

The Gunrock

University of California, Davis

Introduction:

When creating the menu, we wanted it to reflect the theme of the restaurant—sports-inspired, casual, for everyone and, above all, delicious. Each menu item is named in connection to a sports theme or saying. We crafted the menu with a variety of sections, including bites, grub and tacos, salads, playmaker mac and cheese, desserts, beer and wine and our limited time offerings (LTOs). We also adapt to current trends and customer preferences, specifically with our Smash Burger and Quesabirria Tacos, which started out as LTOs and moved to full-time menu items based on feedback and popularity.

Essay:

The majority of the recipes at The Gunrock are created by our in-house staff, who are consistently involved in menu development. We are also proud to partner with Sudwerk Brewing Co., a beloved local brewery, to offer a variety of beverages for those over 21. Keeping students' budgets in mind, we've designed portion sizes and prices to accommodate a diverse range of tastes and needs, ensuring there's something for everyone. For those looking for more affordable options, menu items like our mac and cheese and potato tacos are priced with students in mind. We also offer vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free and halal options, so every guest can find something to enjoy.

At The Gunrock, it's not just our cooks and chefs who are involved in creating and serving our delicious dishes—our students play a key role in learning how to prepare these dishes, gaining valuable life skills that will help them in their futures. We take pride in using high-quality ingredients and ensuring that every dish is made to order.

Introduction:

The Gunrock proudly showcases its UC Davis spirit through its decor, with a strong emphasis on celebrating Aggie sports teams. Partnering with UC Davis Athletics, The Gunrock hosts exciting watch parties, posts game schedules and displays memorabilia. The sports theme extends beyond the decor, offering a range of activities like board games, darts, foosball and cornhole. The Gunrock also collaborates with Sudwerk Brewing Co. to host popular monthly trivia nights and co-hosts a variety of events with campus departments and student-run organizations, including the Love Lab, Women's Resources and Research Center and the National Society of Black Engineers.

Essay:

The Gunrock serves as the go-to spot for the men's basketball team's pre-game meals and is a hub for departmental events. Each year, The Gunrock hosts the Iron Brew competition celebration. Students from the practical malting and brewing course in the Department of Food Science and Technology craft their own beer recipes at the campus brewhouse located within the Robert Mondavi Institute for Wine and Food Science. The winning team is invited to collaborate with brewers at Sudwerk Brewing Co. to scale up their recipe commercially, with the resulting beer being served at The Gunrock.

But The Gunrock isn't just for beer lovers—it's also a place for celebration. From year-end parties to events hosted by student organizations, faculty and staff, this space is a central meeting point for the campus community. The Gunrock was designed as a place for everyone to come together with students, staff and athletic teams stopping by before games. In December 2024 alone, The Gunrock hosted 5 winter gatherings and 19 large group events. The venue itself is thoughtfully designed to accommodate both intimate gatherings and larger crowds, with easily reconfigurable and ample seating and tables for up to 108 guests.

Introduction:

A huge marketing push is our limited-time offerings (LTOs). The LTOs occur for 3 weeks at a time every quarter and are advertised on LCDs, in the print and online menus and in Student Housing and Dining Services' 2 newsletters—the Aggie Reader, which goes out to a list of 11,000 students and staff and the Davis Dish, which goes out to 1,200. If an LTO is especially well-liked and sells well, there is the opportunity for it to become a permanent menu item.

Essay:

Marketing for The Gunrock includes a wide variety of print and digital assets, along with LCDs, a website and swag. Marketing also oversees the cohosting of events and sends out emails to on-campus departments and clubs.

One of the challenges we faced with marketing The Gunrock was fighting the perception that it was only a place for faculty and for students over 21 since it serves alcohol. We instead turned the brand into a location that serves everyone. We achieved this by hosting a grand reopening in 2022. We changed the decor, enhanced the music, updated the menu, added games and changed the service style from table service to counter service. We welcomed everyone in and offered coupons and specials. Slowly, but persistently, the word spread.

We also dedicate ourselves to customer feedback, which we get through student surveys and a secret shopper program, and use it to improve the menu, service and overall experience. Sara Spencer, who rated her visit a 9 out of 10, states, "The environment was very inviting and welcoming! I felt at home while there. The food, prices and staff were all great. The Quessabirria tacos were amazing!"

Introduction:

At The Gunrock, our goal is to have a menu that everyone can enjoy. We take pride in having a menu that caters to special diets, including halal, vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free. We source ground beef and chicken that is halal and ensure a large portion of our menu can be made vegan or vegetarian by removing or adjusting sauces and cheeses. The Gunrock also strives to keep our menu fresh and exciting by rotating our salads every quarter and limited-time offerings (LTOs) every 3 weeks.

Essay:

Every year, The Gunrock competes in the Yolo Vegan Food Challenge and consistently makes it as a top finalist. The first year, The Gunrock entered in their Oyster Mushroom Po'Boy Sandwich. The second year, The Gunrock competed with their delicious Carrot Hummus and Falafel Plate with quinoa tabbouleh, which won second place and best dish. This year, we are serving Carrot Shawarma.

We also value and prioritize quality ingredients. We use ingredients from our partner and beloved local brewery, Sudwerk Brewing Co., in various LTOs, like the beer-battered fish tacos. These tacos also include fresh and local fish from Real Good Fish Company based out of Monterey, CA.

Introduction:


The Gunrock strives toward sustainability in its menu items and containers. With reusable food containers and a rotating menu, The Gurnock achieves limited waste. Smash Burgers are made with humanely raised beef from Creekstone Farms. The Gunrock's salads may change every quarter to reflect the seasons, but the ingredients are always from UC Davis' student farm. The Gunrock also uses fish from the local and sustainable company Real Good Fish.

Essay:

We have seen an increase in sales year over year, both in numbers and through the increase in reservations for large parties, meetings, holiday gatherings and happy hours. From the 2022-2023 school year to the 2023-2024 school year, The Gunrock's sales rose 43% year over year, with a specific uptick in sales for LTOs.

We've also received positive feedback from a variety of sources, including our secret shopper program. Summer Barber, who rated her experience a 10 out of 10, states, "Overall, the staff at The Gunrock are amazing! My overall impression of the menu was that it was really thought out, and I really enjoyed the meal. It was filling and the portion sizes are great. I would definitely come back."

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