

# The Daily Cardinal

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Courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison Housing

## CAMPUS NEWS

### ‘Do you dabble in live lobsters?’: Behind UW-Madison’s \$36,000 lobster feast

*UW Dining hosted a “resident appreciation” dinner across campus on May 1, offering whole lobsters to students on meal plans. Records obtained by The Daily Cardinal show the university paid more than \$36,000.*

By [Gabriella Hartlaub](#) and [Ella Hanley](#)

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The University of Wisconsin-Madison treated students to an unusual and expensive dining hall experience this spring: whole lobsters flown in from Maine.

UW-Madison Housing & Dining hosted a "resident appreciation" dinner across campus on May 1, offering thousands of lobsters to students on meal plans. Staff even set up lobster-cracking stations to help students navigate the shells. At Liz Waters dining hall, salmon and steak were served instead.

Records obtained by The Cardinal show the university purchased about 2,354 pounds of lobster at \$15.69 per pound, totaling more than \$36,000 — excluding shipping and travel costs. The expense came from UW Dining's \$46 million annual operating budget, funded through housing contracts, meal plans and dining sales.

Emails reviewed by the Cardinal show the idea originated in March. Dining staff reached out to multiple Wisconsin-based seafood distributors, seeking price quotes for between 2,000 and 3,000 live lobsters.

In one email, UW Executive Chef Paul Strunger asked a supplier simply: "Do you dabble in live lobsters?"

Housing Marketing Director Brendon Dybdahl said the decision was made in consultation with the Student Dining Advisory Board, which consists of housing residents. The goal, he said, was "to mark the end of the academic year with a memorable experience for students."

Dining staff weighed price differences between Canadian and American lobsters. Canadian tariffs in effect at the time pushed the university to purchase through U.S. Foods, an existing partner of the university, and it was arranged for the lobsters to be shipped from Maine to Dane County Regional Airport.

Behind the scenes, staff raised concerns about the risks of transporting thousands of live lobsters. In an April email, Assistant Director of Purchasing Angie Erickson asked a supplier whether a credit would be available "if there are dead lobsters at the time of delivery." According to records, the shipment arrived alive.

Lobsters were available only to those with dining plans; guest swipes were suspended for the four-hour dinner service, from 4 to 8 p.m. While some students lined up for the rare dinner opportunity, others said they weren't sure how to eat it.

To ease the process, dining hall employees staffed stations to help students crack open shells and provide guidance on how to eat the crustacean.

"It was one of the worst things I've ever eaten. I gagged whenever I thought about it until just last month," one student said, adding that he normally enjoys seafood — lobster dinners included.

For UW Dining, it was a way to cap off the year with something memorable. For students, it left a mix of excitement, confusion — and in at least one case, disgust.



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