

Christian Cappelluti

ARA's theft

When was the last time that someone ripped you off? If it takes you more than two seconds to figure out the answer, then you are on the wrong track. Let me help you and rephrase the question: when was the last time that you purchased something from ARA, the food service company here on campus?

Almost all students agree that ARA is overcharging us, yet nobody does anything to actively promote a change in the situation. Except for one article called "Dollar to doughnuts, price too high", published in *The Old Gold & Black* by Andy Ferguson, this past January, the issue was never considered under a serious perspective, and remained more as a naive, childish complaint of the students.

I believe that we, as students, have both the right and the power to get a better service on campus, and action should be taken.

I have been doing a lot of research, in collaboration with Dr. John Wood, in the Department of Economics, and Ryan Bifulco, one of his students, and we have indisputable evidence that things are not going the way they should.

I will show you why, how, and how much ARA is taking advantage of us, and what we should do to change it.

Now, the first and most important thing that we all have to realize, is that ARA takes advantage of its MONOPOLY on campus: a survey conducted by Dr. Wood, in the Department of Economics, shows that 30 percent of Wake Forest students do not have a car, and therefore they cannot go off campus to eat, whenever they want. Also, consider that, even if you have a car, it would be very inefficient and time consuming for you to leave the campus every time you want something to eat, don't you think so?

ARA think so, but evidently they don't think it's enough. They want to have even more, more power, more control, and so they require all freshmen to purchase at least a \$985 meal plan. Now I want you to ask yourselves: is it right that if a student wants to come to Wake Forest he will be forced to eat ARA's food? Do you see any valid justification for that, other than ARA's hunger for our money?

But that's not it: ARA has not only the monopoly on food, but also the monopoly on soap, deodorants, toothbrushes, batteries, films, textbooks (yes sir, all textbooks are traded through ARA, go to the bookstore and ask, if you don't believe me). In other words: if we need something, we are very likely to need it from ARA!

As a result of this situation, ARA has so much power that it can set pretty much whatever prices they want, and we cannot do anything but accept them. Now, as you can see, ARA is not

extremely competitive in setting prices, but that makes perfect sense, since competition on campus does not exist in the first place. These figures, elaborated by Ryan Bifulco and I, are rather self-explanatory. ARA, compared to Kroger, overcharges us on the average by approximately 40%.

I don't know about you, but I certainly don't like it, and I want to change it. The question now is: how?

I want to share with you my opinion, and let me tell you, first, what I think would NOT work:

first, complaining to ARA, filling out those "How are we doing?" forms. It's like complaining about the theft to the thief.

Second, asking for receipts trying to make everybody more "price-conscious". This would not work because, as the survey shows, 96% of the times, the meal plan is entirely financed by the student's parents, and the student, therefore, does not have a very high incentive to reduce the expenses. On the other hand, we could have a policy so that all the detailed bills from ARA are sent home to the parents who are paying for it, but this policy would face a strong opposition from the students themselves, who would never accept such a close monitoring on their expenditures.

The third potential solution which I think would not work is substituting ARA with another company. Given the circumstances, we would probably only end up with a new name for the same old problem.

And now let me tell you what I am sure would work: opening up the campus to competition.

Better services are where competition is higher: I have been to Berklee College of Music, downtown Boston, surrounded by restaurants and food stores, for a semester, and the dining service was just excellent: you only have to pay \$4 for admission to the dining room, and then you have this huge, rich buffet with everything from pasta to ice cream, from steaks to vegetarian entrees, and you can always have as much as you want, with no limits. But even here in North Carolina, at other universities, things are different: Chapel Hill, for instance, is located right in front of Franklin St., where there are several small restaurants, and prices for the University's dining services are much more competitive than here, I've heard from a friend who studies there. Even Duke, our big rival, offers a much better deal: did you know that with their meal card they can order food from most stores downtown Durham?

It would take so little to have a good food service here at Wake Forest, too. It would be sufficient to have the Pitt and Benson center run by two different companies, for instance, and all of us would see amazing improvements.

Let's try to imagine, if you would, going to the Pitt and finding prompt, efficient service, higher quality and competitive prices, and the same thing in Benson. No more waiting ten minutes because they ran out of silverware or trays (don't we give them enough money to buy silverware and trays in sufficient quantities?!), no more extra charge for a spoonful of sauce, no more weighing fruit and salad, and paying \$5 for a 24karat lettuce! At last, we would no longer be vulnerable victims, but free and voluntary customers. It's evident to me that competition is definitely the most effective solution, because it directly removes ARA's monopoly, the main reason why the problem exists!

But words are not enough: we need to DO something.

What I want you to do after my speech, much more than remembering the words, is:

Stop complaining to ARA about ARA. It's absolutely no use, it would be much better to publish all the comments that you have on the Old Gold & Black, the college newspaper.

But the most important thing is: write a letter to dean Mullan, the dean of the College, explaining the situation and asking for at least one alternative company for food service, other than ARA, because, let me tell you one last time, competition is the single most effective and direct weapon that we have, as customers, to protect our interests, and to put an end to this slow, continuous and intolerable daily rip-off!

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Data table					
Ryan Bifulco			Supermercato	differenza	
Articolo	ITEM	ARA	KROGER	DIFFERENCE	PERCENT
Prod. raffredd.	ADVIL COLD	6,35	3,99	2,36	37%
Prod. analges.	ADVIL	5,13	3,09	2,04	40%
The	LIPTON MIX	1,77	0,89	0,88	50%
Dentifricio	DRIXORAL	6,79	4,59	2,2	32%
Shampoo	HEAD AND S.	4,03	2,72	1,31	32%
Deodorante	RIGHT GUAR.	3,53	1,99	1,54	44%
Deodorante	RIG. G. SPRA.	4,13	2,99	1,14	28%
	KODAK FILM	6,73	4,39	2,34	35%
	200				
	KODAF FILM	5,75	2,89	2,86	50%
	100				
Batterie	DURACELL 9 VOLT	4,37	2,69	1,68	38%
Bevande	SNAPPLE	1	0,79	0,21	21%
Succ. d'aranc	TROPICANA	2.00 = 20C	2.04 = 46 oz		
	TWISTE				
	DANNON	0,99	0,5	0,49	49%
	YOGURT				