NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY FOOD SERVICES

CAMPUS DINING *today*

SUMMER 2025

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featuring

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- THE EMERGING SCIENCE OF NEURO-NUTRITION
- THE FUTURE IS ON THE MENU



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On the cover: Students sample the wakame Wellington and Atlantic lo mein dishes at the "Under the Sea Showdown" at Boston College last year. (Photo courtesy of Boston College Dining Services)

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SUMMER
2025



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leadership agenda



RAHUL SHRIVASTAV
NACUFS CHAIRMAN
2024-2025
RASHRIV@IU.EDU

Dear NACUFS members and colleagues,

As we embark on another transformative year in campus dining, I'm delighted to present this issue of *Campus Dining Today*, focused on "Trends in Cuisine, Design & Beyond." What an exciting time to be part of our industry—a period where tradition and innovation meet to create entirely new possibilities for the communities we serve.

In my travels across campuses nationwide, I've witnessed firsthand how our member institutions are responding to changing student expectations. Today's students arrive on campus with sophisticated palates and heightened awareness of how their food choices impact both personal and planetary well-being. They've grown up in a world where global cuisines are accessible at the tap of a screen, where dietary preferences are personal expressions, and where the story behind their food matters as much as its taste.

Your innovative responses to these evolving expectations continue to inspire me. Chef-driven concepts featuring authentic global flavors are replacing standardized offerings across our member institutions. These culinary adventures serve dual purposes—providing international students with comforting tastes of home while expanding domestic students' cultural horizons, one thoughtful dish at a time.

Sustainability has rightfully moved from aspiration to operational standard. The comprehensive approaches I've seen go far beyond basic recycling programs. Plant-forward menus showcase seasonal campus garden produce. Zero-waste initiatives transform kitchen scraps into compost that nurtures those same gardens. Water and energy conservation measures are now built into both daily practices and equipment specifications. These efforts create powerful teaching moments about our relationship with food systems while demonstrating institutional commitment to environmental stewardship.

Perhaps most encouraging is how our industry is addressing workforce challenges through creating more fulfilling career paths that emphasize professional development, work-life balance, and meaningful contribution. The culinary teams I meet increasingly reflect the diversity of the student bodies they serve, bringing authentic knowledge and passion to their work. Your cross-training initiatives and educational partnerships are creating vital pipelines for the next generation of dining professionals.

The physical transformation of dining spaces continues to evolve as well. The thoughtfully designed environments I've toured balance operational efficiency with atmospheric elements that create genuine community hubs. Interactive cooking platforms bring food preparation into public view, creating transparency and engagement. Flexible designs allow spaces to transition throughout the day, maximizing facility utilization while meeting students where they are.

Technology's expanding role in our operations continues to impress me—from AI-enhanced waste reduction systems to robotic delivery services navigating campus pathways. These innovations don't replace human connection but rather enhance it by freeing our teams to focus on creative and service-oriented aspects of their work.

What strikes me most in my conversations with you—my fellow members—is how these trends intersect to create something greater than their individual parts. A sustainability initiative becomes more powerful when communicated through technology. A diverse workforce brings authentic perspectives to menu innovation. Thoughtful design creates spaces where communities naturally form around shared meals.

As we navigate these culinary crossroads together, I'm confident that NACUFS members will continue leading the way—not by chasing every trend, but by thoughtfully integrating innovations that align with your institutional values and community needs. The pages that follow highlight specific examples of how your colleagues are doing exactly that across menu development, sustainability practices, workforce initiatives, design approaches, and technological implementation.

Thank you for your continued dedication to transforming campus dining experiences. I look forward to our ongoing conversation about the future of our profession.

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ROBERT NELSON, CAE
PRESIDENT &
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
RNELSON@NACUFS.ORG

As the pages of this issue illustrate, innovation in campus dining is more dynamic than ever. From plant-forward superfoods and neuro-nutrition to electrified kitchens and tech-enabled customization, our member institutions are setting new standards for how we think about food, service, and student well-being. The trends featured in this edition—thoughtfully explored by leaders at Boston College, Michigan State, Ohio University, SUNY Geneseo, and others—reflect not only the creativity of collegiate dining teams, but also a deeper commitment to community impact, sustainability, and student success.

At NACUFS, we've seen that same spirit reflected back to us in real time through the **On the Road Listening Tour 2025**, now underway. From Atlanta to Chicago and Seattle to D.C., these in-person conversations are offering invaluable insights into what's working, what's changing, and where our members most need support. They've underscored a shared desire for collaboration, adaptability, and professional growth across institutions of every size and model. I want to extend my thanks to everyone who has hosted, attended, or shared their voice. We are listening closely, and your input is actively shaping our value proposition.

Looking ahead, NACUFS is focused on delivering resources and experiences that directly support your evolving needs. The **NACUFS 2025 National Conference** in Salt Lake City is just around the corner, and I encourage you to take full advantage of the robust lineup of learning sessions. This year's conference is designed to help you tackle real-world challenges with fresh strategies—from leading through change and managing efficient operations to implementing new technologies and transformative renovations. It's a space where ideas are exchanged, solutions are sharpened, and colleagues become collaborators.

We also have a strong slate of programming planned for the fall, tailored to support both personal leadership and operational success. Our **Executive Leadership Webinar Series**, *Leading Through Change*, will provide timely guidance for navigating uncertainty with confidence. We'll also explore how to communicate the impact of campus dining through our October webinar, *Campus Dining Storytelling: A Strategy-Based Approach*. Two in-person workshops will take place at Stanford University—*Engaging People and Financial Management*—providing hands-on training in key areas. And coming very soon, we'll be introducing a new **online marketing course** designed specifically for campus dining professionals.

At the same time, we are investing in the foundation that powers all of these experiences. This year, NACUFS is undertaking a significant upgrade to our website and data systems to create a more streamlined, user-friendly experience for every member. From event registration and membership renewal to updating staff rosters, managing email subscriptions, or purchasing from the online store, these improvements will simplify your interactions with NACUFS and make it easier to access the resources you need. The new platform will also offer an improved mobile experience, ensuring that you can stay connected and take action wherever you are.

This technology investment directly supports our **2025–2027 Strategic Plan**, approved by the NACUFS Board of Trustees at the end of last year. As we strive to deliver greater organizational value and world-class programming, these enhancements will help us better serve our members and the broader collegiate dining community. Whether you're seeking continuing education, operational tools, or stronger peer networks, these upgrades are designed to drive greater benefit more efficiently while creating space for continuing innovation and advancement.

As we continue to move forward together, I am reminded that our strength as a community lies in our ability to adapt, to share, and to lead with purpose. Thank you for the work you do, and for the commitment you show to your students, your teams, and this profession. I look forward to seeing many of you in Salt Lake City—and to the continued conversations that will guide our future.

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Pitt Eats unveils state-of-the-art transformation



Globally inspired cuisine is on the menu at 11 distinct dining options influenced by Pittsburgh's cultural diversity

Steve Schurr
vice president of operations, Chartwells Higher Education/ Pitt Eats

Maggie Weaver
senior marketing director, Chartwells Higher Education/ Pitt Eats



At the University of Pittsburgh's new Pitt Eats dining facility, Table 33 serves up a rustic yet refined taste of Central and South America—featuring flame-infused fare from the churrasco grill, fresh-pressed tortillas, and rotating tacos and burritos. (Photo courtesy of Pitt Eats)

"By bringing together talented chefs from diverse culinary backgrounds, we've thoughtfully crafted menus tailored to each station's unique experience."

- Steve Schurr, Chartwells Higher Ed vice president of operations

The University of Pittsburgh and Pitt Eats, powered by Chartwells Higher Education, has completed the total renovation of the University of Pittsburgh's largest dining facility, The Eatery.

The two-year, multimillion-dollar project included extensive research with students and campus leaders, transforming the dining hall into a uniquely dynamic space. Introducing 11 new, distinct concepts and an inviting atmosphere to the university, The Eatery—serving, on average, 5,500 students daily—is a destination that serves Pitt's diverse campus community, allowing for a community-focused program that enhances the student dining experience.

"By bringing together talented chefs from diverse culinary backgrounds, we've thoughtfully crafted menus tailored to each station's unique experience," Chartwells Higher Ed Vice President of Operations Steve Schurr said. "Our goal was to create distinct, culturally representative dining options. Despite the variety of cuisines, there's a seamless and inclusive atmosphere as guests move from one station to the next."



Plated tacos are featured from The Eatery's Table 33, which serves up a rustic yet refined taste of Central and South America. (Photo courtesy of Pitt Eats)

Each of the concepts opened as they came online in 2024. They are:

Kokumi: An elegant and fun exploration of Pan-Asian cuisine.

» Intensely flavorful and aromatic experiences provide offerings for pescatarians, vegans, vegetarians, and omnivores alike.

» Ramen is featured every Thursday, with poke-inspired rice bowls every Tuesday.

Saffron: A food journey along the spice road.

» Part of the Kokumi station, the cuisine is inspired by Western Africa and Asia Minor flavors and offers daily vegan and vegetarian options.

Farm Stand: Plant-forward, fresh-inspired eats.

» Fresh, made-to-order salads with fresh-grilled proteins provide offerings for all eaters.

The Delicatessen: Flavorful favorites from our kosher kitchen.

» This dedicated kosher space continues Pitt Eats' local partnership with Elegant Edge Catering.

» Enjoy homemade lox bagels, matzo ball soup, pastrami sandwiches, and chicken shawarma.

Table 33: Rustic yet refined exploration of Central and South American cuisine.

» The cuisine is centered around the churrasco grill, charbroiling, and general flame-infused food.

» Fresh-pressed tortillas, fresh-fried chips, rotating Taco Tuesday, and rotating burritos on Friday.

Cucina: Italian American red sauce and pizza joint with traditional scratch sensibility.

» Find handmade pasta, hand-stretched pizzas, cooked-to-order with fresh ingredients and fan favorites.

» Rotating Italian-inspired features.

Briny Pickle: Familiar deli counter experience with comfort favorites, paying homage to Pittsburghers and their love for pickles.

» Made-to-order options like those found at your typical daily counter, with a mobile-ordering option.

» Soups and house-fried chips available daily.

Food Truck: Fun, fast, familiar favorites in a street food format.

» Offering scratch-made homestyle dishes with quality ingredients amplifying the experience of a diner.

» Chicken tenders and burgers are available all day, every day with mobile ordering.

Flourish: Healthy, inclusive cuisine with allergen-conscious sensibilities.

» Offering consistent and variable options allowing allergen-conscious students regular and diverse experiences.

Unwind: A quiet place to prep for the day or relax and recharge with specialty coffees, teas, and drinks.

» A brand-new coffee shop location specializing in local, hand-crafted special beverages, artisan breakfast sandwiches, local pastries, and creamy gelato.

Market at Litchfield Towers

» Amazon technology is used to accommodate students on the go in this retail convenience store.





At UPitt's new Pitt Eats dining facility, the Food Truck delivers fun, fast, and familiar favorites—serving up homestyle dishes like chicken tenders and burgers all day, every day, in a lively street food-inspired setting with mobile ordering for added convenience. (Photo courtesy of Pitt Eats)

"We put our heart into what we serve, with house-made, from-scratch cooking at the forefront of our menus, and strive to constantly innovate, evolve, and change with our campus community."

-Caitlin Courtney, director of dining for Pitt Eats



"Here at The Eatery, we are changing the preconceptions around college dining," said Caitlin Courtney, director of dining for Pitt Eats. "Anyone coming into the space can see and feel the difference we are making: We've created a food hall with authentic flavors—giving our diverse community food that feels like home—and have added in fusion dishes to bridge flavors and encourage our students to try new things.

"We put our heart into what we serve, with house-made, from-scratch cooking at the forefront of our menus, and strive to constantly innovate, evolve, and change with our campus community."

Embracing Pittsburgh's rich culture and heritage, the distinctive space is designed with student life in mind. It will feature various seating options and environments where students can enjoy meals, participate in study groups, or find a quiet spot to unwind. The Eatery will also include retractable screens for game days and movie nights, transforming it from a dining hall to a social hub. Cutting-edge technology such as an app-controlled jukebox and other innovative features will enhance the dining experience and foster campus connections. §

NACUFS ON THE ROAD LISTENING TOUR 2025



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Listening tour schedule*

May 7	Johnson County Community College - Overland Park/Kansas City, Kansas
May 19	National Restaurant Association Show - Chicago, Illinois
June 3	California State University Long Beach - Long Beach/Los Angeles, California
June 5	Grinnell College - Grinnell/Des Moines, Iowa
June 10	Georgia State University - Atlanta, Georgia
June 12	The George Washington University - Washington, D.C.
June 18	The Ohio State University - Columbus, Ohio
June 24	Oregon State University - Corvalis/Portland, Oregon
June 25	University of Washington - Seattle, Washington

***Dates and locations may be added or changed. Questions? Email membership@NACUFS.org.**



Ramen on the *Run*

HOW OHIO STATE'S SPECIAL PACKAGING MADE NOODLES CAMPUS-FRIENDLY

Debbie Wakefield
marketing specialist,
The Ohio State University
Office of Student Life,
Dining Services

It's no secret that college students love eating ramen. The Ohio State University has taken this collegiate staple to new heights. Ohio State Student Life Dining Services offers gourmet ramen bowls that students can easily enjoy anywhere on campus, thanks to innovative packaging designed specifically for on-the-go ramen.

Leaders in Ohio State Dining Services knew that for a ramen-to-go concept to be successful, the packaging would need to be just right.

Previously, ramen noodles and broth were placed in a plain brown paper bag that was awkward to hold and put the broth at risk of spilling.

To brainstorm an innovative solution to better packaging carryout ramen, Ohio State approached the vendor Sushi Avenue for help.

Jordan Lisowski, vice president of operations of Sushi Avenue, said they both realized that the packaging was going to be just as important as the food.

"We knew that keeping the broth and noodles together for an extended period of time would end up with the customer having soggy, overcooked noodles," Lisowski explained.

Drawing on their experience opening the fast-casual restaurant concept, One Two Three Sushi, Sushi Avenue adapted their custom packaging to meet the needs of busy college students.

The innovative packaging holds a bowl for noodles, vegetables, and toppings, with a lidded container of ramen broth stacked on top. This creates a better end result product for the customer, ensuring that the noodles and toppings remain fresh, and the



Student employees at Oxley's To Go, like Alana Zhang (partially shown), wrap the carryout container around the ramen bowl and broth, securely stapling it shut along with the customer ticket. This process takes less than 15 seconds, leading to faster student pickup times. (Photo by Debbie Wakefield, The Ohio State University)

The innovative packaging holds a bowl for noodles, vegetables, and toppings, with a lidded container of ramen broth stacked on top.

I liked the packaging from the first time I saw it.

-AMIRAH BONNER,
A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT

broth stays sealed and hot until the moment of consumption. This thoughtful approach has been well received by students, staff, and faculty alike.

Dining services opened Oxley's To Go in the spring semester of 2022 as a quick service location near academic buildings in the center of Ohio State's campus.

Student employees wrap the carryout container around the bowl and broth, securely stapling it shut along with the customer pick-up ticket. This process takes less than 15 seconds, leading to faster ticket times. The efficiency of this system has been a key factor in its success, allowing students to order their ramen, then quickly grab their meal and go.

Students pick up their ramen from alphabetized in-store racks, using a comfortable handle, securely holding everything needed to later assemble their meal.

Amirah Bonner, a first-year student from Cleveland studying primary education, said the packaging is a smart idea and makes it convenient to carry her ramen across campus.

"I liked the packaging from the first time I saw it," Bonner said.

Lisa Bannister, operations manager for Oxley's To Go, likes how easy the packaging is for her team. She said that she usually only has to show a student employee how to assemble the packaging one time and after that, they have it.



Oxley's To Go student employee Sandy Yang packages ramen noodles and toppings separately from the broth through a creative packaging design that allows students to enjoy hot ramen anywhere on campus without spills, soggy noodles or awkward carrying. (Photo by Debbie Wakefield, The Ohio State University)

"It's an easy concept to grasp. They pull it over the bowl, fold the handle and staple the ticket," Bannister said. "It's not like a pizza box that has a lot of complicated folds. This one is pretty intuitive to assemble."

Bannister said that students like the unique container and how it's different from anything else on campus.

"I can always tell when anyone has been to Oxley's To Go and ordered one of my five ramen bowls because I see them carrying the unique container," Bannister said. The distinct design of the packaging has become a recognizable feature on Ohio State's campus, making it easy to spot fellow ramen enthusiasts.

The creative packaging design allows students to enjoy hot ramen anywhere on campus without spills, soggy noodles or awkward carrying.

The packaging is important because to-go orders make up a significant portion of Oxley's orders. In the spring 2025 semester, Oxley's sold 4,288 carryout ramen bowls. Over 76 percent of their orders were customer pick-ups using the custom packaging. The rest of the business consisted of delivery orders, using the campus food delivery robots. The most popular ramen bowl was pork belly, comprising 36 percent of orders. The second most popular was beef at 19 percent. No matter the type of ramen, students can rest easy knowing the noodles won't get soggy, overcooked, or spilled.

Ohio State's innovative ramen-to-go packaging is setting a trend in both package design and student pick-up options on college campuses. §

In the spring 2025 semester, Oxley's sold 4,288 carryout ramen bowls. Over 76 percent of their orders were customer pick-ups using the custom packaging.

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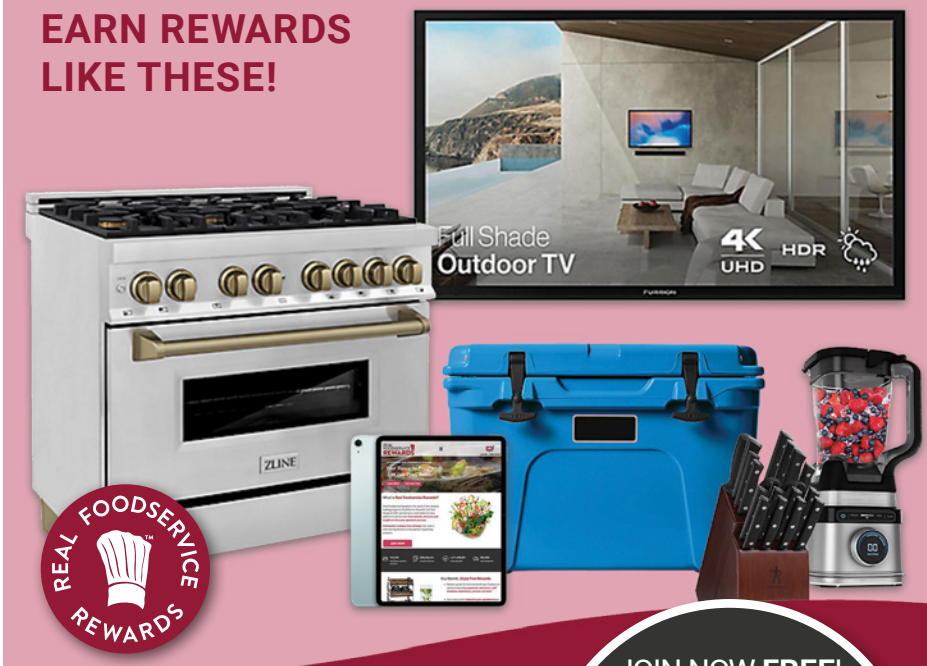

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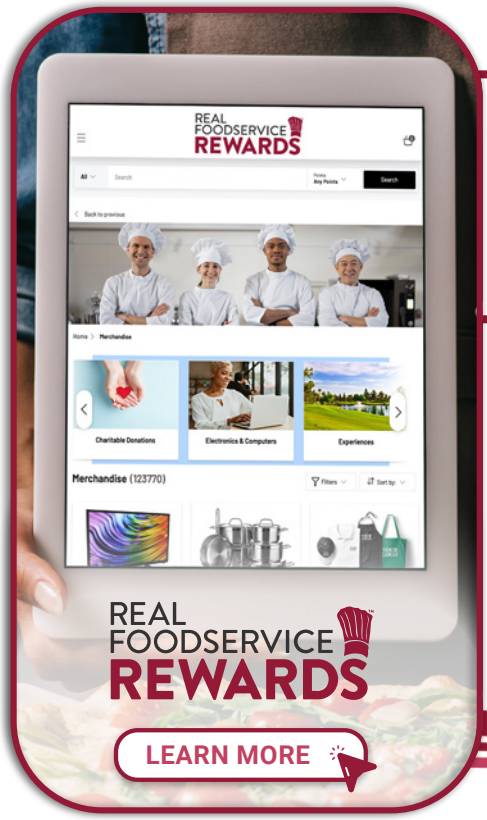

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SUSTAINABLE SUPERFOOD

Kelp-inspired recipes innovate and excite at Boston College

Allison Burns
student, class of 2027,
Boston College

Kendall Lee
student, class of 2026,
Boston College

Morgan Santaguida
student, class of 2025,
Boston College

One of today's hottest food trends is also one of the latest ways Boston College Dining Services (BCDS) is embracing its commitment to sustainability, innovation, and providing students with nutritious and delicious meals. Kelp, a nutrient-rich superfood, promotes environmental sustainability by absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing ocean acidity. Recognizing its benefits and popularity, BCDS last year hosted an "Under the Sea Showdown," challenging each dining location to create and present a unique kelp-inspired dish.

The showcase, held at BC's largest dining hall, featured a beautiful front display that transported attendees underwater. With ocean-themed decorations and staff dressed in creative sea-inspired costumes, BCDS highlighted this trendy superfood's culinary versatility and environmental benefits.

"Under the Sea Showdown"

The Kelp Battle at Boston College, designed by Executive Chef Phyllis Kaplowitz, was a culinary showcase aimed at introducing students to the sustainable, nutritional, and delicious benefits of kelp.

"This event was a fantastic opportunity to highlight kelp's versatility and its positive impact on both our health and the environment," Chef Kaplowitz said. "Seeing our

culinary team's creativity and our student's enthusiasm was truly inspiring."

The contest featured dishes from various dining locations, judged on creativity, sales ability, and presentation. Key judges included Chef Andrew Wilkinson of North Coast Seafood; Sancia Sehdev, a junior and president of EcoPledge; Kurt Straif, a research professor in BC's Global Public Health Program; and a representative from Atlantic Sea Farms, a women-owned business based in Maine and the source of the kelp.

Standout creations included crab cakes with 'sea lettuce slaw;' Atlantic kelp lo mein, kelp meatball pizza; vegetarian sausage and kelp meatball panini with marinara, provolone, and ricotta; wakame Wellington; and kelp and chickpea panini with fripps (house-fried chips). Lower Dining Hall's wakame Wellington dish won the contest, impressing everyone with its flavor and creative take on a traditional beef Wellington.

Educational and interactive

More than just a friendly competition, this event was a unique learning opportunity for students. Throughout the week, BCDS employees set up educational displays to help inform students about kelp's environmental benefits, nutritional value, and role in plant-based diets. The student body's enthusiasm has created a growing demand for more sustainable, plant-based dining options on campus.

Each unit made free samples for students to try each dish and participate in the competition.

One student, a junior who was unfamiliar with kelp's benefits before the event, said, "I didn't know it could be so tasty!"

Why Kelp?

BCDS chose to spotlight kelp in this competition in an effort to align sustainability with nutrition. Because kelp is a regenerative sea crop, it requires no fresh water, fertilizer, or land to grow. It acts as a carbon sink, absorbing carbon dioxide and nitrogen—both major contributors to ocean acidification—while also helping to clean the water as it grows. This makes kelp one of today's most environmentally friendly food sources.

BCDS is constantly expanding vegetarian and vegan dining options. Beyond its sustainability benefits, kelp is also a nutrient

> **This event was a fantastic opportunity to highlight kelp's versatility and its positive impact on both our health and the environment.**
>
> -Executive Chef Phyllis Kaplowitz, Boston College

powerhouse. It is rich in protein, calcium, fiber, and essential vitamins. Its natural umami flavor makes it the perfect meat substitute.

Beyond the showdown

The "Under the Sea Showdown" was not just a one-time kelp event. Since the showdown, BC Dining has continued to explore kelp's culinary potential, using it in soups, salads, and grain bowls across the different dining halls, such as the Cousteau Bowl at Tully's Cafe, one of four campus cafes, and the Atlantic Kelp Lo-Mein Bowl at Lyons Dining Hall.

The success of the "Under the Sea Showdown" further proves that sustainability and delicious food go hand in hand. Integrating kelp into the dining halls introduced a new sustainable ingredient to BC's dining menus and is now part of a broader effort to reduce food waste and promote sustainability in campus dining. BC Dining Services has already implemented several initiatives to cut down on waste, source local and sustainable food, and educate the students in mindful eating. These initiatives include Green2Go—a program designed to reduce single-use disposable waste, and the FRESH (Fairtrade, Regional, Equitable, Sustainable, and Healthy) initiative, a framework for sourcing and sustainable education on campus.

As universities nationwide continue to seek sustainable dining solutions, BC Dining's kelp initiative exemplifies how small changes can make a significant impact. The "Under the Sea Showdown" showcased BC Dining's commitment to sustainable dining while generating excitement for the future of food on campus.

"The Under the Sea Showdown was a fantastic blend of culinary competition, educational outreach about kelp, community collaboration, and bringing a vibrant and delicious experience to our dining hall," said Beth Emery, director of dining services.

With this event's vibrant success, BC Dining looks forward to exploring more eco-friendly ingredients and culinary trends that promote sustainability without compromising taste or quality. The journey toward a greener future is just beginning, and Boston College Dining is proud to lead the movement—one delicious, sustainable dish at a time. §



▲ St. Mary's created crab cakes with sea lettuce slaw for the "Under the Sea Showcase." (Photo courtesy of Boston College Dining Services)



▲ Chefs at Corcoran Commons prepared the winning dish, the wakame Wellington. (Photo courtesy of Boston College Dining Services)



▲ A vegetarian sausage and kelp meatball panini with marinara, provolone, and ricotta, served with fripps, was prepared by the chefs at Boston College's Hillside Dining Hall. (Photo courtesy of Boston College Dining Services)



◀ The Atlantic lo mein prepared by Lyons' Dining Hall for the "Under the Sea Showdown" last year is pictured. (Photo courtesy of Boston College Dining Services)



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EXPERIENTIAL DINING

Inside a trend-forward approach to campus dining innovation

Cheryl Berry
associate director of marketing & communications, culinary services, Michigan State University



As collegiate dining programs strive to stay ahead of industry trends, innovation isn't always about adopting the latest technology—it's about rethinking how to enhance the dining experience with existing resources. To that end, Michigan State University (MSU) Culinary Services tackled a growing challenge with a forward-thinking solution that has reshaped dining culture, fostered engagement, and aligned with evolving student preferences.

MSU's dining plans offer students unlimited access to residential dining halls and 12 weekly Combo-X-Change (CX) meals redeemable at campus retail locations. While CX provided students with convenient meal options, it lacked opportunities for connection and engagement. MSU Culinary Services recognized this gap and responded by creating Experiential Dining, a program designed to give students new ways to bond over food. The program wasn't static; it evolved based on student feedback and participation. Events like karaoke and trivia nights saw lower registration, while chef tables and hands-on workshops filled up quickly, highlighting student interest in more interactive, experience-based dining options. The flexibility of the culinary services team to adjust offerings ensured that the program remained relevant and appealing throughout the academic year.

BLENDING TRENDS WITH ENGAGEMENT

Experiential Dining quickly became a hit with students by offering a range of engaging events inspired by global cuisine and culinary creativity. The program not only provided students with new ways to use their dining plans but also created a sense of excitement and exclusivity around campus dining.

"It's about giving students a reason to gather, try new things, and build a sense of community around food. It's also been incredibly rewarding for our culinary team to have that direct interaction with students and see their excitement firsthand."

-Rebecca Selesky, assistant vice president of culinary services, MSU

Notable EVENTS

Candy making classes

Students learned the art of confectionery, creating sweet treats in an interactive, hands-on session led by MSU's culinary team.

Charcuterie board workshops

With the rise in popularity of artisanal charcuterie, students were guided through the process of assembling beautiful, balanced boards featuring cured meats, cheeses, fruits, and house-made spreads.

Chef's table experiences

MSU chefs curated intimate, reservation-only dining events that highlighted specific cultures and cuisines. These included a Mexican lunch featuring house-made tamales and tortillas and giving students a chance to create their own salsa to take with them.

Partnership dinners

Collaborations with campus and local organizations elevated the dining experience. The Student Organic Farm Fall Fest featured seasonal produce grown on campus, paired with farm-to-table-inspired dishes.

Chef demonstrations

Live cooking demonstrations by MSU's culinary team showcased trending techniques such as ramen bowls, truffle making, and a breading workshop, allowing students to interact with chefs and ask questions in real time.









Left, Dustin Ignash, executive sous chef at Michigan State University, demonstrates candy-making techniques during a hands-on class as part of the campus dining experiential learning program. Right, an MSU student displays meats, cheeses, and fruit she assembled during a workshop that guided students through the process of assembling beautiful, balanced charcuterie boards. (Photos by Jamie Ball, MSU Culinary Services)

EXPANDING PARTICIPATION

A key objective for Cheryl Berry, associate director of marketing & communications and the creator of Experiential Dining, was to ensure that all MSU Culinary Services units had the opportunity to participate in the program. This was no small feat, as MSU Culinary Services encompasses a diverse range of operations, including residential dining, retail dining, MSU Bakers, The State Room (a fine dining restaurant located in the campus hotel), catering, and concessions. While not all units were able to participate, most did—and the results were exceptional. The broad participation allowed the program to offer a wide scope of events, hosted by a variety of teams with unique expertise, further enriching the student dining experience.

"Experiential Dining was born out of a need to rethink how students engage with their dining plans," said Berry. "We wanted to create memorable experiences in small settings that would generate engagement with students. Seeing students connect over food, try new cuisines, and get excited about dining on campus has been incredibly rewarding."

BUILDING COMMUNITY

While these events were designed to engage students, an added benefit was the meaningful connection they created for MSU's Culinary Services team. Experiential Dining gave chefs and culinary staff the opportunity to share their expertise and interact with students in a more personal setting. Instead of working behind the scenes, team members were able to relate with students—explaining techniques, answering questions, and exchanging cultural perspectives. This face-to-face connection fostered mutual respect and deepened the sense of community within MSU's dining program.

"It's about more than providing meals," said Rebecca Selesky, assistant vice president of culinary services at MSU. "It's about giving students a reason to gather, try new things, and build a sense of community around food. It's also been incredibly rewarding for our culinary team to have that direct interaction with students and see their excitement firsthand."



ELEVATING VALUE

The success of Experiential Dining went beyond providing fun events—it enhanced the overall value of the dining plan by transforming meals into experiences. Students were no longer just grabbing a quick meal; they were participating in events that fostered connection, creativity, and cultural exploration.

By aligning with broader trends in the foodservice industry—such as experiential dining, interactive experiences, and culinary storytelling—MSU Culinary Services created a program that resonated with students and positioned the university as a leader in campus dining innovation.

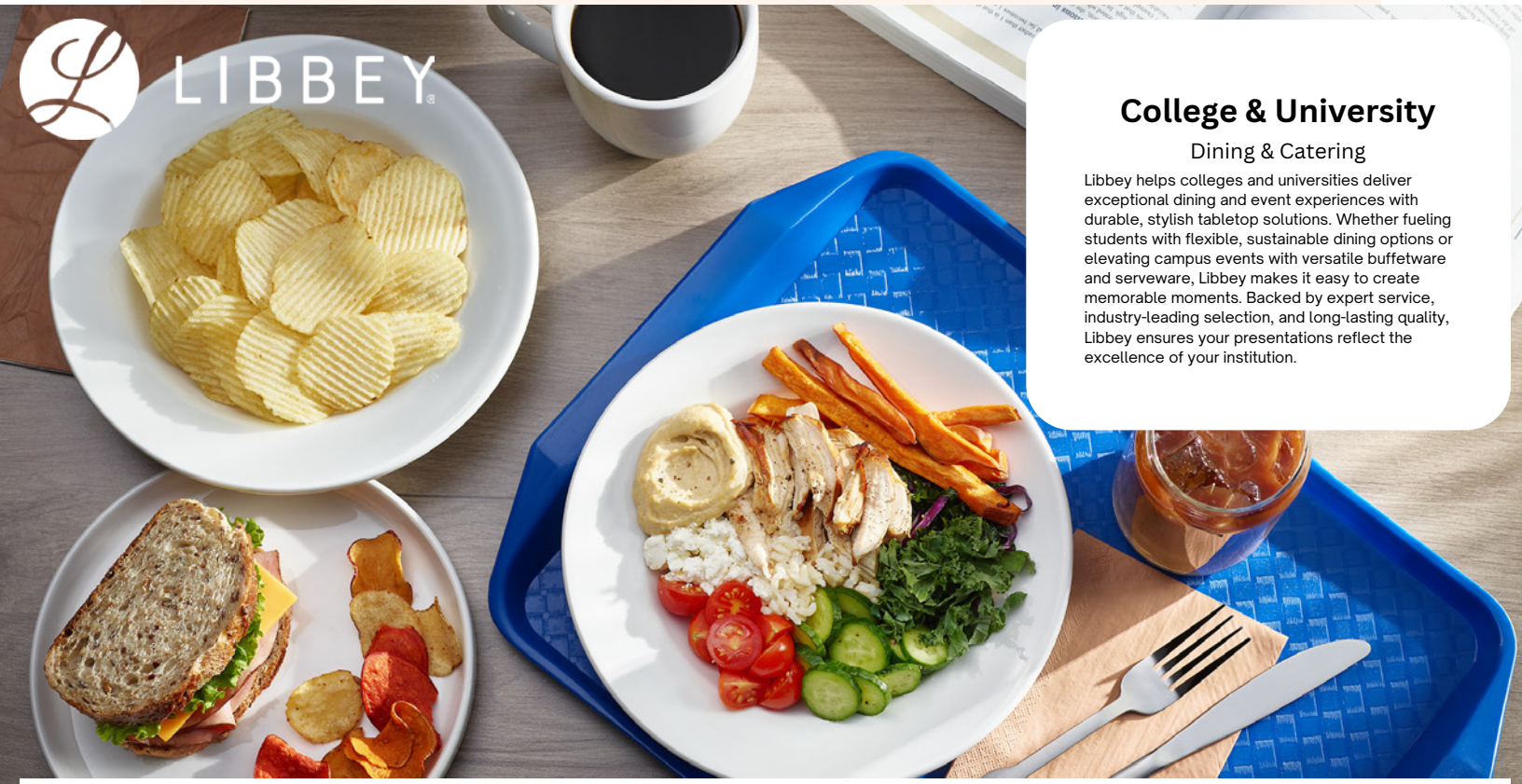
SUSTAINABILITY

A key benefit of Experiential Dining was its impact on sustainability. By encouraging students to use their dining plans for experiences rather than stockpiling packaged food, the program significantly reduced waste at the end of the year. Students became more mindful about how they used their Combo-X-Changes, opting for fresh, prepared meals over packaged snacks.

EXPERIENTIAL DINING'S FUTURE

The success of Experiential Dining at MSU reflects a broader shift in campus dining trends. Students are seeking more than just nourishment—they want connection, creativity, and a sense of belonging. MSU's innovative approach demonstrates that true dining innovation doesn't always require new technology—it requires understanding student needs and delivering memorable experiences that make dining more than just a meal.

By creating a dining culture rooted in exploration and engagement, MSU Culinary Services has set a new standard for collegiate dining, proving that the future of foodservice is as much about connection and experience as it is about convenience. §



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The Emerging Science of Neuro-Nutrition

How food fuels the mind and mood of college students

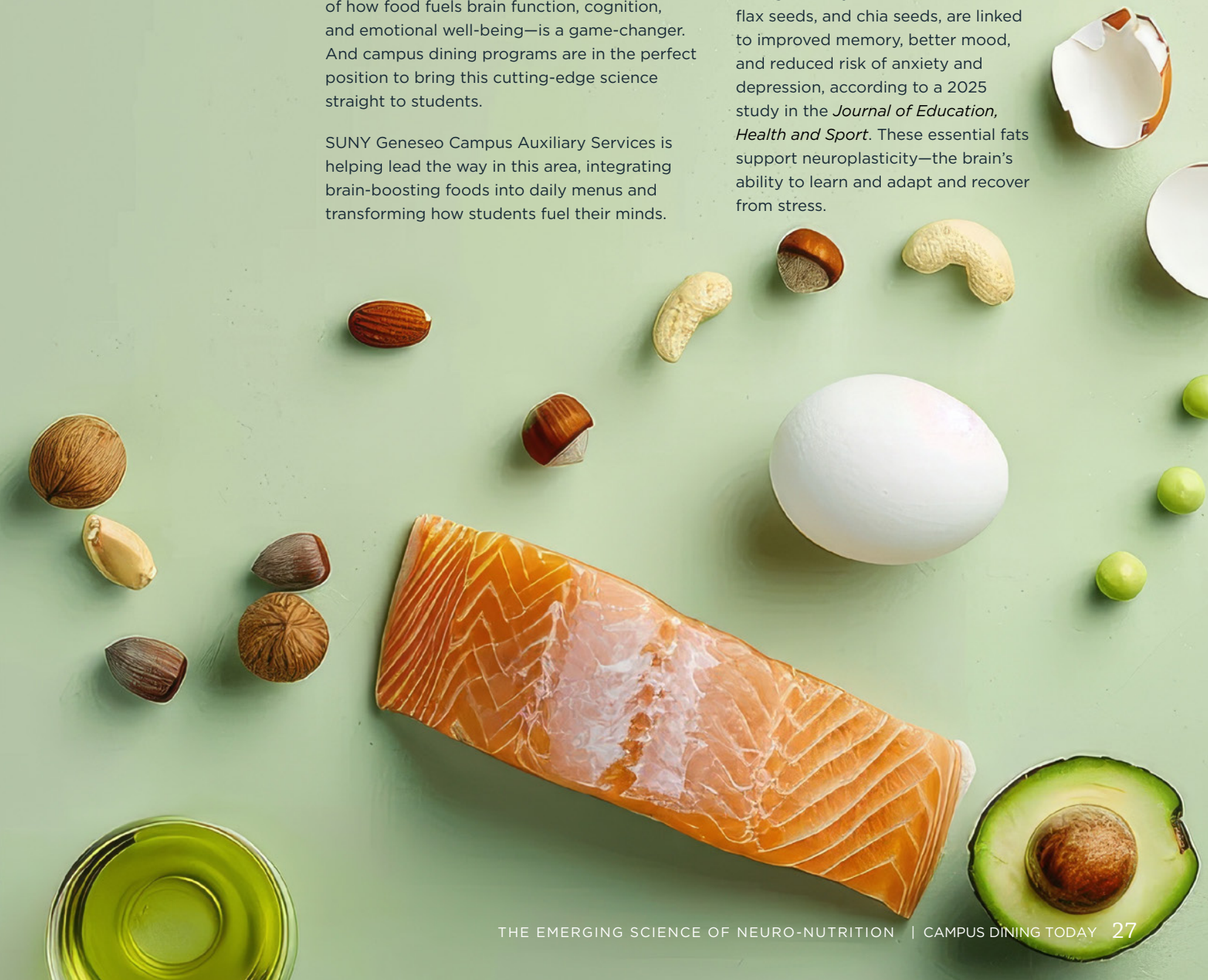
Heather Carrera, DCN, MS, CNS, CDN,
nutrition and wellness manager, campus auxiliary services,
SUNY Geneseo

College life is a whirlwind—late-night study sessions, packed schedules, and the constant pressure to perform. With stress and mental health struggles on the rise, what if students had a secret weapon for sharper focus, better mood, and stronger resilience? The answer might be right on their plates. Neuro-nutrition—the study of how food fuels brain function, cognition, and emotional well-being—is a game-changer. And campus dining programs are in the perfect position to bring this cutting-edge science straight to students.

SUNY Geneseo Campus Auxiliary Services is helping lead the way in this area, integrating brain-boosting foods into daily menus and transforming how students fuel their minds.

Neuro-nutrition at work: What science tells us

Think of the brain as a high-performance engine—it needs premium fuel to operate at its best. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in salmon, flax seeds, and chia seeds, are linked to improved memory, better mood, and reduced risk of anxiety and depression, according to a 2025 study in the *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. These essential fats support neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to learn and adapt and recover from stress.







Salmon and shrimp bowls

Whole grains and fiber-rich foods like quinoa and beans also support neuroplasticity, while in addition, helping to stabilize blood sugar, preventing dreaded energy crashes and foggy thinking. Lean meats, eggs, and legumes provide the amino acid building blocks that help form neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, key players in mood and focus. Even hydration plays a role: just a small dip in water intake can lead to brain fog and sluggish thinking. According to 2012 research in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, dehydration of just 2 percent can impair cognitive function, reducing attention and memory performance.



Micronutrients pack a serious punch, too. Magnesium, found in spinach and pumpkin seeds, supports relaxation and stress management, as shown in a 2016 study out of Germany. Zinc, found in beef, oysters, and lentils, supports emotional regulation and cognitive function. B-vitamins power up energy and neurological health, while antioxidants from colorful fruits and veggies protect brain cells from damage. A 2016 study from *The American Journal of Public Health* even found that eating at least eight servings of fruits and vegetables daily correlates with greater happiness and life satisfaction—food really can be a mood booster!





green immune smoothie



Top left, a salmon and shrimp bowl is pictured from Mary Jemison Dining Hall at SUNY Geneseo. Bottom left, a colorful salad with plant-based protein is shown from Mary's Deli in the Mary Jemison Dining Complex. Top right, a green immune smoothie with spinach, flax, and chia seeds is available at Mary's Smoothie Station. (Photos courtesy of SUNY Geneseo Campus Auxiliary Services)

Listen to your gut: Fueling mental health

The gut and brain are deeply connected, constantly communicating through a complex network of signals. A healthy gut microbiome produces neurotransmitters like serotonin, which contributes to feelings of happiness and well-being. Diets high in refined carbs and sugars can throw off this delicate microbial balance, leading to increased inflammation and lower levels of serotonin and brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a key protein linked to learning and mental resilience. BDNF acts like fertilizer for brain cells, promoting the growth of new neurons and strengthening connections between them. Without enough BDNF, students may struggle with memory retention and emotional regulation. The emerging field of nutritional psychiatry supports this idea as well; diet, the gut microbiome, and mental health are intricately linked.

Fiber-rich and fermented foods—think kimchi, kefir, tempeh, and kombucha—support a healthier gut and may even ease symptoms of anxiety and depression, according to a 2020 study by *Advances in Nutrition*. More than half of dietary intervention studies on anxiety have found that improving gut health through food leads to noticeable symptom relief. Probiotic-rich foods help replenish beneficial gut bacteria, while prebiotic fibers in garlic, onions, asparagus and bananas feed these good microbes, strengthening the gut-brain axis.

While chronic stress is not itself a mental health condition, prolonged exposure to stressors can lead to elevated cortisol levels, and increased risk of developing or worsening mental health problems. However, this is yet another opportunity to use food to help the body regulate cortisol levels and improve focus. Dark chocolate with at least 70 percent cocoa contains flavonoids that stabilize cortisol, enhance dopamine production, and improve cognitive function. Green tea, rich in L-theanine, promotes relaxation while maintaining alertness. These functional foods can be introduced subtly into dining hall offerings, whether in smoothie bars, tea stations, or baked goods.



Easy & accessible brain food

The great thing is, implementing neuro-nutrition doesn't mean a complete overhaul of the menu—it's about making strategic, student-friendly changes. SUNY Geneseo Campus Auxiliary Services is weaving these brain-boosting foods into everyday dining in creative ways:





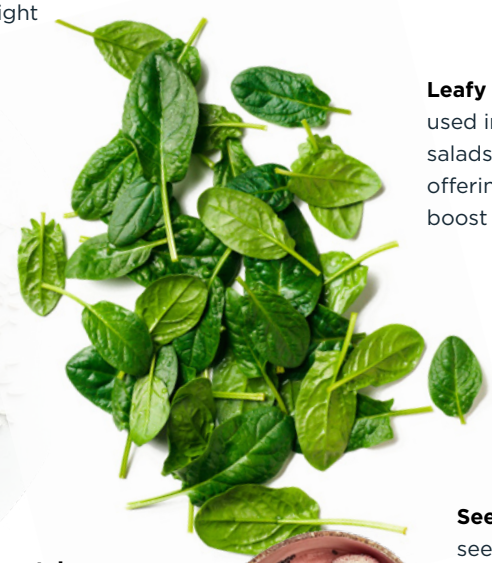


Antioxidant-rich berries are available as smoothie add-ins and incorporated into seasonal drink promotions, offering a delicious way to fight oxidative stress.

Fermented foods like kimchi, tempeh, and miso add a gut-friendly twist to campus dining, appearing in dishes like tahini miso broth for ramen night, sesame tempeh at the vegan station Roots, and kimchi noodles at Twisted Fork.

Omega-3s: Salmon appears weekly at various dining locations, ensuring a steady dose of these essential fats.





Leafy greens: Spinach is used in smoothies, stir-fries, salads, and sandwiches, offering a versatile way to boost magnesium and fiber.

Smart snacks: Brain boxes—grab-and-go snacks featuring foods like acetylcholine-rich hard-boiled eggs, hummus, and colorful veggies—give students quick, nutrient-dense fuel on busy days.

Whole grains and plant protein: Quinoa and brown rice are daily offerings at salad bars, while beans and lentils provide daily hearty, plant-based protein options.



Seeds: Flax and chia seeds are featured at smoothie bars, overnight oats stations, acai bowls, and even incorporated into select dessert offerings, allowing students to easily increase their plant-based omega-3 intake.





Customizable smoothies are available at Milne Library's newest café, Books and Bytes, with science-backed add-ins like choline, green tea extract, and ginkgo—perfect for enhancing focus during study sessions.

Spreading the word, empowering students

Serving brain-friendly meals is just one piece of the puzzle. Engaging students with education and storytelling makes the impact even stronger. Campus auxiliary services raises awareness through monthly *NutriFacts* social media posts, breaking down the science behind neuro-nutrition in a fun, accessible way. For example, an October post for World Mental Health Day highlighted how high-fiber diets are linked to lower depression rates.

Interactive nutrition workshops and pop-up nutrition tables in the library during midterms offer students a more in-depth opportunity to learn about the cognitive impact of their dietary choices. An *Optimize your Mind for Midterms* five-day challenge on social media during midterm week further reinforced the connection between food and mental performance—while keeping the focus on empowerment and enjoyment of food.

Transforming dining: More than just a trend

The 2024 NACUFS report, *Campus Dining: 2030 and Beyond,* highlights the growing demand for food options that enhance cognitive function and mental well-being, particularly among future college students over the next five years. Students increasingly seek meals that support both academic success and emotional well-being, along with educational initiatives that help them understand how food fuels their minds. This trend underscores the importance of incorporating neuro-nutrition into campus dining, positioning these programs as a cornerstone of student wellness education for the years to come.

Integrating neuro-nutrition into campus dining isn't just a trend—it's a movement. By making nutrient-dense foods accessible, educating students on food's impact on cognitive performance, and shifting campus culture toward mindful eating, dining services can have a transformative impact on student success. A well-fed brain is a sharper, more resilient brain, setting students up to thrive academically, emotionally, and physically. When dining programs embrace neuro-nutrition, they don't just serve meals—they empower an entire generation to reach its full potential. §

References are available upon request.



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The Future is on the Menu.

Ohio University crafts a recipe for innovation

Cassie Meek
marketing & design manager, Ohio University Culinary Services

In a rapidly evolving culinary landscape, universities are not just serving food—they are creating a dining experience that mirrors the latest developments in sustainability, health, technology, and global influences. Ohio University Culinary Services is leading the charge, embracing innovations that reflect recent culinary trends in campus dining. Aligning with the Menus of Change initiative, Ohio University has positioned itself as a trailblazer in crafting a forward-thinking dining program that meets the needs of a health-conscious, environmentally aware student body.

Plant-forward menus

One of the most significant trends reshaping the campus dining experience is the shift toward plant-forward menus. According to the Menus of Change initiative, the future of dining revolves around prioritizing plant-based foods, which are not only healthier but also have a lower environmental footprint than animal-based products. Ohio University has embraced this trend with open arms, offering students a variety of plant-based proteins that are both delicious and nourishing.

These proteins, crafted from ingredients such as legumes, grains, and mushrooms, provide an excellent alternative to traditional animal proteins. They are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals, offering students balanced meals that promote long-term health and well-being. Whether it's a hearty black

bean burger, a flavorful tempeh stir-fry, or a smoky lentil chili, the plant-based options are far from an afterthought. They are a core part of the menu, ensuring that every student, regardless of dietary preference, can find satisfying, nutrient-dense meals that support a healthy lifestyle.

This shift toward plant-based eating is also in line with global sustainability efforts. The food production industry is responsible for a significant portion of greenhouse gas emissions, with animal agriculture contributing heavily to this impact. By focusing on plant-forward dishes, Ohio University is reducing its carbon footprint, demonstrating a commitment to the planet while simultaneously meeting the dietary needs of its diverse student body.

Bold international flavors

Incorporating bold international spices and flavors has become another hallmark of Ohio University's dining program. Today's students are increasingly adventurous when it comes to food, and they want options that reflect the diverse global culture in which they live. Ohio University's menus celebrate a wide variety of international cuisines, from the bold heat of Indian curries to the savory umami of Japanese miso-based dishes.

This global approach introduces students to new flavors, making their dining experience far more exciting and engaging. The emphasis on spices, herbs, and bold flavor profiles brings together foods from all corners of the world, allowing students to sample everything from Mediterranean falafel to Korean bibimbap. Such diverse culinary offerings makes campus dining feel like a global marketplace, where cultural experiences are shared through the universal language of food.

Moreover, Ohio University has embraced functional foods—ingredients that provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition. Fermented foods like kimchi and kefir, as well as adaptogenic herbs like turmeric and ginger, are frequently featured in the menus. These foods not only offer unique flavors but also support digestive health, immune function, and overall wellness. By incorporating these powerful ingredients into everyday meals, Ohio University is fostering an environment where students can enjoy food that is not only tasty but also functional for their health.

Sustainable sourcing

In 2025, sustainable sourcing is no longer a trend but an expectation, and Ohio University is fully committed to ensuring that its dining services contribute positively to both the environment and local communities. The university's dedication to sourcing sustainable ingredients is reflected in its partnerships with the OHIO student garden, local farms and suppliers, many of which adhere to organic and ethical farming practices.



In 2025, sustainable sourcing is no longer a trend but an expectation, and Ohio University is fully committed to ensuring that its dining services contribute positively to both the environment and local communities.



Sourcing food locally not only reduces the environmental impact associated with long-distance food transportation but also supports the local economy. Ohio University's commitment to sustainability extends beyond just plant-based foods. This conscious effort to support ethical farming practices aligns with the university's broader goals of reducing food waste, conserving water, and minimizing the environmental footprint of its dining operations.

Sustainable packaging and waste reduction are also integral parts of Ohio University's environmental strategy. The use of compostable containers, a reduction in plastic usage, and a comprehensive food waste management system contribute to a dining experience that is as green as it is delicious. Students at Ohio University can feel confident that the meals they are enjoying are not only good for them but also for the planet.

Tech-driven personalization

As technology continues to revolutionize the foodservice industry, Ohio University has embraced tech-driven solutions to enhance the dining experience for students. One of the most exciting developments is the university's adoption of digital ordering platforms, which allow students to personalize their meals and reduce wait times.

The digital platforms enable students to customize their orders according to their dietary needs, whether that's adjusting for allergens, choosing plant-based options, or selecting specific portion sizes. This level of personalization ensures that students can create meals that are tailored to their preferences, whether they are focused on nutrition, taste, or convenience.

The implementation of The OHIO Micro-Stores on the Athens campus is a game-changer for students, offering convenient access to fresh, on-the-go meals like salads, sandwiches, and more, across campus. These strategically placed micro-stores provide an additional option for students seeking a quick, nutritious bite between classes or after hours when traditional dining halls may be closed. By offering fresh, ready-to-eat options in easily accessible locations, The OHIO Micro-Stores are helping to meet the diverse needs of students with busy schedules, promoting

healthier eating habits and ensuring that students always have a satisfying meal option at their fingertips. Whether it's for a mid-day snack or a late-night craving, these micro-stores are making campus dining more accessible and convenient than ever.

Moreover, Ohio University is exploring the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to anticipate dining preferences, further enhancing the personalized experience. By analyzing student data on eating habits and preferences, the system can recommend dishes that align with their tastes and dietary requirements, offering a truly customized dining experience that puts students in control of their meals.

Thoughtfully designed dining spaces

In addition to the food itself, Ohio University recognizes the importance of the dining environment in shaping the student experience. The design of dining spaces plays a crucial role in fostering connection, community, and well-being. Ohio University's dining halls are thoughtfully designed to create an inviting atmosphere where students can gather, share meals, and build relationships.

From open layouts that encourage social interaction to quiet corners perfect for studying or unwinding, these spaces cater to a variety of student needs. Natural elements like wood, plants, and plenty of natural light enhance the overall ambiance, making dining not just a necessity but an enjoyable and enriching part of campus life.

Setting the standard

Ohio University's innovative approach to campus dining reflects the broader trends shaping the culinary world in 2025. By embracing plant-forward menus, global flavors, sustainable sourcing, and tech-driven personalization, Ohio University is setting the standard for the next evolution of campus dining. These trends are transforming dining halls into vibrant, culturally rich spaces that nourish not only the body but also the mind and spirit. As the future of campus dining unfolds, Ohio University remains at the forefront, leading the way with a dining experience that is as forward-thinking as it is flavorful. §

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Designed for the Future

Michigan Dining's new electric-powered facility reimagines campus dining

Alena Miklosovic
marketing intern,
Michigan Dining

Implementing electric kitchens into this dining facility as well as future facilities is a great way to significantly decrease the university's carbon footprint, supporting the university's overall mission to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040.

With a new residence hall under construction at the University of Michigan, Michigan Dining saw an opportunity to create a cutting-edge, all-electric dining facility, one that prioritizes sustainability, efficiency, and student experience.

The idea for an all-electric dining hall initially came about shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic, during planning for a new dining facility on U-M's north campus. Though the plans never materialized, the Michigan Dining team was excited to be able to transfer some of those designs to this current project.

At its core, the purpose of implementing an all-electric kitchen design is to further the sustainability goals of Michigan Dining as well as the greater University of Michigan. For the last few years, Michigan Dining has had a clear objective to be a driving force behind sustainability initiatives on campus. Implementing electric kitchens into this dining facility as well as future facilities is a great way to significantly decrease the university's carbon footprint, supporting the university's overall mission to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040.

As well as benefiting the environment, this new facility was also designed to benefit the people who will be there every day, namely, the staff. Michigan Dining Senior Director Steve Giardini and Senior Associate Director Susan Cramer stressed



> **As an early adopter of all-electric dining, MDining reinforces their commitment to a greener future, proving that sustainability and modern dining can go hand in hand.**
>
> **-Tara Schroeder, vice president, Ricca Design Studio**



Pictured is a rendering of the new University of Michigan dining facility set to open in the fall of 2026. (Rendering courtesy of Robert A.M. Stern Architects, LLP)

"We wanted equipment that is flexible enough to adapt to different cuisines while ensuring efficiency and ease of use for our entire team daily."

-Frank Turchan, campus executive chef, Michigan Dining

that staff comfort and efficiency were big factors in creating the design for the dining hall. Necessities such as lockers, time clocks, designated break spaces, and changing rooms will be easily accessible, and the team made sure to include a dedicated staff entrance so that staff don't have to enter the building through the loading dock.

"Everything was really designed with the team in mind," Cramer explained. "We want to make their jobs easier."

To ensure that the new dining hall is optimized for efficiency, the Michigan Dining team partnered with Ricca Design Studio, a leading foodservice design consulting firm. Together, they worked on creating a design that aligned with Michigan Dining's goals of sustainability and streamlined functionality. Tara Schroeder, vice president of Ricca, highlighted the eco-friendly kitchens as one of the highlights of this project.

"As an early adopter of all-electric dining, MDining reinforces their commitment to a greener future, proving that sustainability and modern dining can go hand in hand," Schroeder said.

In addition to Michigan Dining administrators and Ricca consultants working on the project, a team of Michigan Dining chefs was also consulted to help ensure a practical and safe working environment. Having a good workflow is essential in a space that will constantly be full of people passing through or stopping to eat; the chefs have shown the unique ability to transfer their current working knowledge to design an efficient, staff- and customer-friendly space from scratch.

At first, some chefs were skeptical about the idea of working in an all-electric kitchen. They were justifiably concerned about working with unfamiliar equipment and the functionality of having only electric appliances on such a large scale.

Luckily, Campus Executive Chef Frank Turchan and the whole design team did extensive research on what equipment would be needed to make all-electric kitchens successful and productive. Turchan provided a lot of valuable input about how to best organize the dining experience, as well as about the electric aspect of the facility.

"We wanted equipment that is flexible enough to adapt to different cuisines while ensuring efficiency

and ease of use for our entire team daily," Turchan said. "Consistency is key in any kitchen, so it was important to choose tools that help everyone maintain quality, streamline operations, and create great food."

Of course, the design team also had to keep in mind the other group of people that will be utilizing the facilities daily: the students of the university. To get input from students, engagement sessions were held where students could share their feedback about their dining hall experiences and suggestions on what they would like this new dining hall to look like.

The design team was also able to take what they have learned from some of the more recent dining hall renovation projects such as South Quadrangle's renovation in 2014 and apply that knowledge to this project.

As Giardini pointed out, Michigan Dining is "constantly innovating to put the students' experience first."

One of the biggest priorities in creating the design was making sure that the dining hall will be easy for students to navigate.

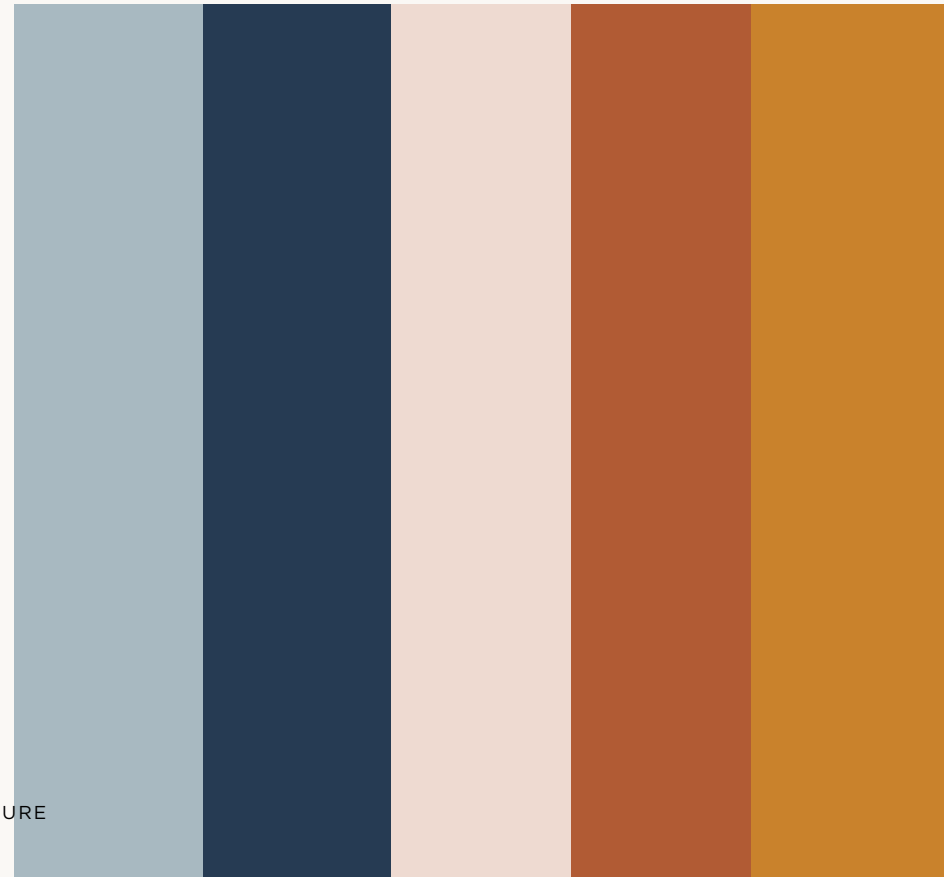
"We don't want it to feel like a maze," Cramer said. "(With the new design) a student can walk in and almost see the whole place in a glance."

Moreover, the dining hall isn't just about the food, it's also about the environment. Michigan Dining was fortunate enough to be able to partner with the U-M College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) to build a teaching kitchen as well as several collaborative spaces within the dining hall's building. The teaching kitchen will be vital for training staff, and it will provide access to culinary education for students at the university through the partnership with LSA.

The collaborative spaces, which include conference rooms, are intended for meetings of students, perfect for student organizations that want to be able to eat and meet at the same time. Each collaborative space will have different seating capacities and different technology components to ensure that each group of students can find a space to fit their needs.

This new dining facility, set to open in the fall of 2026, will be unlike any other dining facility on the University of Michigan campus. Perhaps most prominently, the innovative all-electric kitchen is a first for Michigan Dining, and for university food service as an industry. This dining hall is part of a broader expansion of the university. Michigan Dining is excited to bring their services to a new part of campus and to see how students will interact with this new facility as campus changes geographically. As Michigan Dining expands, this all-electric facility will set a new standard for sustainability and student-centered design, ensuring that the future of campus dining is both innovative and environmentally responsible. §

As Michigan Dining expands, this all-electric facility will set a new standard for sustainability and student-centered design, ensuring that the future of campus dining is both innovative and environmentally responsible.



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1. Gen Z is looking for food to be an experience, not simply a way to fuel their bodies – Mintel, The Gen Z Food Consumer, 2024







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STAY AHEAD

IN A CHANGING INDUSTRY

NACUFS learning resources equip foodservice professionals for what's now—and next

Zoe Voigt
learning and curriculum manager, NACUFS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NACUFS offers a range of learning opportunities, including live events such as webinars, in-person workshops, and conferences. These events provide you with the chance to connect with industry experts, hear from thought leaders, and collaborate with fellow members. But we know that busy professionals often need more flexibility, which is why we also created an on-demand experience that allows you to learn at your own pace, anytime and anywhere.

NACUFS LEARN

One of the most powerful educational resources available to members is NACUFS Learn, our robust learning management system (LMS), which launched at the end of 2024. This new platform is designed to streamline your educational experience by allowing access to a wide array of training content and resources. Whether you're looking to develop new competencies, stay up to date with industry trends, or earn badges for completing online courses, NACUFS Learn provides a seamless and personalized journey toward achieving your professional goals.

Scan the QR code to explore NACUFS Learn

PERSONALIZING YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE

NACUFS Learn makes your learning journey uniquely yours! By ranking your interests in your profile, you will get a customized list of recommended content that fits your career goals. It's easy to quickly register for upcoming webinars and other relevant content. Plus, with your personalized dashboard, you can easily track the courses you've enrolled in, monitor your progress, see the badges you've earned, and stay organized—whether you're completing a course or attending a webinar.

SKILLS ASSESSMENT AND CONTINUOUS GROWTH

Everyone's path to professional growth is different. To help you identify your strengths and areas for improvement, NACUFS offers a skills assessment tool. With the results, you can explore the *NACUFS Collegiate Dining Body of Knowledge™*, organized into five key topic areas to guide you in enhancing your skills and expertise in collegiate dining.

DIVERSE LEARNING FORMATS

No two professionals learn the same way, which is why NACUFS Learn offers a variety of learning formats to cater to different preferences and schedules. There are live webinars and town halls to attend, but also online courses, micro courses, microlearning videos, and recorded webinars that you may have missed or want to revisit, that are all available when you are.

This diversity of learning formats ensures that members have ample opportunities to engage with the content in a way that fits their learning style. Whether you're looking for quick, focused lessons or more comprehensive courses, NACUFS Learn has you covered.

EARNING CERTIFICATES AND BADGES

As you progress through the various learning courses, you'll have the opportunity to earn badges to demonstrate your commitment to continuous learning and your expertise in key areas of collegiate foodservice. All badges also come with a certificate that can be printed. These badges and certificates not only enhance your professional profile but also showcase your dedication to growth.

STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE

In the ever-changing field of collegiate foodservice, it is crucial to stay informed about the latest trends and best practices. NACUFS' learning programs are designed to equip you with the knowledge and skills necessary for career advancement.

By taking advantage of these professional development opportunities, you are investing in your future success. Start exploring these resources today to unlock your full potential!

NEW CONTENT



Marketing for Foodservice: *Coming soon!*

Enhance your marketing strategies to boost awareness of your department and create impactful guest experiences in this online course designed for foodservice administrators with beginner-to-intermediate marketing knowledge. In this interactive course, you will learn how to develop a marketing plan, implement evaluation strategies, establish a brand identity, employ integrative marketing techniques, and create a crisis management plan.

Strengthening Team Culture in Campus Dining: *A new micro course*

In this short, interactive online course, you will learn how to enhance your team's culture through a philosophy of hospitality. Explore foundational concepts that shape our interactions and foster meaningful engagement in a welcoming environment. Participants will practice techniques that promote inclusivity and openness, ensuring that both guests and team members feel valued in dining. This course will encourage you to reflect on your influence and explore how you can contribute to cultivating a genuinely hospitable workplace.

UPCOMING WEBINARS
FALL 2025

"Campus Dining Storytelling: A Strategy-Based Approach"

Continuing the series of relevant and timely webinars that have taken place throughout the spring, Evan Olsen, dining director at the Florida Institute of Technology, will lead, "Campus Dining Storytelling: A Strategy-Based Approach," this fall. In this informative session, Olsen will share effective strategies for communicating your dining program's story to key audiences, including administration, students, and the wider public.

Discover how storytelling can enhance the impact of your program, foster stronger connections, and increase visibility. Whether your goal is to elevate the reputation of your dining services or engage your campus community, this session will provide actionable tools and inspiration to help ensure your story is heard.

Executive Leadership Webinar Series: "Leading Through Change"

We are excited to announce the Executive Leadership Webinar Series 2025: "Leading Through Change," coming this fall. This series will explore effective strategies for managing crises, adapting to the evolving landscape in higher education, and navigating these challenges with agility. Designed specifically for university administrators and directors, it will be hosted by three experts in the field. Join us for this valuable opportunity to enhance your leadership skills and gain insights into overcoming challenges in the current educational environment.

IN-PERSON EVENTS

Engaging People Workshop

November 2025 | Stanford University

Join us for a two-day workshop this November designed to transform your approach to leadership, team management, and employee retention. Whether you are an aspiring manager, new to management, or have years of experience, the Engaging People Workshop will offer fresh insights and practical strategies focused on motivation, leadership, conflict resolution, teamwork, and recruitment.

This interactive workshop promotes collaboration among participants, enabling you to explore overarching strategies and develop a framework for effective team management!

Financial Management Workshop

November 2025 | Stanford University

The Financial Management Workshop is an engaging NACUFS event designed for individuals seeking to enhance their skills in the financial management of collegiate dining operations. This two-day workshop offers a valuable opportunity to elevate your financial management expertise.

As an extension of the online course, Financial Management for Foodservice, this workshop will feature in-depth discussions in a small group setting, allowing participants to work collaboratively as a consultative group to troubleshoot and improve each other's operational effectiveness.

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From Kitchen to Career

Campus dining as a launchpad for tomorrow's workforce



Katie Nielsen, MBA
assistant general manager,
dining commons,
Rochester Institute of Technology

A general manager reviews student development approaches across multiple campuses and reflects on their role in shaping student experiences.

Campus dining unites future engineers, artists, mathematicians, and business leaders around food. This unique proximity is a strategic advantage that few other businesses have. At the same time, we as campus dining professionals have a deep responsibility to the students we are training for the workforce.

The students learn to be on time. They learn how to take feedback, how to problem solve, and how to take initiative. These students don't just enter the workforce trained—they enter it practiced.

Preparing adaptable, capable professionals is among the most significant legacies our industry offers.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Campus dining is uniquely positioned as the melting pot of campus, bringing diverse disciplines together in one space, exchanging ideas, communicating, and connecting. Campus dining provides that opportunity to its diners, and even more importantly, to its employees.

Roles in dining equalize student experiences—work ethic, communication, and follow-through matter more than major and title. Everyone washes dishes, serves food, solves problems, and shows up, building critical professional skills and practiced dependability.

"It's all about connecting with your people every day and celebrating their achievements on the floor and as important members on our team," explained Betsy Helgesen, who leads the Dining Student Leadership Program at the University of Minnesota. "When you connect with your team and create a safe and positive work space, they in turn are in a great place to take care of your guests."

A job in campus dining offers students a structured environment where they can develop essential soft skills. While their college courses prepare them technically, it's how they navigate challenges, take responsibility, and collaborate under pressure that sets them apart. Dining gives students real stakes and opportunities to make mistakes, learn from them, and grow within a supportive structure. It is where they begin practicing adulthood.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Structured leadership programs allow students to practice management, conflict resolution, and proactive problem solving.

One of my best student managers came to me at one point, overwhelmed with his schedule and ready to quit. Instead of quitting, we had a conversation about time management and honoring commitments. I told him he would never get better at managing a heavy workload if he didn't start practicing now, and as a student that crafted his own major in physics and math, he could expect a heavy workload throughout his academic career. We fixed his schedule to be manageable, he stayed, and as he grew, he became one of our most reliable student managers.

At the University of North Dakota, the Dining Student Leadership Program formalizes that development for student leadership.

"Networking is another layer to this program," said Megan Wasylow, training specialist manager at UND. "Not only are our student leaders connecting with professionals throughout campus, but they are connecting with each other. Student leaders are connecting with each other outside of their dining units, and we're seeing a closer knit community and a perceivable increase in student staff retention from spring to fall, even after only one year."

The Hawkeye Work Grant at the University of Iowa integrates research into student employment.

"This is a collaborative program between the office of student financial aid, the provost office, university housing & dining, and graduate students in our master's program of higher education in student affairs," said Dr. Brenda Buzynski, University of Iowa's assistant provost and director of student financial aid. "Students shared that this opportunity provided them with their first on-campus job, and they realized that working in UHD helped them build skills they would need for any future job."

Preliminary data collected since the Hawkeye Work Grant program's 2022–2023 pilot year indicates higher retention rates and slightly elevated GPAs among participants compared to non-participants, with student involvement steadily increasing each year.



From left, students Jenna Kelley and Amal Aboushanab from Rochester Institute of Technology's restaurant and event management course participate in a collaborative experiential learning activity with campus dining. Co-taught by Katie Nielsen (author of this article), dining commons assistant general manager, and Edward Ganster (pictured), a faculty partner from the hospitality department, the course bridges academic theory with operational practice. This collaboration exemplifies an integrated approach where campus dining serves as a living laboratory for workforce development and cross-departmental learning. (Photo by Milagros Lombardo, Rochester Institute of Technology)

> "It's all about connecting with your people every day and celebrating their achievements on the floor and as important members on our team."
>
> -BETSY HELGESEN, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CAMPUS RETAIL, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH

Buzynski noted that students also found flexibility, community, and confidence through their work experience.

These programs show how campus dining can go beyond simply offering jobs. They become mentorship pipelines. Productivity begets productivity. When students see their mentors committed to a greater mission, they absorb that work ethic. They start modeling leadership, taking ownership, and most importantly, they start seeing themselves as professionals.

TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION, AND THE FUTURE OF CAMPUS DINING

As campus dining shapes workforce skills, recent shifts toward technology further amplify students' need for adaptability. Mobile ordering, kiosks, and delivery platforms have pushed campus dining operations into a digital-first reality. While technology now captures many of the

These spaces signal that dining can be both service and classroom—and that human connection must be built in, not taken for granted.

basic interactions—placing orders, processing payments, managing inventory—those touchpoints that once allowed for human connection have been streamlined or eliminated entirely.

This shift leaves student employees in a unique position: there are fewer interaction points built into their job positions, while they're also being called upon for the problems that technology can't solve. That moment—a frustrated guest, a broken system, an unexpected challenge—is now the training ground for empathy, composure, and problem solving. These are no longer "optional" soft skills; they are survival tools in a service world increasingly impacted by automation.

Embracing this learning opportunity, Cornell University's Discovery Kitchen integrates food education with professional development. Dustin Freeley, assistant director of Cornell Dining, and Anna Gallow, director of enterprise marketing and promotions, emphasized parallels between kitchen tasks and professional scenarios.

"You enter with a plan and sometimes that plan encounters challenges, but you're still expected to deliver in a timely manner with positive results," Freeley said. "This encourages creativity, problem solving, teamwork, and communication, all of which are skills vital to success in any profession, or field of study."

Beyond skill building, Discovery Kitchen also emphasizes the communal power of food.

"The convenience of grab-and-go creates a short temporal experience of eating," Freeley explained. "Adding communal preparation to food items… is a great way to connect and share a human experience."

Innovation kitchen labs represent a natural next step for campus dining programs, integrating academic goals, hospitality practices, and operations into immersive learning ecosystems. These spaces signal that dining can be both service and classroom—and that human connection must be built in, not taken for granted.

In an era marked by hospitality labor shortages, digital transformation, and growing reliance on automation, campus dining programs uniquely equip students with adaptability, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills that automation cannot replace.

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

Understanding campus dining as more than simply meal service, but rather as a team of professionals and educators preparing the future workforce, highlights our deep responsibility and immense potential. We can solve business problems using the diverse talents of our own student body, and in doing so, we give them real stakes, real challenges, and real growth.

Kory Samuels, a longtime dining executive and campus leader at Rochester Institute of Technology, put it best from a student's perspective: "'My mom isn't here, but you're here.' This isn't merely about workforce development—it's about lifeforce development."

Dining staff may not be family, but the time spent in these kitchens becomes deeply formative. It's where students

> “‘My mom isn’t here, but you’re here.’ This isn’t merely about workforce development—it’s about lifeforce development.”
>
> -KORY SAMUELS, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF AUXILIARY SERVICES, ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

learn how to show up, how to respond to pressure, and how to serve others with intention.

“Food is cool,” Samuels added, “but do not minimize your impact on the community. … Everyone needs to eat. It’s like an olive branch.”

Dining is often the only part of a student’s life that crosses boundaries—between departments, between class years, and between different ability levels. That reach gives us not only influence, but responsibility.

Campus dining’s impact extends beyond meal service; it shapes workforce readiness. By collaborating closely with academic departments, dining programs can turn operational challenges into practical immersive learning experiences.

Graduates leave not just with degrees, but with professional habits shaped daily by campus dining experiences. Preparing adaptable, capable professionals is among the most significant legacies our industry offers. §

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Campus integrates emerging technologies to reduce waste and rethink dining operations



On any given day, it's not hard to spot the problem of waste on a university campus. Overflowing trash bins, mountains of single-use containers and cutlery, and discarded food waste paint a clear picture of the environmental challenge facing higher education institutions.

According to a 2022 report from Environment and Climate Change Canada, "over half of Canada's food supply is lost or wasted annually." Since the 1950s, approximately 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced globally, with about 79 percent of that plastic currently residing in landfills or the environment, according to a 2017 research report in the journal *Science Advances*.

Reusable container programs have emerged as a key trend in campus dining, helping institutions reduce waste, streamline operations, and enhance student engagement. As the University of Guelph's campus has shifted toward sustainability through the evolution of its reusable container program and the integration of technologies, the hospitality services team has learned key lessons and practical strategies relevant for institutions seeking to enhance their sustainability efforts through technology.

A campus compost bin filled with orange peels at the University of Guelph is pictured. The university is piloting two complementary technologies on campus that help track waste and consumption, allowing the hospitality services team to make adjustments that save costs while minimizing waste. (Photo by Samantha Casey, University of Guelph)

Since the 1950s, approximately 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced globally, with about 79 percent of that plastic currently residing in landfills or the environment, according to a 2017 research report in the journal *Science Advances*.

Evolution of the #IAmReusable program

Recognizing its role in reducing waste, hospitality services at the University of Guelph introduced the #IAmReusable program in 2011. This waste reduction initiative allowed students and staff to become green container program members at a one-time cost of $5. Containers could be returned in exchange for an #IAmReusable card, which could be redeemed for a new container during the next meal purchase.

While successful in reducing single-use packaging waste and encouraging sustainable behavior, it wasn't without limitations. Tracking participation rates and environmental impact was challenging due to the lack of a data collection system. The upfront cost of program participation also limited full program adoption. Furthermore, container loss and replacement costs strained efficiency and finances. A more efficient, scalable, and cost-effective solution was needed.

A shift to Reusables

To modernize this system, hospitality services partnered with Reusables.com. The change was driven by several key goals including increasing container return rates, the ability to track reusable container usage and streamline the return process, and to measure the program's environmental impact.

Implementation process

This transition required careful planning and execution. The project team conducted location walk-throughs to determine optimal return and check-out points, product testing, pre-implementation meetings with key stakeholders, staff training and marketing campaigns to build awareness.

As with any major change, the team encountered resistance in the form of questioning the need for a new program, while others were hesitant to adapt to a new technology. The team addressed these concerns through clear communication, sharing important data, and emphasizing the benefits of the program.

Results

The impact of the new Reusables program was immediate. Since launching in August 2024, the program has recorded approximately:

- **11,400 participants**
- **366,000 reuses**
- **18 tons of disposable waste diverted**
- **73 tons of carbon emissions saved**
- **365,000 litres of water saved**

These results demonstrate the significant impact of the program and a significant step in reinforcing a culture of sustainability in university dining halls.

The goal is to empower your team and students—not to replace them.



To modernize a more limited program first implemented in 2011, the University of Guelph Hospitality Services has partnered with Reusables.com, a technology platform founded in Vancouver, British Columbia in 2021. A Reusables bin is pictured. (Photo courtesy of Reusables.com)





Top, compost bins on campus are collected by the City of Guelph. Above, a full recycling bin on campus is pictured. The University of Guelph is investing in improvements to its sustainability programs by partnering with a variety of forward-looking technology companies to support their already robust efforts. (Photos by Samantha Casey, University of Guelph)

Expanding with Winnow and Metafoodx

To build on this success, University of Guelph Hospitality Services is piloting two complementary technologies:

Winnow is an AI-powered food waste tracker that uses smart scales and image recognition to monitor waste. It helps identify patterns in food preparation and consumption, enabling the kitchen team to adjust production quantities, rework schedules, and find innovative ways to repurpose trims and leftovers.

Since launching the pilot program, Winnow has helped identify the top wasted items, allowing our team to adjust production and reduce both labour and food waste. For example, identifying high waste in roasted vegetables led to reduced quantities, improving efficiency and reducing labour costs.

Metafoodx is a data-driven platform that tracks actual consumption and leftovers at the end of service periods. As an example, insights into scrambled egg consumption and breakfast buffet leftovers have allowed for better timing of production to enhance quality and limit leftovers.

These technologies have improved staff accountability, enhanced production control, and enabled the culinary team to adjust menus and reduce overproduction, significantly decreasing waste. Long-term benefits include cost reduction, increased revenue through optimized spending, and lower greenhouse gas emissions from composting, transportation, and production.

Practical strategies for implementing new technologies

KEY LESSONS

1. Team buy-in is essential

People are naturally wary of change, especially when things have been done the same way for a long time. Providing people with the information they need in advance will help them understand the "why" behind the decision. Be prepared to answer questions and take feedback. Use concrete examples to show how the change will benefit them directly.

2. The power of proper training and documentation

Most teams include individuals with varying levels of technological comfort and experience. Take the time to develop clear training materials and offer hands-on training sessions. People are more open to change when they understand how it works and don't feel overwhelmed by it.

3. Communication is key

Make sure all key stakeholders are aware of upcoming changes well in advance, so they have time to prepare. Use multiple communication channels to reach people where they are. Transparency builds trust and reduces resistance.

4. Be purposeful with implementations and integrations

New technology is exciting—but it should enhance the student and staff experience, not complicate it. Ensure that the technology being implemented is intuitive and adds value rather than creating frustration.

TIPS FOR OVERCOMING COMMON CHALLENGES

1. Plan, plan, and plan some more

Do your research, work with companies that align with your values and goals, and make sure the technology supports your strategic priorities. Proper planning reduces the risk of missteps.

2. Be flexible and allow for trial and error

Growing pains are inevitable when adopting new technology. Be adaptable and open to refining processes as you learn what works and what doesn't.

3. Know when to cut your losses

Letting go of a system or product you've invested time and money into is tough — but sometimes a sunk cost is just that. Ask yourself:

Is this efficient?

Is it making my team's work easier?

Is there a better option available?

Are we getting a worthwhile return on the time, effort, and data being put in?

4. Don't be afraid of change

Technology is constantly evolving, and there are often more efficient ways to do things than "the way it's always been done." The goal is to empower your team and students—not to replace them.

The road ahead

Sustainability in campus dining has become more than just a buzzword—it's a necessity. In the face of this growing issue, universities and colleges have a unique opportunity—and responsibility—to lead the charge toward sustainability. By leveraging innovative technologies and data-driven insights, campus dining operations can help create a more sustainable future for the next generation. §

References are available upon request.

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