An open letter to the Metropolitan State food vendors:

On a college student’s budget, the options around Metro are pretty limited. Sure, one of the best steak houses in the entire state is less than a block away, but students fit the ramen to burgers motifs more fittingly than the burgers to steak. So, obviously, that’s disqualified.

Even with that little qualifier in mind, I feel like vendors and I need to have a little heart to heart: man to artery clogging businesses, because the food situation at the St. Paul campus and Midway Center is at best concerning, at worst dire. I say that with very little hyperbole.

“Where life and learning meet,” a slogan that looms over my head as I walk in front of Burger King, doing my best to convince myself to eat a meal that would make my stomach punch me so hard from the inside that my jaw would shatter like glass.

It’s a shame that I have to convince myself to do so. But, when my other viable options for food are a coffee shop that closes by 3 p.m., a sandwich shop that closes before night classes get out, two pizza places that challenge how often one can eat pizza, charbroiled “Play-Doh” burgers, and assorted vending machines for such an occasion where I want to eat unhealthy corn and processed flour snacks, the decision comes down to two choices: charbroiled “Play-Doh” or don’t necessarily get the chance to eat at all.

Even if “Food for Thought,” the free food shelf on the St. Paul campus, is a great option, it perplexedly came close to being moved off campus recently. Even if one of the proposed locations was only a few blocks away from campus, it’s difficult for me to believe that uprooting a low-cost program for the sake of progress is really the solution that comes naturally.

“Where life and learning meet,” the slogan reads above me as I type this. It’s difficult for me to really take that to heart, given the topic.

I only reflect on the slogan because with “Food for Thought” being apparently contentious enough to justify entertaining the idea of getting rid of one of Metro’s most consistent food supplies for students, the sentiment of the motto has a somewhat hollow ring to it. But, maybe I’m not giving enough credit. In the new student center, there is a brand new cafeteria stocked with state-of-the-art equipment that will cook accessible, ready food when it ope—

Oh wait, it hasn’t opened yet.

It’s incredible to think about how the Metro student culture is both unique to MnSCU as well as one of the university’s most apparent issues. For food vendors of different schools, such as Lancer for example, a reliable culture of students regularly eating on campus is not only measured, but expected. In Metro’s case, there is inconsistency of student population staying on campus to justify both the money and effort. Consequently, for a vendor to come to the main campus, a larger deposit is required in the contract to offset the risk.

The business perspective is pretty straightforward. When looking at how hunger affects students, it’s worth noting that this has a probable effect on the collective academic achievement of the university. That’s part of what makes the situation turn from concerning to dire: for a campus that reflects such cultural and economic diversity, the university has an obligation to bring affordable, accessible and quality food to its students.

Yes, an obligation; not a packet of sympathy nor a blind eye in fear of investment, but an obligation.

But I’m sure a solution will be found sooner than later. I don’t bring this up to say there is a lack of consideration, but it is worth noting an old cliché: something about roads and good intentions. Good intentions aren’t necessarily rational. Consider this food for thought—seriously, no pun intended—as a hopeful cautionary commentary going into the next formal school year.

Just keep in mind that in order for the “college’s living room” to succeed, it needs a kitchen.