Courtesy image from the app's developers, UCSC first-years Eliah Reeves and Christian Knab.

Campus

Why did UC Santa Cruz Students Create a New Dining Hall App?

Anna Zou, March 9, 2023 | 🕐 3 min | 👁 29 | 🔖

Every student with a meal plan has a dining hall dish that they look forward to seeing, whether it be pasta or samosas. But knowing if or where it's going to be served on any given day is always a gamble.

Students at UC Santa Cruz who want to know what the dining hall is serving turn to either the dining hall website or mobile applications, such as UCSC Menu and UCSC Dining. But where do these apps come from?

"I was really excited when I downloaded a dining hall app, because I was able to plan out what I was

going to eat," said Marshall Sekula, a second-year biomolecular engineering student.

The recently-released dining hall app UCSC Menu was created by computer engineering and computer science first-years Eliah Reeves and Christian Knab. They wanted to create an app that would solve an inconvenience they had as Merrill residents.

"Since Merrill [Dining Hall] is closed on the weekends, we ended up trying to figure out which dining halls to go to a lot since [our options are] either Cowell or 9/10 [...] so we started working on [UCSC Menu]." said Reeves.

However, Reeves and Knab's app is not the only one available on the App Store. There is competition between theirs and the older and more commonly-used UCSC Dining, which was made three years ago by computer science alum Ryan Chai.

Chai said that he made the app to practice his programming skills.

"I just thought, well, maybe this could be a good opportunity to gain some experience on developing software," said Chai.

The main distinction between UCSC Dining and UCSC Menu is the former's lack of food categorization, and Reeves mentioned several times that he found it a hassle to sort through an unorganized list pulled directly from UCSC Dining's website.

"We felt like it was annoying that ketchup was above the main entree, because there's always ketchup. We wanted to categorize everything, so you could find what you're looking for quickly," Reeves said.

In acknowledgment of some flaws in UCSC Dining, Chai made adjustments to his code last summer, but never got around to releasing the update as it was still in the testing phase when the new quarter started.

Both Reeves and Knab expressed that, although making UCSC Menu was a slow process, it was a good experience to familiarize themselves with programming. Reeves and Knab also recently worked on an update to UCSC Menu, which was released late February, and have plans to develop it even further.

"We're working on adding new features," said Reeves. "We just added a calculator to tell you how many Slug Points you have left at the end of the quarter, because a problem that we noticed last quarter was that everyone had so many [left over]."

Regardless of whether they prefer UCSC Menu or UCSC Dining, students appreciate the convenience of being able to pull up an app to see what's being served.

"The biggest factor is definitely going to be the convenience," said Chai. "There are a lot of reviews on the App Store saying how convenient it is to just have an app to read the menu and be able to see what is [being served] in the dining hall."
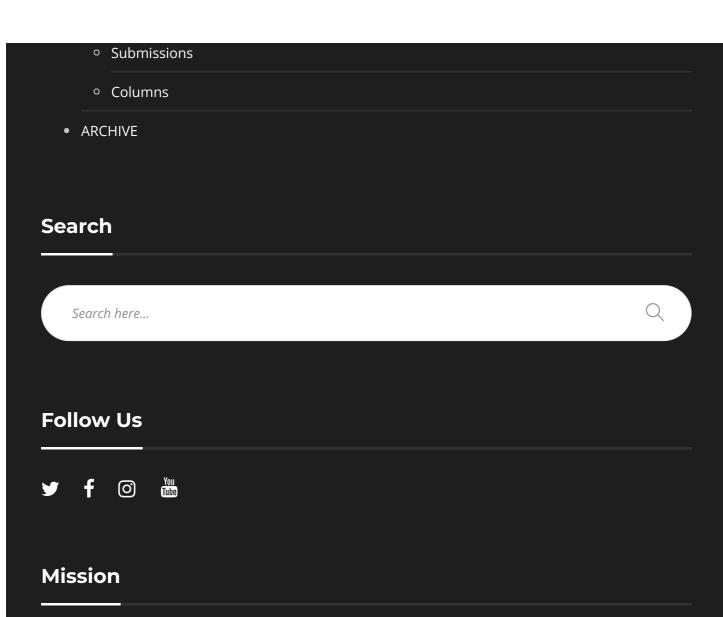
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