

Cooking for a Cause 2024

Jones County Junior College (Jones College)

Introduction:

Sodexo at Jones County Junior College has made a notable difference in raising awareness about food insecurity on college campuses by launching the inaugural "Cooking for a Cause" event. Their initiatives led to a generous contribution of 300 meal vouchers along with a \$300 in-kind donation to support "The Bobcat Pantry," the campus food pantry.

Essay:

With Hunger Action Month in September 2024, we saw an opportunity to bring awareness to the issue of food insecurity on college campuses. The inaugural Cooking for a Cause series, launched at Jones County Junior College, showcased a cook-off that brought together Sodexo and SodexoMagic Chefs from ten universities across Louisiana and Mississippi. The chefs were challenged by our District Dietitian, Abbey LeBoeuf, MS, RD, LDN, CNSC, to incorporate at least three ingredients from a list of common pantry staples, symbolizing the resources available at local food pantries.

To further support the cause, Sodexo matched the meal plan swipes generated during the event at Jones College, along with a portion of sales to support food insecurity on campus. Following the event, we proudly donated 300 meal vouchers and an additional \$300 in contributions to the Bobcat Pantry. "These donations will help students you would not guess need a little help now and again," said Food Pantry Manager, Kristen Register who also works in the Campus Clinic. "The Cooking for a Cause" event was a fun way to raise awareness of the growing needs of students. We appreciate any assistance, and it is always needed."

Introduction:

The marketing strategy for the Cooking for a Cause event included social media updates, flyers, email blasts, and cross-promotion with campus partners. Abbey LeBoeuf, the District Dietitian, shared insights on her Instagram, and local media outlets like WDAM covered the event. The results were featured on the Food Service Director website, and a digital cookbook was released. Looking ahead, the team is preparing for the September 2025 series, with Jones College clients receiving a program sneak-peek box that includes a physical copy of the 2024 cookbook and a branded Cooking for a Cause apron.

Essay:

The marketing strategy for this event was meticulously planned, utilizing custom-branded materials across multiple platforms. This included social media updates on the Jones College Dining pages, flyers, posters, email blasts to the campus and clients featuring a newsletter about the event, branded aprons, and cross-promotion with campus partners. Abbey LeBoeuf, the District Dietitian, provided valuable insights about Cooking for a Cause and its mission on her Campus Dietitian Instagram account, onebite_nutrition. Local media outlets, including WDAM, covered the event, with journalists conducting video interviews with students and Abbey on-site. The results of the entire series were featured on the Food Service Director website, and a digital cookbook was released, showcasing the chefs and their recipes.

Additionally, as we approach summer 2025, the team at Jones is preparing for the next Cooking for a Cause series, set to kick off in September 2025. Clients will soon receive a program sneak-peek box, which will include a branded Cooking for a Cause apron and a physical copy of the 2024 cookbook.

Introduction:

Jones College set the tone for Cooking for a Cause with creative dishes from Executive Chef Andy "Chia" Wu (Jones College) and Executive Chef Dwayne Brown (East Mississippi Community College). Their delicious meals captured the attention of students while incorporating the required food pantry ingredients into their recipes, allowing students to recreate these dishes independently. For additional flair, each chef featured a display of the food pantry items used at their station.

Essay:

To encourage students who rely on the food pantry to think creatively with pantry staples, we challenged our chefs to include at least three pantry items in their recipes. Chef Andy won the crowd's vote with Salmon Croquette served on a bed of smoked gouda grits, topped with a bacon cream relish. The primary ingredients, inspired by food pantry items, included chicken stock, instant grits, canned salmon, canned corn, and panko breadcrumbs. Chef Dwayne prepared a chicken and sausage jambalaya, using essential pantry items such as rice, chicken broth, and diced tomatoes. Although it was not a requirement, both chefs created desserts also using food pantry ingredients for added flair, with Chef Andy's Honey Bun Bread Pudding and Chef Dwayne's assorted Berry Cobblers. "So, this was actually pretty neat having a cooking competition. I didn't know what to expect from either chef, but they were both really good meals," said sophomore from Magee, Daniel Baldwin. "A lot of people don't know what's going on outside of their own personal 'bubbles' sometimes. I think this is just good for raising awareness and it's a creative way to do it because I mean, everyone likes to eat here at Jones."

Introduction:

Sodexo at Jones College's "Cooking for a Cause" event was a collaborative effort that involved Sodexo team members, campus organizations, students, and departments. While chefs showcased their dishes, guests were encouraged to vote for their favorites, and various groups, like the Bobcat Pantry and student services, added to the event's success. The athletic department brought fun with the campus mascot, and the counseling department provided support. Though Jones' own Executive Chef Andy Wu took home the trophy, the real success was the positive impact the event had on the campus community.

Essay:

While the chefs were the main attraction, the event was a collaborative effort. Sodexo team members and leadership continued to inform guests about the event's purpose and encouraged students to cast votes electronically for their favorite dish. The campus community also played a large role in the event, with various organizations contributing. The Bobcat Pantry shared details about the campus food pantry, while student services created a fun atmosphere with music. The counseling department also offered support and resources, and the athletic department added to the fun with the campus mascot, who sported Cooking for a Cause gear and was available for photo opportunities. While Jones Executive Chef, Andy Wu, took home the trophy and bragging rights, the real accomplishment was the positive impact we had on the university through this initiative.

Introduction:

The launch of Cooking for a Cause at Jones College sparked a wave of inspiration, encouraging other campuses to organize their events in a similar way. By the end of the program, all participating campuses contributed nearly 3,000 meals to Swipe Out Hunger and local/campus food pantries, along with significant in-kind donations and non-perishable food items. Beyond showcasing culinary talent, these events raised awareness of food insecurity and provided valuable resources for students in need. Given the overall success of this initiative, we are excited to transform it into an annual event.

Essay:

The successful launch of Cooking for a Cause at Jones College had a significant impact, inspiring other campuses to organize their events in a similar way. By the conclusion of the program, the participating campuses contributed 2,933 meals to Swipe Out Hunger and local or campus food pantries, as well as \$2,586 in in-kind donations and 671 non-perishable food items. These events highlighted the incredible creativity and culinary talent of our chefs, while also fostering collaboration with our community partners. More importantly, they provided a platform to educate students on the issue of food insecurity, the resources available to them, and how they could make a difference in their own way.

According to the 2019-2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 23% of undergraduate students and 12% of graduate students experience food insecurity. "Food Insecurity is not about filling empty stomachs; it is about nourishing the minds and empowering our campus communities," said Phoebe Cook, Sodexo District Manager. "It is our responsibility as campus partners to bring awareness and solutioning to this issue. Cooking for a Cause was created to do just that—make a change in the lives of our students one small step at a time."

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