Ordering food in the student center

During my visit to the Student Center for this particular assignment, I decided to observe people ordering food as the activity that I would focus on. Specifically, I watched people when they ordered from Taco Bell. I picked this activity because it has a high potential to be improved by some implementation of more technology. It also has a few distinct steps that I can easily document and describe.

Taco Bell in the student center is tucked between UBurger and Neopolitan Pizza and is currently the only Taco Bell in Boston Proper. It is most frequented by students of Northeastern University and can get very busy depending on the type of day. Its patrons can also include professors, university employees, visitors to the university and occasionally highschool students during lunch hours. It has 2 registers at the counter and a queue in front of it for people waiting in line. For the student, there are 3 distinct steps, waiting in line, ordering, and waiting for your food. The only artifacts that the activity produces are a receipt, and the food itself.

Waiting in line is relatively straightforward. People queue in front the registers (which are touchscreens) and wait for an available register. While waiting in line, people can look at the menu which is on the wall behind the registers. Once up to the register, the customer gives their order and the cashier punches it in to the register via touchscreen. The cashier will ask any clarifying questions such as type of meat in a taco
or type of sauce as well as clarifying size of the order if none was given. Once that is complete, the cashier then processes the payment (cash, credit card, or husky dollars) and gives the customer a printed receipt with their order number. Once the order is placed, the customer moves to the left of the registers and waits for their order to be made. While waiting, someone behind the counter will prepare any beverage that the person may have ordered. Once the order is complete, an employee will read a number off which corresponds to a customer’s receipt which means they can retrieve their order. Occasionally, at this point a student will request additional condiments for their order.

I interviewed two people about their experience and I tried to keep the questions open ended, but focused on things such as speed of their experience and any problems they may have had. My first question was “How often do you come here?”, followed by “What kinds of issues do you have when you order from Taco Bell?”. I would then follow up with any clarifying questions related to their responses. I first interviewed a sophomore Chemistry student who said that he only comes there two or three times a month. Two my second question he answered “I usually don’t have any problems when I order, but if I come between 12:30 and 1:30, the line can be pretty long”.

The second person I interviewed was a middler Finance major. She told me that she hardly ever orders from Taco Bell, but the day I interviewed she said she didn’t have time to go back to her apartment for lunch. Her only problem was that she thought they were a bit slow preparing her food.

From these interviews it seems that speed is the primary issue that people have with their experience at taco bell. Perhaps things such as a smartphone app for placing
orders ahead of time or even a web-app for placing orders would be beneficial. At lunch hours, it can get very busy so having some orders placed ahead of time would lessen the load on the cashiers at the registers and free up more time for preparing food in a timely manner.