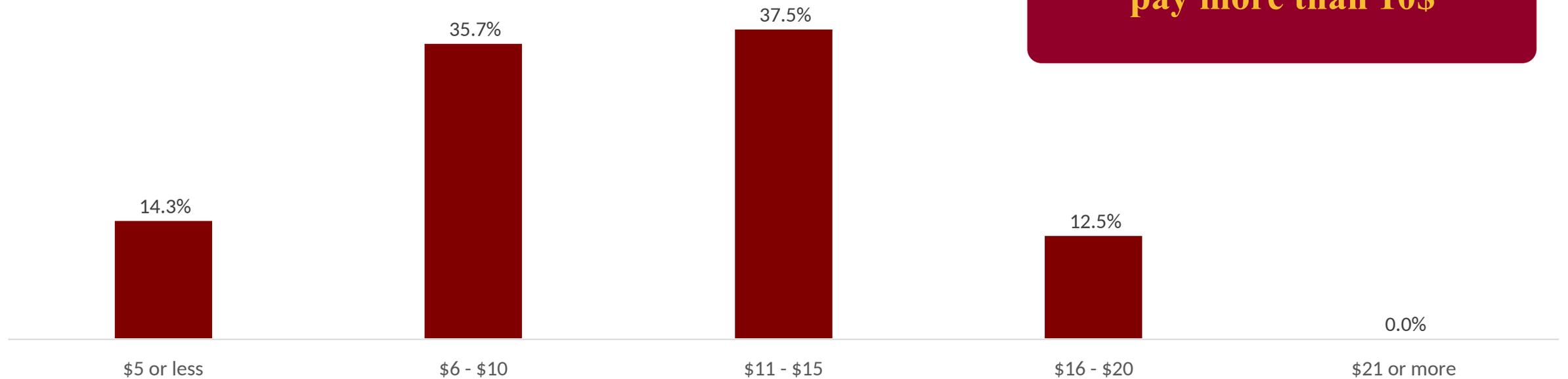
LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

Low response rate:
The survey has a low response rate due to time constraints; it may not accurately represent the preferences and opinions of the entire Fordham student population. The findings may be biased towards those who chose to participate in the survey.

Sample representativeness:
 The survey is only conducted among certain sections of Fordham students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. The preferences and behaviors of the Fordham students who filled out the survey may not represent all college students.

Lack of qualitative data:
The survey mainly collects quantitative data through multiple-choice questions, which may limit the depth of understanding and insight into the reasons behind certain preferences and behaviors. Qualitative data, such as open-ended questions or interviews, could provide more nuanced information.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

Limited scope:
The survey focuses on dining preferences and restrictions within a 5-block radius of the Fordham campus. It may not capture the full range of dining options and preferences that students may have, especially for those who live off-campus or have access to transportation.

Lack of follow-up:
Due to lack of time, the survey needs to include a mechanism for follow-up or clarification of responses. This may limit our ability to gather additional information or address any ambiguities in the data.

Invalid Data:
Some responses to the open-ended questions, like go-to food options, included invalid entries such as "nnn" which may impact the accuracy and reliability of the gathered data.