

## NACUFS (2025)

### Outreach & Education Program of the Year

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Breaking Bread, Building Bridges: UC Merced Dining and Division of Equity, Justice, & Inclusive Excellence Guest Speaker Series

University of California Merced

#### Introduction:

UC Merced Dining's innovative cultural food guest speaker series, launched in collaboration with the Division of Equity, Justice, and Inclusive Excellence began in October 2023. This series celebrates the intersection of food, culture, and social justice by featuring renowned chefs, authors, and community leaders who share their culinary journeys and cultural heritage. By highlighting underrepresented voices, the series fosters dialogue around diversity and equity while educating students, staff, and community members about the stories behind the food they enjoy. From indigenous recipes to global flavors, the series enriches the campus experience and inspires deeper connections through shared meals and stories.

#### Essay:

UC Merced Dining's guest speaker series exemplifies its commitment to outreach and education by fostering cultural understanding through food. Created in collaboration with the Division of Equity, Justice, and Inclusive Excellence, the series celebrates diverse culinary traditions and their power to bridge cultural divides. By inviting renowned chefs, authors, and community leaders to campus, the series offers students, staff, and community members the opportunity to explore the intersections of food, culture, and social justice.

Notable events include hosting the chefs from Café Ohlone, who shared their expertise in Indigenous California cuisine during Native American Heritage Month, and Arthur Moye III, CEO of Full Circle Brewing, the largest black-owned brewery in

the United States for Black History Month. Each event is tied to cultural heritage months, ensuring a connection between the guest speakers' backgrounds and the food served. The UC Merced Dining team works closely with each guest to create menus that highlight their unique heritage.

Through shared food, storytelling, and live demonstrations, this guest speaker series transforms dining into a platform for learning, dialogue, and celebration. It strengthens UC Merced's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion while uniting the campus and community around the universal language of food.

#### Introduction:

Getting the word out about the cultural food guest speaker series was all about using the tools available to bring people together. We focused on reaching students first, sharing event details through digital signs in dining centers, posts on social media, and campus news outlets. Direct emails to past attendees kept them in the loop, and our campus partners helped spread the word even further through their networks. We made sure the marketing was clear and inviting and included QR codes on marketing materials to make reserving a spot easy. We have used this marketing format for all events.

#### Essay:

The cultural food guest speaker series offered unique learning opportunities by combining cultural education with culinary exploration. Each event was crafted to provide attendees with an engaging experience that celebrated diverse cuisines and their connections to history and heritage. To effectively promote the series, UC Merced Dining employed a strategic marketing plan that utilized direct emails to previous attendees, social media posts on dining and campus platforms, and digital signage in dining centers. Campus partners heightened the reach by sharing event details through their channels.

Dining marketing student employees played a significant role in developing the visual branding for the series, crafting graphics that reflected the cultural essence of each event while aligning with UC Merced's brand guidelines. Their creative efforts were instrumental in producing cohesive designs for print signage, digital displays, and online promotions.

This multi-channel approach, enhanced by the creativity and dedication of student designers, created excitement and boosted attendance across the series. From full house conference center spaces to intimate discussions in classroom spaces, the guest speaker series connected people through food, storytelling, and shared cultural experiences, showcasing the power of collaboration and the vibrant diversity of the UC Merced community.

#### Introduction:

The cultural food guest speaker series has had an impact on UC Merced's campus and community, fostering cultural understanding and engagement through food and storytelling. Each event connects students, staff, and local community members with chefs, authors, entrepreneurs and culinary leaders, offering unique insights into diverse cuisines and their cultural significance. By tying events to heritage months and creating menus inspired by each guest's background, the series has not only educated attendees but also celebrated the diversity that defines the campus community. This initiative continues to build bridges, uniting people through shared culinary experiences.

#### Essay:

We started the cultural food guest speaker series to bring the same caliber of programming found at larger metropolitan universities to UC Merced, offering our campus and community the opportunity to engage with influential voices in food, culture, and social justice. The series aims to celebrate diversity, foster understanding, and educate through the universal language of food.

Since its inception, we have hosted a wide range of impactful speakers. Natalie Baszile, author of *We Are Each Other's Harvest*, inspired attendees with stories of Black farmers reclaiming their agricultural heritage. Ross Koda from Koda Farms shared his family's legacy of resilience, tracing back to his grandfather's time in internment camps during World War II. Dr. Claudia Serrato captivated the audience with her expertise in Indigenous Mexican cuisine, weaving cultural narratives into every dish.

Our dining team often hears heartfelt feedback from attendees, whether on campus or in the community. Some guests have even been moved to tears, deeply affected by the powerful stories shared during the events. These moments reinforce the importance of the series in building bridges across cultures and fostering a sense of unity and appreciation within the UC Merced community and beyond.

Introduction:

The cultural food guest speaker series used diverse campus spaces to create memorable experiences. Events were hosted in various locations, including a private dining room, an engaging classroom setting, and the grand ballroom of the campus conference center. Each venue was carefully chosen to match the event's theme and accommodate its audience. After each speaker's presentation, a networking reception featured a buffet of foods inspired by the guest speaker's discussion, providing attendees with the opportunity to connect, share, and reflect. This thoughtful use of space and design enhanced the series' ability to foster community and cultural appreciation.

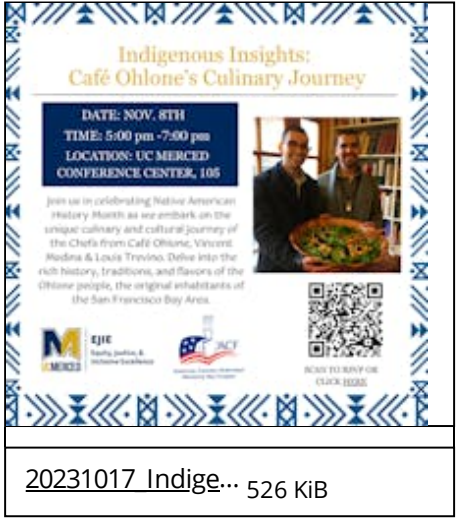
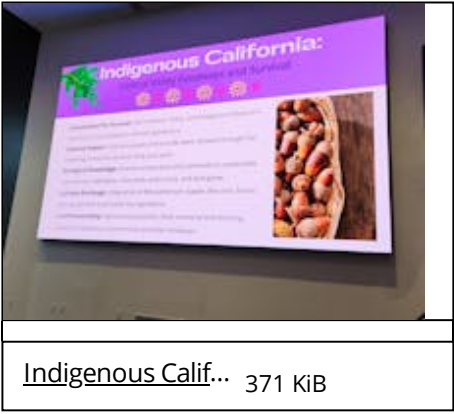
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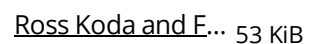
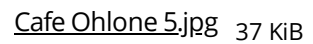
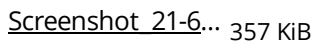
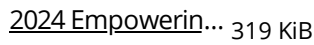
The cultural food guest speaker series transformed campus venues into vibrant spaces that fostered learning, interaction, and connection. Each location was chosen to create a unique atmosphere, whether through the intimacy of the private dining room, the interactive energy of a classroom, or the grandeur of the campus conference center's ballroom. These varied spaces allowed the series to engage different audiences while adapting to the tone and scale of each event.

The private dining room provided a cozy and personal setting, perfect for intimate discussions and smaller gatherings. In contrast, the grand ballroom offered a sophisticated backdrop for larger events, with ample room for engaging panel discussions and access to large screens for presentations. The classroom format encouraged more focused interactions, inviting guests into a comfortable learning environment.

To foster engagement, each event transitioned into a networking reception. Buffets featured dishes specifically designed to align with the cultural themes of the speaker's presentation, turning the reception into an extension of the learning experience. Guests could connect with one another and the guest speakers, breaking barriers in an informal and welcoming space. These design choices elevated the series, turning each event into a celebration of culture, education, and community.

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