Student Union Expansion: More Seating, New Restaurants and More

A major renovation to the Student Union will expand restaurant and retail space, more than doubling the seating available for dining and studying and easing overcrowding.

Early concepts include adding a second floor to the food court area on the north side, with large windows overlooking the beautiful cypress dome natural area behind the building.

The expansion and renovation would come at no cost to students, as Aramark has agreed to pay for the estimated $14 million project as part of a 10-year reconfiguration of its dining services contract with UCF.

Under the agreement, Aramark will begin overseeing dining services in the Student Union during the next few years and will work closely with students to identify which restaurants – current or new – that they would like to see. At least two of the restaurants will be local businesses.

Current restaurants will remain at least through the end of their leases, almost all of which run through 2017 or 2018.

Aramark also plans to move forward with an additional restaurant near the Recreation and Wellness Center and Academic Village housing, as well as a renovation of the 63 South dining hall.

If you have additional questions after reading this FAQ, please email unionres@ucf.edu.

Why modernize and expand the Student Union?

Many students have voiced concerns about the lack of sufficient seating and the overcrowding in the food court area. The Student Union was built in 1997, when enrollment was about 28,000 students.

The majority of the food court is still the original design, even though enrollment has increased to 63,000. During lunch on a weekday in the Student Union, students sit in every available chair and on the floor throughout the facility. This renovation will increase seating from the existing 315 seats to an estimated 750 food court seats.

The extra seating would enable more students to dine at the Student Union and also provide additional study spaces during non-meal times.
**What kind of food options will be available?**

We don’t know what restaurants will be chosen, as Aramark and UCF will seek student input in the coming months.

Aramark also oversees dining at the student unions at Florida State University, the University of Florida and the University of South Florida. At FSU, for example, the Student Union is home to Chili’s, Miso (a stir-fry restaurant), Einstein Bros. bagels, Salad Creations and Freshens yogurt and smoothies.

For UCF, restaurant categories and preferred choices recommended by an early focus group include:

- Asian (Panda Express)
- Bakery/Café (Einstein Bros. or Au Bon Pain)
- Burgers (Steak and Shake)
- Chicken (Pollo Tropical suggested for Recreation and Wellness Center area but no preference for Student Union)
- Pizza (Papa John’s)
- Mexican (Qdoba)
- Salad (No preference)
- Sandwiches (Which Wich or Firehouse Subs)
- Snacks (No preference)
- Coffee (No preference)
- Varied Menu/Sit-Down Restaurant (Chili’s)
- Convenience/Drinks (Tropical Smoothie or Smoothie King)

Aramark currently manages the Chick-Fil-A, Starbucks, and Einstein Bros. Bagels on UCF’s campus.

We will not be opening another dining-hall-style facility – these will be local, regional and national restaurants.

**How have and how will students be involved?**

Students have provided feedback through surveys and focus groups. Moving forward, there will be several options for students to provide feedback about potential restaurant offerings in the food court, as well as architectural designs for the Student Union. Students interested in future surveys and focus groups can email unionres@ucf.edu.
What is the financial impact of this project on students?

Aramark will pay the estimated $14 million in construction costs. Once the renovation is complete, it’s anticipated that higher sales will produce more revenue in support of student activities. Overall, UCF’s estimated revenue from the 10-year contract extension with Aramark is $82 million, compared with $26 million for the most recent 10 years.

What will happen to the current food vendors after their leases expire?

It’s too early to tell. At the UCF Board of Trustees’ request, Aramark has agreed to allow two locally owned or alumni-owned businesses to operate in the Student Union. We will communicate details about the process for selecting restaurants as soon as they are available.

Will food prices increase?

UCF Business Services manages the campus’ food service contract with Aramark and approves all pricing at on-campus restaurants covered under the agreement. Restaurants on campus are required to offer prices comparable to local market rates, meaning they must be similar to the same restaurants located off campus.

What is the construction timeline, and how will construction impact the Student Union?

We do not have a start date yet for construction, as the first step will be to complete designs. Construction will be done in phases to minimize impact on the Student Union operations. There will always be food options available to students and the campus community.

How will the changes affect student employment opportunities?

Aramark (UCF Dining Services) is one of the largest employers of students on campus, with more than 300 current student employees. This number represents more than 60 percent of the Aramark workforce on campus, and this trend would continue with new restaurants in the Student Union. Also, the employees from existing restaurants will have the ability to apply with Aramark for both full and part-time employment when applications open for these new restaurants.
What about the cypress dome behind the Student Union?

The cypress dome is the marquee natural area for campus and will not be encroached upon by this construction. In fact, the conceptual design incorporates large windows to allow for views of the area from within the food court.

What will the new food court look like?

The new food court will have a two-story seating area along with improved exterior seating. Here are some conceptual designs: