



APG Policy Comment Tracker

Catering Services & Off-Campus Dining Policy

Comment Period: April 12 – May 12, 2021

<u>Comment No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Comment</u>
1	4/13/2021	Rebecca Evanoff	<p>Good Morning</p> <p>What I wondered is if Chartwells also has a policy on how to 'process' requests? I do recall Workday not integrating with their system and several payment glitch/workarounds that were identified.</p> <p>It would be beneficial for the Chartwells portion of their policy to be available for review at the same time as this WPI policy. (The link to the 'events planning guidelines that is included does not work). Seeing the whole process from an administrative services viewpoint would be helpful as most of these service and meeting requests are assigned to staff to execute.</p> <p>Is there a plan if Chartwells stops being the WPI catering vendor?</p> <p>Can you clarify the 'internal meetings' among WPI employees? Is there an option so that if a group meets as a need to freely discuss work related issues, part of a team building/discussion/brainstorming off campus and the meeting is scheduled during lunch because of schedule/location constraints (that is the only time available) that this type of collaboration would still be able to use wpi funding?</p>
2	4/13/2021	Andrew Clark	Does this policy allow off-campus dining with campus visitors, such as faculty candidates and seminar speakers?
3	4/13/2021	Karen Troy	<p>Dear APG,</p> <p>I have many concerns about the catering services and off-campus dining policy. Let me explain several situations where having WPI funds cover food is critical to the success of the initiative or program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentor/mentee relationships. “Back in the old days” the Morgan center would cover the cost of one meal per term (or perhaps per semester) for faculty mentors to have lunch with their mentee. This provided us with an incentive to meet, as well as much-needed time away from our offices and campus, to discuss career goals, planning, and objectives. Plus, it reduced the barrier to meeting because everyone needs to eat. It was an incentive for everyone involved to build a relationship.



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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Faculty Extended Orientation – when I was a new WPI faculty member, there were several occasions where I attended extended orientation sessions over the lunch hour. It was a time for me to enjoy getting to know my new colleagues and learn about aspects of campus, faculty governance, etc. Of course we could have technically done this without food, but it made it much easier. I didn’t have to think about the logistics of getting food and then rushing to yet another meeting. I could simply show up and learn. • Faculty governance – Faculty meetings and committee chairs meetings. Same general concepts apply. Sharing a meal for these activities builds relationships, lowers the barrier to participation, and incentivizes everyone to show up by allowing us to conduct business during a meal. (time is precious.) <p>I agree there are some meetings and workshops that include catering that is unnecessary. However, this policy makes no exception for ANY such activity. A more nuanced approach that allowed for flexibility and exceptions on the types of activities that could include catering / WPI funded meals would be appreciated.</p> <p>Side note: What percent of the operating budget is spent on catering these types of meetings? I suspect it is very small, relative to other categories. The return on this investment may not be obvious, but I am certain that WPI faculty would be happy to develop metrics if you need quantitative data.</p>
4	4/16/2021	Gillian Smith	<p>Hello,</p> <p>I am sure that general dissatisfaction with the proposed policy is well-known at this point, but I wanted to a) add my voice to it, and b) point to a specific line in the policy that is especially demoralizing:</p> <p>The event is a strategic event that is focused on building relationships to foster collaboration and improve employee engagement. (IV.B.2)</p> <p>This line really points to what I see as the crux of the problem with this proposed policy: casting employees as resources to be strategically managed, rather than human beings with really rather basic human wants and needs. This policy makes me feel like a cog in a machine, like a nameless character in a strategy game played by administrators who are trying to minimize cost and maximize “engagement” without acknowledging that engagement comes from moments of real human connection.</p> <p>And so, sadly, the policy is also counterproductive. By denying food at “meetings” this policy ignores three interrelated truths – that food is social, that meetings are social, and that work cannot be divorced from its social context. Coffee at the morning department meeting supports an atmosphere of collegiality that is also critical to a department’s functioning. Cheese, fruit, and veggies at a meeting of the Campus Hearing Board (which is mandated to be held in the evening) acknowledges that employees give up meal times with their families for the sake of the community and helps make sure that difficult discussions and decisions don’t happen on an empty stomach.</p>



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			I don't think that is anyone's explicit intent; nonetheless, by calling out "strategic events" as those that "improve employee engagement" it makes me wonder – what are we supposed to be doing at all the rest of our mere "meetings"?
5	4/28/2021	Michael Gennert	<p>Dear APG,</p> <p>The Faculty and Staff at WPI are being nickel-and-dimed to death by WPI Forward's attempt to save a few dollars with no consideration given to the effect on the people who really make the university function.</p> <p>This certainly includes the proposed catering policy, which would prohibit lunches for COAP members who must sit through 2-hour-long meetings twice a week to conduct university business. As Chair of COAP, I am vehemently in opposition to this proposal.</p> <p>However, a bigger point is that while we are being told to cut back on supposedly wasteful and frivolous food, we are each receiving a UPS package containing cookies and mixer ingredients for tomorrow's Trustees' Celebration. Apparently the directive to achieve cost savings does not apply to those who make the rules. The hypocrisy is blatant, stark, and upsetting.</p> <p>Yours truly, Mike Gennert</p>
6	4/30/2021	Jennifer deWinter	<p>I would like to comment on the catering services policy. This seems to be connected to WPI forward, but there are real problems with how this policy was conceived toward the "saving money" goal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy doesn't address the fact that on-campus, chartwell has a kick back to the institution • The policy that limits faculty use of funds to purchase food for meetings between faculty and staff functionally targets one group without understanding why food may have been used in the past <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o I use these funds as a director of a major program to mentor junior faculty and TRT faculty o I use these funds to put together faculty who don't know each other well to get them sitting and talking about research, which has generated successful grant submissions and research agendas (hard to get faculty to sit and chat for long periods of time because everyone's so busy). o I use these funds to celebrate faculty achievements, like buying donuts sometimes. • I cannot even emphasize enough the hit to morale this one will cause. Low morale leads to low engagement, low productivity, and losing our best faculty and staff. • Why can't we buy non-chartwell food for meetings? This would save money.



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7	4/30/2021	Sue Sontgerath	<p>DINING POLICY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to clarify if all grants and gifts are exempt? If not how do we determine which ones are and which ones are not? • Can we have snacks (not from Chartwells) donated to a program? • How would food items that are used in experiments or activities be covered? Are they excluded? • Would pre-college summer programs be considered prospective student events for this purpose? • Currently, we provide meals to faculty and staff working in the summer programs as a way to build community and accommodate irregular hours. Can we continue this practice? • Are meals purchased during WPI sanctioned travel considered here or under a different policy?
8	5/1/2021	Nancy Burnham	<p>Dear APG,</p> <p>While I agree that catered lunches every day at informal departmental gatherings would be an excess, I don't think a written policy can cover every situation.</p> <p>If a department or PI sees the need for a catered function, with a consequent decrease in funds available for other purposes, they should be allowed to do so.</p> <p>WPI employs highly educated, disciplined, committed people. They are mature adults, capable of making careful decisions.</p> <p>If this policy came about because one group misused catering services, then rein them in. Don't let one bad apple spoil the lot.</p> <p>Please allow mature adults to continue to make considered decisions.</p> <p>Thank you for reading this message.</p>
9	5/11/2021	Chrys Demetry	<p>Dear Colleagues,</p> <p>I'm copying you on this feedback I'm submitting to the Administrative Policy Group about the proposed Catering Services and Off-Campus Dining Policy (linked below). The 30-day comment period ends tomorrow (May 12).</p>



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			<p>My overall feedback is that if the goal is to work toward a more affordable education for our students, then a different approach might be beneficial—one that engages the community and aims to make us all more thoughtful and sensitive about food spending and food waste. I anticipate that with the proposed policy as written and implemented, many people will say that they are hosting an “event” rather than a “meeting,” and not much will change.</p> <p>I have great interest in this issue since the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center hosts many catered events/meetings and reimburses dining expenses for those participating in the New Faculty Mentoring Program in their first year. Some of the catering is for extended events such as New Faculty Orientation, day-long workshops, and TA Training, which would remain permissible under this proposed policy. But some portion is for shorter events/meetings such as “Food for Thought” teaching and learning lunch-time seminars, socials and celebrations of Teaching Innovation Grants, and meetings of Faculty Learning Communities. These events build community and dialogue around teaching and learning, which has an indirect positive effect on students at minimum, and often direct positive effects as instructors make changes in their teaching practices. Catered lunches for mentor and mentee cohorts each term build community and often reveal shared interests. In a recent typical year (pre-pandemic), the Center spent about \$15,000 on catering and \$1,250 on alcohol for this range of events and meetings.</p> <p>Would many people come to these meetings/events without food? Probably. Would they be as festive and special and collegial? No. And faculty have noted the convenience of going to a lunchtime seminar where food is provided, saving them the time of making their own lunch or getting in line to purchase food on campus.</p> <p>The Center also spends anywhere between \$1,500-\$3,000+ annually on reimbursed dining expenses at local restaurants for those participating in the new faculty mentoring program or helping with various panels (e.g., NFO). With the draft policy, those reimbursements would not be allowed, or maybe they would if we call them an “event” that builds relationships? When the proposed policy was first issued, it was interesting to see many faculty speak to the value of these reimbursed lunches, especially absent of formalized recognition of peer mentoring efforts. Again, I would say that the modest cost for this relationship-building and collegiality among the faculty has benefits for faculty success and retention (protecting our significant investment in them) and has important indirect effects on students.</p> <p>The emergence of this proposed policy HAS gotten me to think more about food spending, and maybe that should be the goal. I will be less inclined to provide refreshments or coffee for meetings/events at non-meal times, since it’s not unusual for a lot to go uneaten. But I would also like to see the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of catering charges and amounts of food provided. Both seem inflated. So much food is wasted at events and meetings on campus. Students are usually found to eat left-overs, but the unnecessary spending remains. • Co-consideration of sustainability issues. For example, for the environment AND to cut expenses, could/should our catering provider eliminate sales of single-use plastic (i.e., bottles of water, plastic cups). We could all bring our own water in refillable containers.



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			<p>For all of those reasons, I do not support the policy as written and would urge that a different process be used to help us all be more cost-sensitive (and food waste-sensitive) in our food spending while also making WPI a great community to work in.</p> <p>Sincerely, Chrys Demetry</p>
10	5/11/2021	Sarah Strauss	<p>Thank you, Chrys.</p> <p>All extremely important points, and absolutely agreed, as I have commented previously: the value of “breaking bread” with colleagues, symbolically and actually, is critical to our collaborative efforts and to our ability to develop relationships across campus more generally. The policy as written has many flaws, perhaps most fundamentally that it lacks recognition of the many ways that shared meals and also, frankly, coffee/tea breaks, function on our campus in ways that have value far exceeding their monetary costs.</p> <p>I also appreciate the concern about environmental sustainability as another kind of cost, one that also sometimes fails to track with spending-only considerations: longer and shorter-term costs, and the impacts on the bigger system, must also be engaged when we think about campus catering/dining policy. We have some green options in place on campus, but more thought in integrating with these new policies would be welcome.</p>
11	5/11/2021	John Sanbonmatsu	<p>Hi Chrys,</p> <p>I couldn't agree more, particularly around sustainability issues. It wasn't long ago that Chartwells used to provide reusable water pitchers; then they figured they could make more money by selling single-use plastic water bottles. The menus that Chartwells offers are meanwhile almost entirely animal-based: even leaving aside the horrific treatment of animals in our agricultural system, consuming such products is more lethal to the ecosystem than driving a car (https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth). And yes, there is so much good food wasted at catered events here that it takes one's breath away.</p> <p>On my own "wish list" would be a clause in any new catering contract that would permit faculty and staff to use other vendors too at their discretion. When I first arrived here, faculty and staff would routinely pick up food at, say, the Sahara Cafe, to bring to events. Some years back, however, WPI granted Chartwells a monopoly on the supply of food at our events. This not only diminished the quality and diversity of the offerings (no further comment, surely, is necessary) but also dramatically ratcheted it up the cost per item/serving.</p> <p>There should be a catering committee made up of representatives of all employees to find a cost-effective, sustainable, ethical, healthy, and savory alternative to the status quo. Simply banning food and drink from many campus events makes no sense. Humans have been breaking bread with one another for thousands of years. It's part of who we are.</p>



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12	5/11/2021	Padraig O Cathain	<p>My comment is as follows:</p> <p>I would like to see an explicit commitment to the health of staff, faculty and students in the Catering policy. The standard options at events that I attend are coffee and donuts from Dunkin for seminars and pizza from Chartwells for student facing events. Offering healthy alternatives (or better: not offering unhealthy foods) would underline a commitment by WPI to the well being of the community.</p>
13	5/11/2021	Kent Rissmiller	<p>HI APG,</p> <p>Until Chrys sent this message today, I did not realize that we were on the deadline for comments. Just let me add that we host “events” for our student workers at the end of each semester, that would apparently be prohibited. We also invite project center directors to work meetings 3-4 times a year and then welcome them to an open bar/appetizers at the Sonora or the Fix. Our center directors are not adequately compensated for all they do, so these events in appreciation of their work and are important to us.</p> <p>I think a better approach would be to set a food/event budget for each department/school/program and then we could use that to support these events and try to manage them in the budget.</p> <p>I’ll also add that a lunch for the staff twice a year has been an important bonding time for us. A welcoming dept event and holiday party has always been appreciated.</p> <p>WPI is not poor and we should not be treating employees as if we are a poor institution that cannot support these events that support staff and faculty morale.</p> <p>I’ve worked in state agencies and public universities where we operated with WWII surplus office supplies. WPI is not that poor and we should not be telling employees that we cannot offer a lunch in exchange for their participation in a faculty development program.</p>
14	5/12/2021	Ryan Madan	<p>Hi All,</p> <p>I want to express my concerns about the catering services policy as proposed. I agree with the comments provided earlier by Chrys Demetry: the catering policy should turn its focus away from (dis)allowing catering for certain groups of people, and should instead focus attention to issues of sustainability, food waste (portion size), and allowing greater flexibility.</p> <p>As Writing Center Director I regularly order food for our tutor training staff meetings and new-tutor orientations. These are both to bolster collegiality (as so many of my colleagues have already described in their comments), but also, more importantly, to provide extra motivation for student employees to attend since it provides a time in their busy days when they can multitask--eat a meal in between classes while also attending a staff meeting.</p>



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			<p>It's unclear to me in this policy whether the fact that my "employees" are also student workers, that I'd still be allowed to order food. Perhaps I could? If not, it will seriously hamper my efforts with professional development for my student-tutors. But even if I could get around it, the muddiness of the issue of student-employees shows how this policy, as it's currently structured, missing the mark.</p> <p>To my mind the focus should not be on adding new layers of approval to make these things happen; rather the institution should be looking at cost savings across all of catering at the level of catering itself, not at the level of who is permitted to access it.</p> <p>Thanks for reading,</p>