



**2006 R&I Ivy Awards:  
Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass.**

Two years ago, Helen Wechsler walked into Cambridge Chocolate Shop & Café on Harvard Square to find it packed with students sipping hot chocolate and eating cakes, tortes and other sweets. She made it her mission as director of 14,500-student Boston College's dining services to recreate the bustling, caffeinated store on campus. The Chocolate Bar opened last fall in the third-floor cafe in the college's McElroy Commons.

Creation of the specialty-treat boutique is one example of how attentive Boston College's (BC) dining-services team is to their customers' needs as well as its commitment to staying on top of trends. The Chocolate Bar also is a sign of things to come at a college that already offers 11 custom retail concepts.

Preparing and serving 22,000 meals each day on its Chestnut Hill and Newton, Mass., campuses while overseeing catering and concessions programs keeps Wechsler and her team busy, but she still makes time to listen to students and act on what she hears.

For instance, Wechsler knows that students don't eat "three square meals" a day; they eat 2.8. And almost half the food served during the day ends up in backpacks, consumed outside dining halls. Still, made-to-order entrées are expected during dinner rush—and later.

Student groups keep her in the loop, and comment cards received in person and online ensure BC dining hits the mark.

"Customer service is a top-line focus for us," Wechsler says. "We're surrounded by off-campus competition. Service is the way we differentiate ourselves."

BC dining includes more than students on its meal program. The department also is called on to feed 44,000 fans on football game days and to cater formal dinners, such as the president's dinner for honorary degree recipients at commencement. And its Eagle Express catering service delivers breakfast and lunch to faculty and staff gatherings.

Wechsler spends \$4 million of dining services' \$30 million annual budget on catering and expects its revenue to grow as much as 18% next year. Sports concession stands are the department's charitable connection to the community. BC spends \$2 million each year to keep stands supplied with items such as hot dogs and condiments. Not-for-profit organizations can apply to run them, with all profits kept by the groups. Managing one of 96 concession stands in Alumni Stadium, for example, is how many local high schools pay for uniforms or trips, according to Beth Burns, human resources manager.

**Back Track**

For an operation the size of Boston College's, exceptional foodservice depends on a stable work force of more than 600 employees, says Patricia Bando. The former foodservice director, now associate vice president of auxiliary services, took over a department that in the 1990s had struggled with employee issues and growing pains. As a testament to her efforts, annual hourly staff turnover has stayed between 7.5% and 9% during the past five years.

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The Chocolate Bar in McElroy Commons (above), Wrapsody, Hillside Cafe and many other retail-style foodservice options keep Boston College students, faculty and staff on campus.



- Founded: 1863
- Meals served daily: 22,000
- Mandatory meal-plan diners: 5,100
- Optional meal-plan diners: 6,000 (approx.)
- Dining services' annual budget: \$30 million
- Kitchens on campus: 5 (not including prep areas and concessions)
- Chefs: 4
- Production managers: 4

"We decided to look at employee diversity as an asset and not as a problem," Bando says. "People from all over the world bring something new to our campus" such as authentic meals from South America or Vietnam.

BC dining excels at what Bando calls F.A.C.T.—an acronym for Food, Attitude, Customer service and Teamwork. A focus on those four components, aided by Bando's collaborative management style, has made BC's foodservice department a model for peers.

At Boston College, foodservice employees speak of "restaurant operations" rather than "residential dining," and menus, concepts and operating hours reflect this retail-oriented thinking.

"Nutritionally we have a cutting-edge program," says Executive Chef Chris Eiseman, who recently left the college for family reasons.

Meatless options are well represented on seasonal menus. Twenty-one such entrées were added last summer, Wechsler notes. Items range from grilled portobello mushrooms and veggie burgers to vegetarian Wellington, with layers of peppers, portobellos, zucchini, goat cheese and grilled summer squash in puff pastry.

Seasonal menu changes are inspired by availability from local vendors. Products are randomly inspected and many are fair-trade certified, in line with doctrines of the college's Jesuit founders. Students would rather pay a worker in a developing country a living wage than eat organic apples, says Pat Ryan, assistant director of purchasing and nutrition.

Dining services also does its part to make sustainable agriculture a priority. Ryan and Wechsler are working to secure a grant to fund a farm-to-college program.

#### **Fast Forward**

Creating commercial-style foodservice concepts keeps the number of students on BC's optional meal plan high. Modeling operations after popular quick-service chains such as Sbarro and expanding daypart options and hours appeal to diners.

Last year's renovations at McElroy Commons (which included the creation of The Chocolate Bar) and Corcoran Commons (where a plated-desserts station was added and bakery and grab-and-go options were expanded) continue dining services' commitment to providing foods when and where students want them. And with 20 new buildings envisioned under BC's master renovation plan, the department will need to stay sharp to stay ahead.

"As we create these boutique operations, each one may not have a kitchen. We have to consider square footage and manpower and be able to build the proper concepts," Bando says. "We need to train employees so they're ready for the next generation of foodservice."

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Quality and variety improvements in Boston College's dining programs begun by Pat Bando (top) have continued under her successor as foodservice director, Helen Wechsler.

—Jamie Popp, Senior Editor

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## **A Taste of Boston College**

### **Sandwiches**

New England Classic Panini with turkey, Cheddar cheese and green apple on cran-apple bread  
Buffalo-chicken wrap with popcorn chicken, lettuce, tomato, shredded carrots, celery and blue-cheese dressing

### **Entrees**

Butter-poached lobster tail with roasted-potato-and-chorizo hash  
Tempeh fritter with romaine lettuce and chipotle-Caesar dressing

### **Desserts**

White-Chocolate Mousse Cornucopia  
Chocolate fondue