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Central Michigan University

Entry details

Entry Name:	CMU Dining Native American Heritage Month
Institution Name:	Central Michigan University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Amy Probst, Sr. Marketing Director

This menu provided by Chef Sam celebrates Indigenous foodways by honoring traditional ingredients, preparation methods, and stories passed down through generations. Rooted in the “Three Sisters” of corn, beans, and squash, and centered around manoomin (wild rice), each dish reflects a deep connection to land, seasonality, and cultural knowledge. Ingredients such as maple, berries, cedar, and sage are thoughtfully incorporated to showcase both flavor and meaning. Developed in collaboration with Indigenous voices, this menu invites diners to experience food as a form of storytelling—one that acknowledges resilience, food sovereignty, and the enduring traditions of Indigenous communities.

Essay:

The menu created for Central Michigan University’s Native American Heritage Month is a celebration of Indigenous culture, history, and food sovereignty. Thoughtfully developed in collaboration with Chef Sam Anglin of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, the menu highlights traditional ingredients and preparation methods that honor generations of Indigenous knowledge. Central to the menu is manoomin (wild rice), a sacred and culturally significant food that represents a deep connection to the land and waterways of the Great Lakes region.

Dishes featuring the “Three Sisters”—corn, beans, and squash—reflect Indigenous agricultural traditions rooted in balance, sustainability, and nourishment. Ingredients such as maple, berries, sage, cedar, and bison are intentionally

incorporated, not only for their flavor but for their cultural meaning. Each item tells a story, linking food to identity, resilience, and community wellness.

Beyond nourishment, the menu serves as an educational tool, inviting diners to engage with Indigenous foodways in a respectful and meaningful way. It encourages reflection on food insecurity, sustainability, and the importance of preserving cultural traditions. By transforming campus dining into a space for storytelling and learning, this menu demonstrates how food can foster understanding, representation, and a deeper appreciation for Indigenous heritage.

Introduction:

The theme of the event focused on honoring Indigenous culture through authentic representation, education, and community connection. Centered on food as a storytelling medium, the event highlighted Indigenous traditions, food sovereignty, and contemporary issues such as food insecurity. Execution emphasized collaboration and respect, achieved through partnerships with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, Chef Sam Anglin, and the Office of Indigenous Affairs. Live cooking demonstrations, traditional dance performances, interactive ingredient displays, and a thoughtfully curated menu transformed a busy campus dining space into an immersive cultural experience, fostering meaningful engagement and learning across the campus community.

Essay:

The Native American Heritage Month event at Central Michigan University was thoughtfully designed to honor Indigenous culture through authentic representation, education, and community partnership. The theme centered on using food as a powerful medium for storytelling, highlighting Indigenous traditions, ancestral knowledge, and contemporary issues such as food sovereignty and food insecurity. Grounded in CMU's location in Mount Pleasant, home of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan, the event emphasized respect for place and community.

Execution of the event relied on strong collaboration with Indigenous partners, including Chef Sam Anglin and the Office of Indigenous Affairs. A carefully curated menu showcased traditional ingredients and cultural significance, while live cooking demonstrations allowed students to engage directly with Indigenous foodways. Additional elements such as traditional dance performances, ingredient displays, and storytelling helped create an immersive, educational atmosphere within a high-traffic campus dining space.

Strategic planning transformed everyday dining into a meaningful cultural experience without disrupting operations. High student attendance reflected strong interest and engagement, demonstrating the effectiveness of combining education with experiential learning. Overall, the event succeeded in fostering awareness, respect, and understanding while showing how campus dining can serve as a platform for cultural celebration, learning, and responsible community engagement.

Introduction:

Thoughtful marketing played a key role in making this Native American Heritage Month event both visible and meaningful. Promotion extended beyond simple advertising to focus on storytelling, cultural respect, and community education. Strategic use of social media, digital screens in dining halls, and feature posts highlighting Chef Sam Anglin helped generate interest and anticipation across campus. By spotlighting Indigenous voices, traditions, and the purpose behind the event, marketing efforts positioned the experience as more than a meal. This intentional approach encouraged participation, deepened engagement, and helped transform the event into a memorable and impactful campus-wide experience, with 897 attendees.

Essay:

Marketing played a key role in making the Native American Heritage Month event both impactful and meaningful, especially as it marked the third consecutive year of this annual collaboration. Building on established relationships and past success, the marketing strategy emphasized consistency, cultural respect, and storytelling. Previous interviews with Chef Sam Anglin were intentionally reused and highlighted, reinforcing the purpose and significance

of the event while showing its continued growth. This continuity helped establish the program as a trusted and valued campus tradition.

Promotion extended beyond standard campus outreach to foster true community inclusion. Social media content, digital dining hall screens, and featured posts amplified Indigenous voices and highlighted the cultural importance of the event. CMU Dining also provided meal tickets to members of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, ensuring that the local Native community felt welcomed and represented. Chef Sam further expanded outreach by promoting the event within his own community, encouraging participation beyond the university.

Together, these efforts elevated marketing from simple promotion to a tool for connection and cultural visibility. By honoring past collaborations and amplifying Indigenous leadership, the event became more than a meal; it became a meaningful, shared experience for students, staff, and community partners alike.

Introduction:

In addition to cultural programming and community engagement, several additional considerations helped ensure the overall success and responsibility of the event. Sustainability and thoughtful use of campus resources were prioritized alongside cultural integrity. Efforts such as reducing food waste, supporting internal services, and planning with operational efficiency in mind reflected a holistic approach to event execution. These considerations reinforced that meaningful cultural celebrations can also align with environmental responsibility and institutional values, enhancing the event’s impact while remaining mindful of resources, sustainability goals, and long-term campus practices.

Essay:

Additional considerations played an important role in ensuring the Native American Heritage Month event was not only culturally meaningful, but also responsible, sustainable, and thoughtfully executed. Alongside cultural authenticity and community partnership, the planning team prioritized environmental stewardship and efficient use of campus resources. Sustainability efforts, including the use of the Waste Not 2.0 program, helped reduce food waste while reinforcing the values of mindfulness and respect for resources.

Internal campus resources were intentionally utilized whenever possible, like campus printing services to support university operations while minimizing external waste and cost. Careful planning was required to balance cultural programming within a high-volume dining environment, ensuring smooth service while maintaining an engaging and respectful experience for attendees. Layout design, staffing coordination, and timing all contributed to creating a welcoming space without disrupting daily dining operations.

These additional considerations demonstrated that cultural events can successfully align with institutional priorities such as sustainability, efficiency, and responsible resource management. By integrating these elements into the planning process, the event extended its impact beyond celebration alone. It reflected a holistic approach that honored culture, supported the campus community, and upheld environmental and operational values, ultimately strengthening the event’s integrity and long-term viability.

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