Dining at MIT has a long and torturous history. The system has existed in almost every conceivable form throughout history. No system has ever been found that balances convenience with profitability. From the very beginning, the system struggled to achieve profitability (find research). However, the importance of this varied throughout the years. If the Institute never got involved in providing dining services, it would have never got into this problem. However, providing convenient access to meals was seen as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. So throughout history and continuing until today, the dining system could never seem to shake a slight loss. Over time the Institute’s willingness to run with the system at a loss varied. When the institute was less willing to have a loss, various methods were used to cut that loss. These methods included making some meals mandatory, finding private contractors, and giving those contractors more leeway to cut losses. A few years later, when a loss was less important the Institute looked to program goals like building community and the system expanded.

The profitability of dining at MIT has always suffered from several problems. Fraternities and sororities always included a food component. Some dorms were built with kitchens where students cooked themselves. (When were these started to be built) In addition, local restaurants and take out stands in the neighborhood were always cheaper than the campus food service with union workers.[[1]](#footnote-1) Food trucks in particular, ran with little overhead while campus food operations had to work in space leased from MIT which was not kept in good condition. Students always had choices other than the campus food services, and in many cases those choices were better. Many times students thought that the deficits would go away if only dining services had more convenient hours or served better food faster.

In 1946, the students were complaining about the quality of the low food and the high prices in Walker.[[2]](#footnote-2) In 1966, students were complaining about the food.[[3]](#footnote-3) In a student opinion in The Tech, a student questioned why MIT used Stoffer’s as an external contractor. The student thought that it would have been better to bring in external vendors from the community to campus. This discontent with ARA was widely seen during the 1980s during much of their contract period. In 2005, the student from 1966 finally got his wish; multiple independent vendors replaced the large cafeteria in Lobdell.[[4]](#footnote-4)

However, this effort was not uniform. In 1957, students in Baker boycotted their dining hall in order to get Stoffer’s to manage their dining hall.[[5]](#footnote-5) 230 students skipped dinner in Baker and went to Walker instead where they believed the food was better. The boycotted a second night when the cafeteria planned to reheat the food that they were originally supposed to serve.

The first grumblings against the mandatory plan was found in 1960, when a survey was sent around asking students how much they would using the dining halls if they were not mandatory.[[6]](#footnote-6) The results were not available. In 1957, however, 1/3 of residents in Burton House and East Campus signed up for a Commons plan voluntarily.[[7]](#footnote-7)

One thing which has always been controversial has been a la carte vs all you care to eat, which was then called “Commons.” Whenever one system existed, someone would complain about the lack of the other system. During 1984, Baker went a la carte on Fridays and saw a tripling of the number of students using it. [[8]](#footnote-8) Three-fourths of MacGregor voted to go a la carte, and a girl from McCormick complained that Commons should be men “only, since men only, because women in general eat less than men.” However in 1990, only Baker had a Commons system, and the manager at the time was looking to expand the system to more houses.[[9]](#footnote-9) In 1993 as part of the move to voluntary and as other dorms closed their dining halls, Baker House switched to a la carte. [[10]](#footnote-10)

Cooking for selves around in 1984[[11]](#footnote-11)

Free food was an important part of the culture, much as it was today. [[12]](#footnote-12) Articles were written in the newspaper instructing freshmen on how to find free food.

One thing which differed was that students worked for dining services. Today, no students work for dining services at all. In 1997, dining services still sought to employ students and paid a much higher wage than most of campus but had trouble attracting students to work in food service and they had problems with the reliability of their schedule.[[13]](#footnote-13)

One thing which was controversial with the switch ARA was that the food service employees were no longer employees of MIT and were kicked off the MIT pension.[[14]](#footnote-14) This was controversial among some of the students who saw this as unfair. This was the first in what would seem to be an endless stream of complaints against ARA. (was it so many now or was it always like this – should have done reading before).

In 1989, MIT’s contract with ARA was up for renewal.[[15]](#footnote-15) Lawrence E. Maguire, director of Housing and Food Services, called ARA service "unsatisfactory" over the past three years. They went over their budget and many students were unhappy with the prices and the food. Students who worked for them were unhappy with the ways things were run while other students were upset at needing a waver to hold a study break that provided refreshments. Under that contract, ARA was paid a 2% management fee, but MIT still paid for the losses.

However in 1990, MIT renewed its contract with ARA.[[16]](#footnote-16) Quality was up somewhat and ARA defended it’s pricing as being much lower than other schools in the area. The new contract started in 1991, was made ARA responsible for any losses and gave it any profit it could make.[[17]](#footnote-17) This profit and losses contract was believed to be the first of its kind. Lawrence E. Maguire, director of housing and food services claimed that, “ARA now has incentive to respond to the market. You're going to see salesmen out there now.”

The wide expansion in in 2000

1997: break up of monopoly

2005: split up lobdell to independent vendors

Everything after 1995

I think I should cut Baker – does not add to it

Unless summarize that student’s wills change

Baker House was going to be shut down in 1993 because it was losing $10,000/month.[[18]](#footnote-18) However, the students of Baker House advocated for the dining hall, fighting with Aramark’s manager to make improvements. For example, the students advocated strongly to have a Sunday brunch. Aramark initially helped them, but then realized it cut into their Lobdell business. However, MIT ordered Aramark to keep the dining hall open and the students started to look for alternative companies to Aramark, including the current company Bon Appetite or local chefs. The dining hall opened in 1994 under student management. Though positive word of mouth from students, it inched close to breaking even. Baker students even voted to implement a meal tax to support the hall. However, in 1995, Baker was folded into Aramark again and remained open along with Next House.[[19]](#footnote-19)

1. The Tech V 117 N14 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Tech V 76 N 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Tech V 86 N 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Tech V 125 N 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Tech V 77 N 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Tech V 80 N 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Tech V 77 N 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Tech V 104 N 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Tech V 110 N 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Tech V 113 N 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Tech V 104 N 29 “Free food and how to find it” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Tech V 104 N 29 “Free food and how to find it” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Tech V 117 N 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Tech V106 N 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The Tech V 109 N 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The Tech V 110 N 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Tech V 111 N 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The Tech V 116 N 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The Tech V 115 N 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)