

Rahma Rekik



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Entry details

Entry Name: A Place at the Table: Redefining Halal Dining on Grounds

Institution Name: University of Virginia

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Rahma Rekik - Registered Dietitian - Health & Wellness Manager

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Essay:

The University of Virginia is home to a large and continually growing Muslim student population. Each year, UVA Dine receives an increasing number of inquiries about halal dining options across Grounds, reinforcing the importance of providing inclusive, culturally appropriate food choices.

At UVA Dine, we believe food is central to the college experience—it shapes daily routines, fosters community, nourishes, and creates memories. Our guiding principle, “We hear you. We care”, reflects our commitment to ensuring every student feels acknowledged, respected, and supported. Whether navigating food allergies or religious dietary practices, our goal is for students to dine with confidence and peace of mind.

In previous years, halal dining was accommodated by offering fresh halal chicken at residential dining halls. However, many processed items did not meet halal standards leading to confusion, inconsistency across locations, and operational challenges.

Recognizing these barriers, UVA Dine reimaged its halal dining approach in summer 2025. Drawing inspiration from our successful allergen-free stations, we introduced dedicated halal stations designed to provide clarity and consistency. Each residential dining hall now features a clearly identifiable halal concept, allowing students to self-select safely without needing staff confirmation.

Each dining hall offers a unique halal concept with certificates displayed at each station:

"Mezz Halal" at Observatory Hill Dining Hall serves Mediterranean-inspired dishes featuring halal proteins.

"Halal Street Eats" at Newcomb Hall provides popular street-food favorites prepared entirely with halal ingredients.

"Halal Oven" at Runk Dining specializes in halal pizzas and flatbreads made with halal pepperoni, chicken sausage, and more.

This program significantly improved the student dining experience by increasing accessibility, normalizing halal dining within mainstream dining halls, and reducing stigma or uncertainty around food choices. Student response has been overwhelmingly positive, with exponential growth in participation.

At Newcomb Dining Hall, the Halal Street Eats saw a 350-450% increase in lunch participation, growing from approximately 100 servings per lunch period in 2024 to between 450 and 550 servings in 2025. Halal Street Eats has since become the most popular halal station on Grounds demonstrating broad appeal beyond the Muslim student population.

This initiative has also strengthened partnership with Multicultural Student Services and Muslim student organizations. UVA Dine meets annually with student leaders to discuss halal dining needs and Ramadan planning. For Ramadan 2025, Za'atar, one of our halal retail locations, transformed to a dedicated Ramadan destination offering suhoor and Iftar buffets that celebrated the global cuisines of Ramadan in a welcoming and decorated space. As one MSA student shared: "Having certified halal options at UVA has made a real difference for me and many other Muslim students... It's about more than just food; it's about being able to live out our faith while fully being part of campus life."

— Mustafa

UVA Dine's Halal Program reflects a proactive, scalable approach to special diet accommodation. By embedding halal dining into everyday operations, we demonstrate our commitment to equity, cultural inclusion, and student well-being while delivering a program that is transparent and easily navigated by students. Everyone deserves a place at the table!

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.

PDF	PDF	PDF
Halal Dining Gu... 745 KiB	Mezz Halal.pdf 3.6 MiB	Halal Street Eat... 2.5 MiB



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Ramadan.pdf 1.2 MiB



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Halal Retail and... 2.4 MiB



Ramadan 2025 ... 601 KiB



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