



GC Rank and File Action <rafa.gradcenter@gmail.com>

food access and beyond

1 message

GC Reclaim Commons <gcreclaimcommons@gmail.com>

17 February 2023 at 10:50

To: president@gc.cuny.edu, severett@gc.cuny.edu

Bcc: rafa.gradcenter@gmail.com

Dear President Robin Garrell and Provost Steve Everett,

We write to thank you for publicly engaging with the Graduate Center community on Wednesday, and for your visit to our evening potluck. **The Reclaim the Commons organizers would like to acknowledge in writing Provost Everett's verbal offer to cater a free warm lunch at least once or twice per week to the Graduate Center community starting March 1.** We also appreciate that, with this offer, you have opened a channel of dialogue toward meeting the three demands that we presented at the Community meeting. This includes our demand that you establish a fund to sustain the People's Pantry by March 1, and that you release a public report on the kitchen and its unaccounted-for funds on that same date.

We must affirm that one or two free lunches per week is insufficient to address our faculty, staff, and students' urgent need for food access. The GC community used to rely on the cafeteria for affordable food options in an increasingly expensive midtown New York. Keeping the cafeteria closed without providing an alternative for our daily needs is fueling a humanitarian crisis among us.

Moreover, this is not the only problem in the building. On Wednesday, the GC community spoke about being threatened by your legal counsel, the need for more affordable childcare with expanded hours of operation, putting an end to late pay and underpayment, the budget office's continued dysfunctions, and a general milieu of feeling disrespected by how GC upper management has conducted its affairs (many of these issues are also described in the [Statement of No Confidence](#) that has garnered almost 800 signatures).

As we welcome Provost Everett's offer, we emphasize this larger ecosystem of concerns as we restate our three demands below:

1. Reopen the cafeteria immediately. In tandem with a committee of student, faculty and staff advisers, management must provide a public plan by **March 31** for reopening the cafeteria. Before the cafeteria is reopened, management must begin providing a daily low-cost hot food option to the college community. Vending machines are not enough, and expecting individuals to purchase food in midtown on less than a living wage is unacceptable.

2. Support students, faculty and staff in transforming the Dining Commons into a communal space. By **March 1**, senior administration must establish a fund that will sustain the existing People's Pantry and purchase furnishing and amenities for a more social and community-centered space. There must also be more community autonomy in decisions about future revenue-generating reservations of the space to non-GC entities. Additionally, political expression in the Commons must be affirmed as a positive right and cannot be restricted by administrative fiat.

3. Increase transparency around kitchen management. In 2021, \$900,000 dollars was allocated by vote to kitchen repairs—and yet there seemingly has been no progress in renovations. We demand management post a public report on the kitchen and the unaccounted-for funds by **March 1**. We also demand that the Auxiliary Enterprise Corporation, which manages GC food services and space reservations, become compliant with Open Meetings Law.

On Wednesday, you celebrated the fact that the GC community is returning to the building in greater numbers. We can't overlook that this return overlaps with our development of a community space and the free food and hot beverages that the People's Pantry has provided. The importance of affordable food to the Graduate Center's ability to once again function as the gathering space it once was cannot be emphasized enough.

Thank you for working together to address the needs of Graduate Center faculty, staff, and students. We look forward to confirmation that you received this email, and would appreciate you sharing food delivery details ahead of March 1 that we can publicize to the GC community. As you see, this date will be a crucial benchmark for you to begin making these multiple necessary improvements.

with gratitude for your focus and commitment,

- Reclaim the Commons