Food and Beverages Served at CUNY Meetings Summary

This report presents results from an online survey and telephone interview on food and beverages served at CUNY meetings. Interest in CUNY meetings resulted from the recent publication of Department of Health and Mental Health (DOHMH) guidelines for food and beverages served at NYC meetings and events. The study was designed to help implement similar guidelines for food and beverages at CUNY meetings. The survey was sent to CUNY academic departments and administrative units, with a total of 301 respondents. It asked respondents about the quality, diversity, and healthfulness of food and beverages offered at CUNY meetings. Respondents were also asked about their personal habits in choosing healthy or less healthy products at meetings. In addition, a small number of respondents who had a role in the ordering process volunteered to participate in a telephone interview.

**Beverages**

Water, coffee and tea (all beverages that are recommended by the DOHMH) are served at most CUNY meetings, but soda was present at over half of meetings. Guidelines should discourage high-calorie beverages at CUNY meetings. Additionally, because of the prevalence of coffee and tea at meetings, the guidelines should emphasize healthier sugar and milk condiments, such as sugar substitutes and low-fat milk or milk alternatives.

**Food**

There are number of improvements that could be made at CUNY meetings when ordering food; including, more fruits, vegetables, and whole grain options as well as offering smaller portions. Among the meetings that provided food, a third did not offer fruits or vegetables. The majority of these meetings served baked goods instead (88 percent); yet, over three-quarters did not have whole grain options. Furthermore, only a quarter of meetings offered baked goods in smaller than average portion size.

Following the DOHMH guidelines, the majority of CUNY meetings that offered salads, served condiments on the side (87 percent); the same was reported for sandwiches (63 percent). Guidelines should further support this practice as well as suggest low-calorie condiments.

CUNY also scored well by having very few meetings provide deep-fried food; yet, other high-calorie snack, such as chips and cakes, were more often offered at meetings. As noted above, CUNY guidelines should emphasize fruits and vegetables over high-calorie snacks.

**Interviews**

The qualitative findings from this study provide insight on the food ordering process at CUNY meetings. Not surprisingly, for most departments and administrative units, the budget was the most important aspect when considering the menu. Many were required to go through a university-designated caterer, but because this was often associated with higher prices, some offices found ways around the system (such as bringing in food or holding meetings after lunch).

**Conclusion**

Most respondents said that they would support healthier food and beverage options at meetings, and the findings from this report should help direct creating guidelines to support healthier menus. However, there are other issues that need to be considered, such as what offices can afford and what type of (affordable) food is being offered. However, it is not a simple matter of allocating more money to the meal budget; but rather, working with everyone involved (including those ordering the food and those providing food and services) to ensure that there are healthy, affordable options.

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1 For full report, please contact healthycuny@gmail.com.
Chart 1. Beverages served at CUNY meetings

Chart 2. Foods served at CUNY Meetings

Chart 3. Behavioral Change

How frequently do you choose to consume healthier food and drink options at meetings when they are offered?

Always 59%

Sometimes 38%

Never 1%

Rarely 2%

How frequently would you choose to consume healthier food and drink options at meetings if more and better quality versions were offered?

Always 73%

Sometimes 25%

Never 0%

Rarely 2%