

How to Manage Your Virginia Tech Dining Plan

If you have not had to manage money in the past, budgeting your dining plan may initially seem overwhelming. The process of managing your dining plan will allow you to ensure that you have enough money to last throughout the semester, while accounting for having either surplus or a lack of dining plan money if needed.

Through effective management of your dining plan, you may avoid future issues such as approaching the end of the semester without enough money to last the remaining weeks, or reaching the end of the semester with far too much money left over. Additionally, if you do not manage your dining plan well during the beginning of the semester, some effective management at the end of the semester can easily put you right back on track.

This process is most effective if you start it at the very beginning of a semester when your dining plan is completely unused, however should you find yourself in a less-than-desirable monetary position at some point during the course of the semester, these tips to manage your dining plan may still prove useful.

Any student, whether living on-campus or off, may have a dining plan. These instructions are intended for any student with a dining plan, particularly a student without much experience with managing a budget or first- or second-semester freshmen who are still adjusting to college life.

This method of managing your dining plan works by both managing expenses before they happen such that your dining plan will last through the entire semester, as well as fixing deficiencies in your dining plan from mismanaging your plan in the past. Between the two of these, it is easy to quickly get your dining plan back on track, or keep it on track for the entirety of the semester.

To manage your dining plan effectively, you can begin by choosing an appropriate dining plan size before the semester begins. Throughout the semester, be wary of your purchases and regularly monitor your dining plan to see if you are spending money too quickly or too slowly. If you determine that your dining plan spending is unsustainable, consider making changes in your spending habits or adding money to your dining plan. At the end of the semester, decide if the dining plan size you chose was appropriate for you, or if you should make changes in the upcoming semester.

Glossary

Dining Dollars – A subsection of the dining plan account which holds money added to minor dining plans.

Dining Plan – The monetary account attached to a university account which holds money to be used in any of the on-campus dining facilities.

Flex Additions – A subsection of a dining plan account which holds money added to a major, mega, or premium dining plan after the start of the semester.

Hokie Passport – The Virginia Tech university identification card which is used to pay for meals.

MyVT – The website found at <http://my.vt.edu> which can be used to look up dining plan information or add money to a dining plan.

Rollover – Money left over from the previous fall semester which is automatically added to a subsection of a dining plan account for the spring semester.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Select an appropriate dining plan for the upcoming semester.

At Virginia Tech, there are five sizes of dining plans available: Commuter, Minor, Major, Mega, and Premium, each of which differs only in the amount of spending money included with the plan, except for the Commuter plan, which also differs in that it does not receive the same 50% discount on purchases that the other plans receive. The first two plans are considered 'off-campus' dining plans and can only be purchased by students who are not living on campus. It is advisable that if you live off-campus, you should either purchase the Commuter plan or directly deposit Dining Dollars as needed as these two options are nearly guaranteed to be the cheapest options.

If you live on-campus, you will be required to choose between the Major, Mega, and Premium plans. Between these, it is advisable to select the Major plan and add money as needed, because this will always be the cheapest option for an on-campus resident.

Once you have chosen a dining plan, visit 'Personal Info' tab on MyVT at <http://my.vt.edu> as seen in Figure 1¹ before the semester begins to select your dining plan, by default for Fall semester you will be given a Major plan, and for Spring semester you will be given the same dining plan option you had chosen for the preceding Fall semester.

Hokie Passport

Account	Balance
MAJOR FLEX (ON Campus)	\$236.16
FLEX ADDITIONS DINING	\$2.01
MAJOR FLEX ROLLOVER (ON CAMPUS)	\$1.19
HOKIE PASSPORT STUDENT	\$11.49

- [Hokie Passport Services](#)
- [Make Deposit](#)
- [Deactivate Hokie Passport Card](#)

Figure 1 - The Hokie Passport Section on MyVT

2. Monitor your purchasing.

At the beginning of the semester, you may be tempted to spend a lot of dining plan money because your account is so full. Instead of going on a spending spree, find one of the pale green or yellow cards as seen in Figure 2, which are left at most tables in most of the dining halls or displayed near any checkout register. These cards list each of the major on-campus dining plans with expected amounts remaining listed by week. If you attempt to follow this guideline for your spending, your meal plan should last for the entire semester without any issues.



Figure 2 - The Dining Plan 'Green Card'

¹ Screenshot of the Hokie Passport section of MyVT taken from <http://my.vt.edu> on March 17, 2014.

No Dining Plan is the Cheapest Plan of All?

How can that be possible?

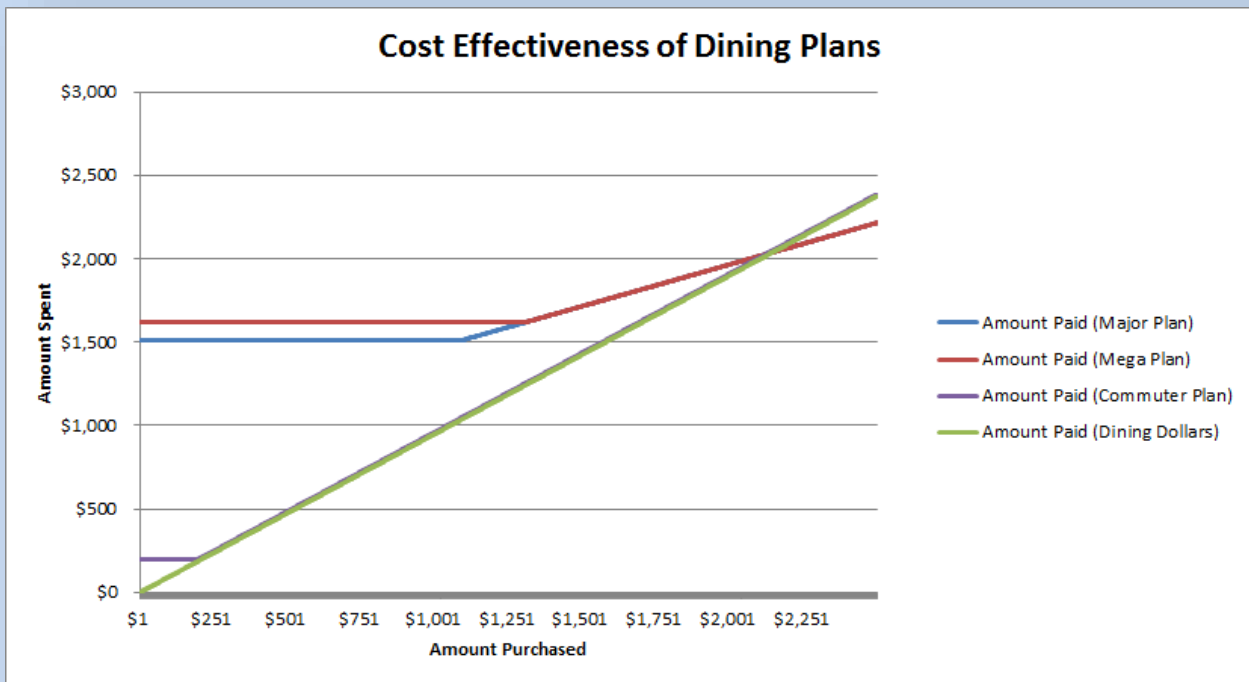


Figure 2 - Compared Dining Plans

It may not be immediately obvious why the best option for an on-campus student is the 'Major' dining plan and the best option for off-campus students to directly deposit Dining Dollars as needed. **Error! Reference source not found.**2 shows a plot of four dining plan options comparing the amount the plan allows you to purchase versus the total amount spent. For the Major and Mega plans, there is an initial 'buy in' cost, which allots a certain amount of money to your dining plan. Because of this buy-in cost, until you purchase enough food to overcome that cost, the plans go to waste. After you reach the end of your allotted dining plan, you can add Dining Dollars which receive the same 50% discount that a normal dining plan does, however because of the initial cost of the dining plan, any on-campus dining plan will be less cost effective than an off-campus dining plan. The best option is to choose the Major plan, which is the smallest of the on-campus plans, because each of the on-campus dining plans is only cost effective *after* you have exhausted your dining plan and added Dining Dollars. By choosing the smallest plan, you are much more likely to completely exhaust your dining plan each semester.

If you live off-campus, directly adding Dining Dollars is a much cheaper option than any of the dining plans. With either the Commuter plan or directly adding Dining Dollars, you receive only a 5% discount on food, but it is still a cheaper option provided that you spend less than \$2,000. Considering that it would be incredibly difficult to spend that much money on your Dining Plan over the course of a single semester, the best option is to have no Dining Plan at all. There is also the added benefit that by directly adding Dining Dollars, you do not need to worry about rollover because Dining Dollars will roll over between semesters and academic years.

3. Make changes in your spending habits where needed.

After consulting the spending information card, it is unlikely that you will be exactly on-track with the suggested spending plan. If you see that your account balance is less than what is recommended for that week, attempt to reduce your spending by putting the cookies back or opting for a water cup rather than a soda cup. You can check your account balance on MyVT or on any receipt from an on-campus dining center. If you don't think you can reduce your spending any, or reducing it still does not put you back on track, do not worry, this is normal. You can always add more money later once your dining plan is exhausted, and going slightly over your dining plan ensure maximum efficiency (See the box on the above page).

If your dining plan has significantly more money remaining than what the card suggests, you may have chosen a dining plan which is too large. If it is a Fall semester, do not worry about this because any remaining dining plan money will be added to your rollover account at the end of the semester. For next semester, consider getting a smaller dining plan because you will have the extra rollover added to it. If it is a Spring semester, increase your spending because the remaining dining plan money does not roll over to the next Fall semester.

4. Add money to your dining plan when necessary.

It is likely that at some point your dining plan will run out. Do not fret about this, it is actually a good thing as it ensures you are getting the best value for your dining plan. Add money to your dining plan by navigating to MyVT at <http://my.vt.edu> and click the 'Personal Info' tab. There will be an option listed under the 'Hokie Passport' section which reads 'Make Deposit'. This link will take you the Online Deposit system where you can add either Flex Additions or Dining Dollars depending on the dining plan size you chose at the beginning of the semester. Based on your previous spending habits, calculate approximately how much money you will likely spend in the remaining time in the semester and add that much to your account. When in doubt, add less than you need because you can always add more money to your plan later.

Note: If you have one of the on-campus dining plans and therefore add Flex Additions, this money will roll over from Fall to Spring semester but will not roll over from Spring semester to the next year. If you have an off-campus dining plan and therefore add Dining Dollars, this money will roll over between academic years.