It’s Steak Night!

Everyone eats, especially college students. Many gain a bit of weight when they leave home for higher education — the notorious Freshman Fifteen — and almost everyone experiences some sort of separation anxiety from familiar foods and preparations. Food service directors are challenged to tempt the taste buds of students and appeal to finicky eaters.

For Pacific students in 1965, it was all about the meat, and you couldn’t get much classier than a steak dinner. So, new Housing and Food Services Director Paul Fairbrook had the student body in the palm of his hand when he announced Steak Nights would be a regular feature of dining at Pacific.

Fairbrook’s steak barbecues marked the end of each semester and the beginning of dead week. Steak dinners with all the trimmings: baked potatoes and Jell-O salad, rolls and frosted cakes, brought a touch of elegance to holiday celebrations in all five campus dining rooms.

In the second week of October in Fairbrook’s inaugural year, students responded in the affirmative to an informal poll in the Pacific Weekly asking whether there had been improvements in food quality. “I spend the whole day waiting for the total ecstasy of dinner,” said one student.

Food service director for 20 years until Pacific outsourced dining services in 1985, Fairbrook always looked for new ways to keep students interested in eating well. He enlisted international students to help him plan authentic meals in their native cuisines, and orchestrated progressive dinners among the dining halls that highlighted the food specialties of several regions of the United States. The whole 2,000-student campus came to a luau he initiated with the help of Pacific’s large Hawaiian student contingent. “We had a fire dancer and a sword swallower who came from Los Angeles, and we cooked a whole pig kalua style,” he reminisced.

He even taught a class for the “elite waiter,” instructing 10 volunteers in “the art of the waiter’s towel” and pouring wine. Fairbrook, who lives in Stockton and has a food-service consulting business, has written several books about the successful programs he pioneered at Pacific.