

Columbia's Caffeine Connections

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I don't know how it is for the rest of you during exams, but this time of year I wake up every morning and stumble immediately for the coffee pot. If a home-brewed cup of joe isn't possible, though, there are several hip locales around campus that are ready and willing to offer you any amount of that most widely used drug: caffeine.

Columbia's coffee houses also serve up a variety of tasty desserts and even "real" food. Three of the city's best—Cafe Espresso, Adriana's and the Courtyard Coffeehouse—are close to campus and definitely caffeinated for your studying pleasure.

Located across from the Horseshoe on College Street, Cafe Espresso is a popular hangout for USC students with some free time. Opening the cafe's heavy door to the pungent aroma of coffee brewing upstairs is an instant wake-up call. Weeknights usually bring more studious patrons to Cafe Espresso's smoky environs, as it is quite easy to tune out the babbling background. But groups of friends are always there, as is the occasional couple engrossed in conversation.

Cafe Espresso lives up to its name, offering espresso-based specialty drinks in addition to the house coffee and cappuccino common to so many coffee houses. Their mochas promise a tantalizing variety of flavors, including raspberry, almond and caramel. The Blarney Mocha is an exciting Irish alternative to the ordinary caffeine buzz, and the Menthe Mocha (my personal pick) is sweet perfection for peppermint connoisseurs.

Mocha drinks are \$2.45, while cappuccinos are a reasonable \$2.10. All coffee specialties can be iced—a definite plus for the coming summer months. Italian soda, hot tea and a coffee of the day complete the drink menu.

If caffeination is not on the agenda, Cafe Espresso also sells a variety of gooey desserts and filling sandwiches. (Reese's

No matter what your coffee preference, no matter what your noise tolerance, Columbia has coffee houses for all types. So this semester during exams, take a break and check one out. Relax. Caffeinate. Keep a steady hand at Jenga.

pie and cappuccino cheesecake caught my attention, but the selection changes daily.) At \$2.50 a slice, these desserts are a bargain for your sweet tooth. Sandwiches and salads are under \$5.

Cafe Espresso also welcomes local artists to perform or exhibit their work there. Art by Marcello Novo presently hangs on the cafe's moody red walls, and acoustic shows entertain patrons on the weekends.

Just a few blocks farther from campus, on Saluda Street in Five Points, Adriana's will satisfy those caffeine cravings and tempt you with a variety of desserts as well.

Prices at Adriana's have recently gone up, as a small notice behind the counter proclaims, but a specialty drink like the Giant Mocha is still only \$2.25—and the most chocolaty, if that is important. The typical espresso, cappuccino and coffee of the day are also available, as are hot and Russian teas.

Fortunately, Adriana's dessert case does not announce nutritional information per serving. Who would really want to know the truth about peanut butter chocolate fudge, or Black Forest torte or chocolate truffle mousse cake? Selections change periodically, and desserts are under \$3 apiece.

Apparently, coffee is a secondary concern for many patrons of Adriana's. This establishment, with its Italian flair, is just as well known for the gelati (Italian ice cream) churned on the premises daily. If ordinary flavors like chocolate, vanilla and strawberry don't grab your attention,

then mocha, malaga, and pistachio might. Employees will provide a sampling spoonful upon request—and customers rarely turn down a flavor after a taste.

Adriana's gelati is served on classy silver dishes in small, medium or large portions—that's molto, molto grande, and grandissimo, to be culturally correct. Milkshakes are available for \$3.40, and they are almost enough for two people.

The atmosphere at Adriana's is livelier and louder than that at Cafe Espresso, but probably because of the more eclectic crowd. Adriana's location farther from campus means college students do not monopolize its tables, and it seems to attract both younger and older patrons. Jazz music blares in the background—too loud for intimate conversation at times, but appropriate for the smoky, bustling atmosphere.

Adriana's also promotes an extensive menu of Italian lunch and dinner specialties. Daily Italian specials, from manicotti to fettuccine shrimp alfredo, are under \$7. Sandwiches, salads, and soups are served, as are 6-inch personal pizzas.

If coffee, conversation, and a creative atmosphere are your preferences, then Courtyard Coffeehouse should be the destination. This relatively young establishment is located on State Street, just across the Gervais Street bridge in West Columbia. Unfortunately, transportation is a must, but it is worth the extra effort.

Courtyard Coffeehouse specializes in coffee. They also have the old menu



Kristin Adams, a USC Junior, works behind the counter at Courtyard Coffeehouse. The West Columbia coffee emporium features regular menu items such as a coffee of the day, espresso, mocha, and cappuccino.

standards (a coffee of the day, espresso, mocha, cappuccino), but their specialty coffees stand out in name and in flavor.

The Milky Way—my recommendation—will satisfy even the most demanding sweet tooth. Mochaacino (Courtyard's specialty) steamed with caramel syrup and whipped cream makes this drink heavy on the sugar, light on the caffeine. This sweet concoction and other specialty coffees are under \$3.

Courtyard Coffee House's surprises include French press coffee at \$1.50 per pot. (Java enthusiasts: take note.) You can pick your bean flavor at the counter and watch the grinding. Flavors include cinnamon hazelnut, Costa Rican tarazu, Java timor and even Kona. These coffees are also sold by the half pound or pound, at prices competitive with those of larger coffee retailers.

While the dessert selection here is smaller, artistic employees will drizzle chocolate syrup on the plate underneath the cookie, brownie, or slice of cake of your choice. The Courtyard Coffeehouse also serves specialty sandwiches: heart-smart specials and macrobiotic sandwiches. They even have hummus.

If entertainment is what you want, you can get it at Courtyard Coffeehouse. Scrabble, Jenga, and Chess are on hand for bored customers, and a map of the world on one wall apparently enchants customers for hours. (You pin a dot where you're from, a star where you want



Marcus Allen and Bob Sublet play a friendly game of chess at Courtyard Coffeehouse, which also offers Scrabble and Jenga.

to be.) A new artist displays his or her work every month, and guests musicians usually play twice a week.

The Courtyard Coffeehouse actually does have a courtyard. It is not well lit at night, but the outdoor tables are popular on spring days. The establishment might sponsor an outdoor concert series there this summer, too.

Perhaps because it is farther from the center of town, Courtyard Coffeehouse is quieter and not as crowded. Jazz and

blues played in the background while I was there, and I could still here myself think. The very first thing I saw through the coffee house's windows was a cozy living-room arrangement of armchairs and a reading lamp. Definitely unusual.

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