THEME FROM TOWN HALLS: CHANGES IMPROVING STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Houston, Jan. 29, 2013 – Whether it’s the opening of a new dining hall last semester or the completion of two more residential facilities later this year, changes are taking place to improve the college experience for students at the University of Houston.

That was apparent during the Food Services & Student Housing Town Hall meetings held on campus Jan. 23 and Jan. 24. Over the next year, many changes are on the way for UH Dining and Student Housing and Residential Life. These were explained to students and staff who came to hear the dining and housing strategic vision for 2013-14.

UH Dining

The biggest accomplishment for UH Dining over the past year was the opening of the Cougar Woods Dining Hall at Wheeler and Cullen.

“We are very excited about that facility and its potential,” said Amber Arguijo, marketing manager for UH Dining.

Besides Cougar Woods, other new restaurants to open recently include Taco Cabana in the Stadium Parking Garage, Tandoori Night in the UC Satellite and Subway in the Cougar Xpress Mart in Calhoun Lofts. The food trucks that serve students at two pad sites on campus also have been a hit.

The renovation of the University Center will bring even more dining changes. When the first phase is complete in about a year, McDonald’s, Chick-Fil-A, Panda Express and Starbucks will open. The second phase will bring in Freshii, a sustainable organic restaurant that will serve such foods as burritos, rice bowls, soups and salads.
The prices for the meal plans that UH offers students will remain the same for the upcoming year. To help streamline the many plans that are offered and to remove some of the redundancies between plans, the Lifestyle 21 and All Access 5 options will no longer be offered.

“We want to provide a plan that enhances the perception of value on campus, and we also want to sustain the high quality, variety and viability of the program in the years coming,” Arguijo said.

**Student Housing**

**Student Housing and Residential Services** is busy preparing for the opening of two new residential facilities in the fall: Cougar Village II and Cougar Place. In addition, the university will be taking over management of the Bayou Oaks apartment community.

Cougar Village II, geared toward freshmen, will have a state-of-the-art classroom and will house 1,144 students. The suite-style double rooms will have compartmentalized bathrooms, said Don Yackley, executive director of Student Housing and Residential Life. In addition, the community space is designed such that students will have more interaction with one another.

The 799-bed Cougar Place is designed for sophomores but will be open to all upper-class students. It will have three state-of-the-art classrooms. Most of the rooms are part of four-bedroom, single room suites that have kitchenettes with a refrigerator, sink and microwave.

Starting this year, new students can use a service called RoomSync through Facebook to help find suitable roommates. It will be extended to returning students the following year. Also this year, Housing is unveiling 11 academic-themed communities that will allow students to live in proximity to one another based on academic interests.

“We are really also about student success. Housing is our vehicle, but the road is helping students be successful,” Yackley said.

Housing staff has spent time this year revamping the first year experience program for the fall, and spent a lot of time developing a sophomore year experience. Another program on the horizon is MAP-Works. It is a technological tool that will take feedback from students on how they are doing academically and socially and it will let staff know if they are having a challenge with any particular area. Staff can then help the student get connected with campus resources in the area in which they are struggling.

Housing has gone completely paperless over the past two years, including the application process and the room assignment process, Yackley said. Although a 3 percent increase in housing rates is expected, the rates will remain the same at Calhoun Lofts and Cambridge Oaks. Also, students will no longer have to pay a $300 security deposit. Instead, they will make a $300 pre-payment that will be refunded several weeks into the semester.

Housing at UH, Yackley said, is a pretty good deal.

“Our rates compared to other Texas schools, on average, are a better bargain and less expensive,” he said.

---

**About the University of Houston**

The University of Houston is a comprehensive national research institution serving the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. UH serves more than 40,700 students in the nation’s fourth-largest city, located in the most ethnically and culturally diverse region of the country.