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The magazine of the
National Association of College &
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On the cover: Student Shahenda Hashem, University of Montana (UM) international scholar from Egypt, helped bring Egyptian koshari to the UM campus during International Education Week. (Photo by Hannah Fellows, UM Campus Dining)

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Teamwork takes center stage at
Ohio State
DINING HALL
Mystery
EVENT

Debbie Wakefield
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Worries about upcoming final exams slipped from their minds as they diligently worked together to figure out how their manager went *missing*.

Ohio State students raced around the loft above the Traditions at Kennedy dining hall, frantically searching for the next clue. Worries about upcoming final exams slipped from their minds as they diligently worked together to figure out how their manager went missing.

This mystery-themed event, "The Case of the Missing Manager," was recently organized by a group of student life dining services student employees.

"Our idea was super interactive, and we wanted to provide a much-needed break from the stresses of academic life and allow students to relax and have fun in a low-pressure environment," said Bailee Elder, a second-year member of the student community leader program and event planner. "And of course, the event helped students build connections with their co-workers, which is an important aspect of overall wellness."

Student community leaders are members of the dining operation's leadership team tasked with creating a respectful and engaged community within a dining operation.

The special event created an opportunity for about 20 student employees to socialize outside their usual shifts.

"At work, there is a friendly environment, but it is still work," said Alexis Loja, a second-year student community leader. "When one is a full-time student and a part-time worker, there is very rarely time for socializing, so for some people, coworkers are the only source of socialization throughout the week. An event at a common place, like the loft of the workplace, facilitates the socialization of coworkers and allows for a fun time."
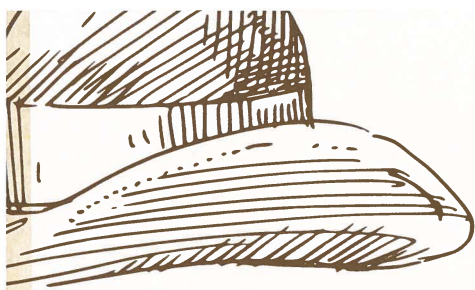
Part of the dining hall was transformed into a spooky Halloween hideaway with table decorations, string lights, a light-up bubbling cauldron, homemade apothecary bottles, and a photo backdrop where students had fun posing together.

Pizza and wings were brought in and mocktails were served up at the "POTION BAR" featuring drinks like "Strawberry Scream," "Witch's Brew," and "Vampire's Kiss."

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Student community leaders went above and beyond to ensure everyone in the operation was included in the special evening by bringing mocktails to students and full-time staff members who were scheduled to work their usual shifts during the evening event.

Like an escape room, each student played a suspect with a unique personality trait and was assigned an alibi for being at the dining hall the night of the incident. For example, one student suspect's card said they were a whiz at math. So, when a clue revealed a receipt with incorrect math scribbled on it, students knew that the perpetrator couldn't have been the math whiz. Throughout the evening as clues were revealed, people would gradually be crossed off the list of suspects.

The clues started easy and progressed to be more difficult. One clue contained spelling mistakes and each letter that was wrong spelled out the word that needed to be said to the mocktail bartender to find the next clue.

"I love escape rooms, and I thought people would enjoy such an immersive experience," said Jenny Sarkar, a second-year student who is in her first semester as a student community leader. "It was fun to watch students figure out all the different clues and see them have that lightbulb moment."

Sarkar even spent four hours filming a two-minute video that kicked off the big mystery of the missing manager. The video begins with slow

ominous nighttime shots of the dining hall, working up to the climax of the manager being taken by a shadowy figure. Text appears on the video, "You are all here for a reason...one of you is guilty. By the end of the night, we must solve the mystery: the case of the missing manager."

Clues were hidden, incorporated into decorations and even team members.

"I dressed up as a witch, and I actually had a clue hidden in my hat," said Olivia Graves, a third-year student who has been a student community leader for two years. "People I hadn't met before in our operation came up to me asking for the next clue."

After college, she wants to be a high school biology teacher. She's appreciated the public speaking confidence she's gained.

"The Student Community Leader program has helped me come out of my shell and be more extroverted."

-Olivia Graves
Student community leader,
The Ohio State University

Members of The Ohio State University's Student Community Leaders program organized a mystery-themed event titled, "The Case of the Missing Manager," where dining employees came together for a fun Halloween-themed evening. In the top photo from left to right are students Griffith Kowalski, Jenny Sarkar, Bailee Elder, Alexis Loja and Toby Bomser. In the bottom photo from left are Jenny Sarkar, Bailee Elder and Toby Bomser. (Photos courtesy of The Ohio State University)
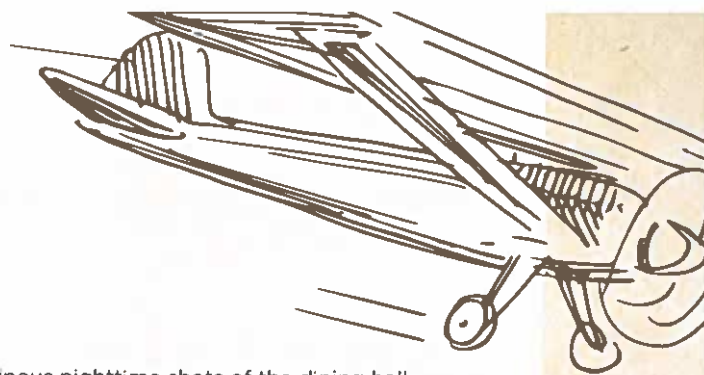
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"The Student Community Leader program has helped me come out of my shell and be more extroverted," said Graves. "I love my job so much. I love my coworkers. I'm so proud of the other student community leaders and how much initiative they took with this event."

They build a sense of belonging and educate student employees about the importance of wellness, development, and community through conversation, as well as active and passive programming. An active program can be an event where student employees can come together outside of work, like the mystery night. A passive program is something that the entire community can interact with at their own pace, such as a bulletin board where students can share get-to-know-me facts.

The program not only provides a way for students to find a place where they belong on campus but creates connections that result in students staying employed, year after year, to work with their friends in dining services with Ohio State's Office of Student Life.

One of the first events hosted by the student community leaders was a tie-dye get-together, but only three people came. The group has improved its advertising and has been proud of how far they've come in hosting engaging student events with the most recent Halloween evening.

"Everyone loved it. I loved it! They loved the drinks, engaging activity, and place to eat and talk," said Loja.

The student community leaders at Traditions at Kennedy hope to continue to plan engaging student events like a kickball tournament, petting zoo, or a mini carnival.

"We're eager to keep going and see where we can take the Student Community Leader program at Ohio State," said Sarkar. §

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