

Foodback MIT

Design Draft

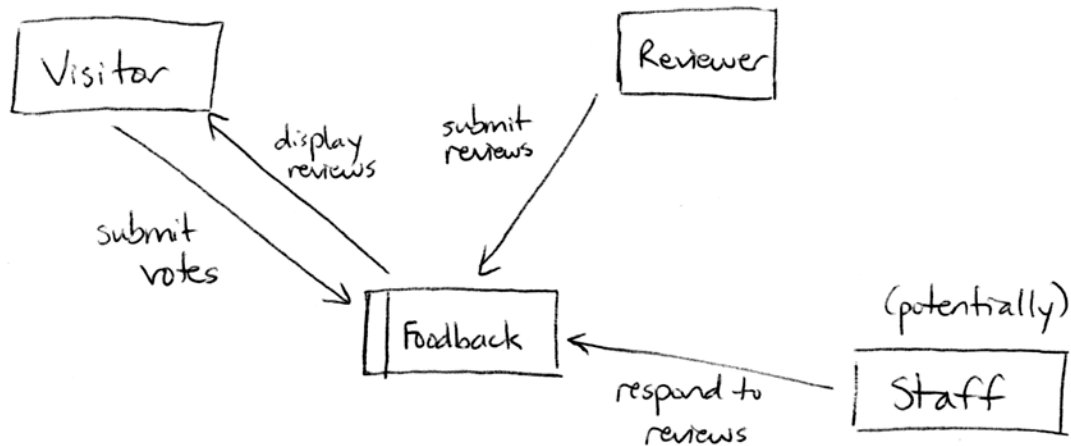
Motivation

Foodback MIT (or just “Foodback” within the MIT community) is a web application that allows members of the MIT community to post and read reviews of the MIT dining halls. An MIT certificate is required to post a review, but the posted reviews are fully public.

The purposes of Foodback include:

1. **Help MIT meal plan subscribers decide where to eat.** By reading reviews from other members of the MIT community, meal plan subscribers can better evaluate their options and are better able to decide which dining hall they would most like to go to. Foodback will allow users to read reviews from only the current meal period so they can learn what people think about current offerings—such as the stir fry special at McCormick, which changes daily.
2. **Help guests to MIT decide where to eat.** Guests generally have little to no knowledge of the MIT dining halls. By reading the reviews for each dining hall before their visit, guests will be able to determine which dining hall best suits their tastes.
3. **Allow MIT dining hall staff to see how they’re doing.** Since the Foodback website is open to the public, the staff of each dining hall can read their respective reviews and determine what they’re doing well and what they can improve.
4. **Allow MIT students to voice their opinions on the dining halls.** Currently, students can provide feedback to the dining halls via paper comment cards or an online form. Foodback seeks to improve upon both of these methods. The website will allow students to leave feedback from any location, unlike the comment cards which are physically located in the dining halls. The website will also have a more user-friendly and intuitive UI than the official dining feedback form, and the submitted reviews will be public, rather than disappearing into the “black hole” of the current feedback submission box.
5. **(Potentially) allow dining hall staff to respond to reviews.** Foodback may also offer special staff accounts, through which dining hall staff can respond to their reviews.

Context Diagram



Concepts

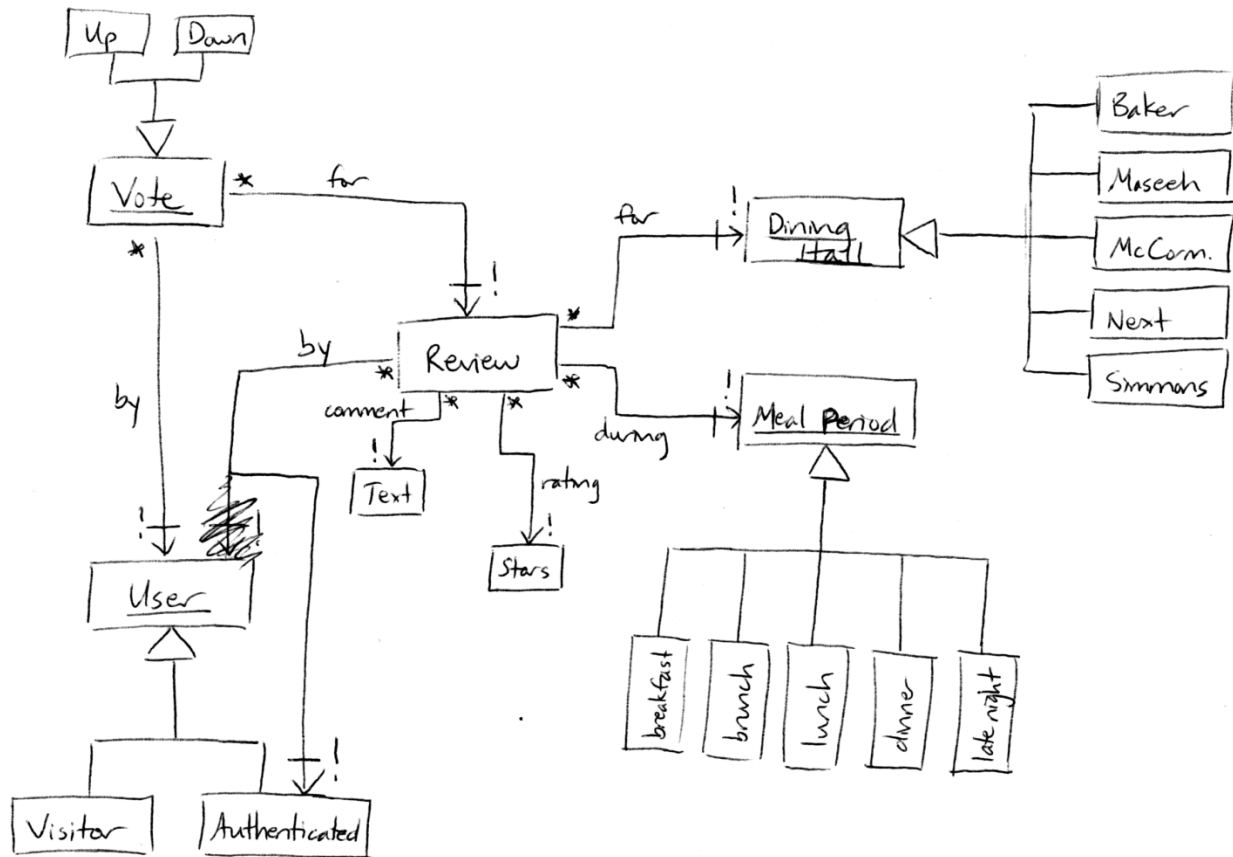
Dining Hall: The specific MIT dining hall for which a review is submitted. A dining hall is associated with the reviews that are posted for it, and has a name that distinguishes it from other dining halls in the UI.

Meal Period: A period of time during which a dining hall offers a certain meal (breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner, late night) and therefore has a certain menu. The available meal periods depend on the dining hall (only Maseeh offers lunch and only Simmons offers late night) and the timespans covered will also depend on the schedules of particular dining halls. Like dining halls, meal periods are identified by name and are associated with reviews.

Review: A piece of feedback submitted by a member of the MIT community. Aside from the dining hall and meal period, a review is associated with the user who posted it, a star rating, and some textual comment.

Votes: Visitors to the Feedback website can vote on the helpfulness of reviews. This allows Feedback to display the most helpful reviews first. Naturally, votes are associated with specific reviews.

Data Model



Design Challenges

Can reviews be edited or deleted? When a user leaves a comment card or submits to the online feedback form, that action cannot be taken back. However, it also (presumably) does not have permanent effects; comment cards are removed after a while, and feedback form submissions are never posted publicly in the first place. Feedback reviews should naturally be considered separately.

Potential Solutions:

We will consider editing and deleting together, even though they are different operations, because they can be used to effectively replace each other. Deleting a review and then posting a new one in its place is almost the same as editing; editing a review to remove all of the text (or replace it with something like "DELETED" if empty reviews are not allowed) is almost the same as deleting.

- Allow editing and deleting. This encourages users to post reviews freely, since they can edit or delete the review if they change their mind. As a result, it may increase participation.
- Do not allow editing and deleting. This may simplify the implementation of the application. It also encourages users to think twice about what they write.

Should information about a reviewer be publicly displayed? By authenticating reviewers with their MIT certificates, we have access to their names and Kerberos IDs. We may or may not want to display some of this information with the review.

Potential Solutions:

- Do not display any identifying information. This is the most effective for protecting user information. Users will feel more comfortable leaving honest reviews if they know that any offended parties cannot identify them.
- Display the user's first name publicly, and:
 - o No other information. Visitors will feel like the review is more personal and believable if there is a name next to it. A first name only can achieve this purpose fairly well. Users who submit reviews will also feel a little more accountable if their names are displayed.
 - o The user's last name or Kerberos ID when the reader is signed in. These should be considered together because, in most cases, a full name can be used to find a Kerberos ID, and a Kerberos ID can be used to find a full name. This maximizes accountability while also minimizing the exposure of user information to non-MIT visitors.

How many reviews can a user submit? If a particular user submits many reviews, it is possible for them to dominate the review system and make their opinion appear to be more prevalent than it really is.

Potential Solutions:

- Do not limit reviews. If a user submits many reviews, they are probably very passionate about the topic of MIT dining. We may actually want them to have more weight in the discussion because they might be better informed than other users. This eases the implementation, but would open the website up to spam.
- Limit reviews to one per user per meal period each day. A user may very well have something to say about the dining halls during each meal period. We should allow the posting of that number of reviews. By allowing no more than that many reviews, we can reduce spam and allow other users' voices to be heard.