

Courtland Thomas



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Entry details

Entry Name: Hospitality Starts Here: LOVE WHERE YOU CHOMP

Institution Name: University of Florida

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Introduction:

From the moment a student steps onto campus for the first time; nervous, excited, and figuring out what comes next, Florida Fresh Dining is already there. It's there in the first meal that makes a new place start to feel like home. It's there in the mobile order picked up between back-to-back classes. It's there in the food truck parked right outside, and the cold Celsius handed to a student who didn't expect anyone to notice them in line. Florida Fresh Dining doesn't just serve students for four years. It walks alongside them, through the late nights, the packed schedules.

Essay:

What truly distinguishes Florida Fresh Dining is the seamless integration of world-class hospitality into the broader student experience, ensuring that dining is a catalyst for community rather than just a daily utility. With an expansive portfolio of more than 45 diverse dining locations, we provide a versatile

ecosystem that caters to every palate and schedule, supported by flexible meal plan options designed to meet the unique needs of a modern campus lifestyle.

By leveraging innovative technology tools, such as the Text2Chat feedback system for real-time responsiveness and streamlined mobile ordering for peak-hour convenience, we have created a dining environment that is as digitally intuitive as it is culinary-forward. This infrastructure is further brought to life through vibrant, engaging programming and high-impact activations throughout the year, transforming our spaces into dynamic hubs where students can connect, recharge, and feel truly at home.

Introduction:

Florida Fresh Dining at the University of Florida is meticulously engineered to be far more than a food provider; it is a cornerstone of the total student experience. We ensure that world-class hospitality is woven into the very fabric of campus life, meeting students exactly where they live, study, and socialize. Our program transcends the traditional dining model through a sophisticated blend of globally-inspired menus and intentional, year-round programming that transforms our facilities into vibrant community hubs. These spaces are strategically crafted to empower students to gather, recharge, and build the lifelong connections that define their journey as a Gator

Essay:

Florida Fresh Dining takes a year-round, intentional approach to student feedback, ensuring that the student voice remains central to campus dining decisions. Feedback is not treated as a single moment in time, but as an ongoing conversation that informs strategy, planning, and execution. This commitment begins with our annual campus-wide survey, Voice to Vision, which garnered 2,626 student responses and achieved an impressive 18% year-over-year increase in participation. The strong response underscores the trust students place in the process and reinforces the importance of listening closely to their experiences and expectations. Building on survey insights, Florida Fresh Dining deepens engagement through focus groups and listening sessions, providing students the opportunity to share detailed, face-to-face feedback. These conversations allow us to expand on survey findings and capture nuanced perspectives that shape our decisions. From there, we deploy a targeted action plan informed directly by student input and close the loop through our "You Spoke, We Listened" communication efforts. This transparent approach ensures students see how their feedback drives real change, weaving their voices into the fabric of our campus dining strategy and reinforcing our commitment to continuous improvement.

Introduction:

The program includes more than 45 dining locations across campus, offering a mix of residential dining halls, retail concepts, local favorites and nationally recognized brands. This expansive network allows students to access fresh, convenient meals throughout their day while supporting both academic and social routines. Locations are open as early as 5:30am and as late as 2am.

Essay:

Florida Fresh Dining emphasizes variety, flexibility, and inclusive menu design. Across its residential dining halls, students can explore a wide range of culinary stations that offer both familiar comfort foods and globally inspired flavors. Taste of Home – comforting, homestyle dishes inspired by classic recipes
Gator Grill – freshly prepared burgers and grilled sandwiches
Delicious Without – meals prepared without the nine major allergens
Rooted – plant-based and vegan dishes
Carved & Crafted – customizable deli sandwiches and rotating chef features
Brick & Basil – pizza and pasta with both classic and build-your-own options
House of Greens – customizable salads featuring fresh, locally sourced produce
Nook – breakfast favorites available throughout the day
Sweets & Treats – house-made baked goods, desserts, and ice cream

Introduction:

Florida Fresh Dining activates campus year round through weekly food truck pop ups and special events featuring crowd favorites like steak sandwiches, soft pretzels, fresh-squeezed lemonade, funnel cakes, and more. These pop ups also bring our most popular menu items to remote areas of campus, expanding access and convenience for students wherever they are. In Fall 2025, food truck activations generated \$9,500 in additional revenue and were further enhanced by the launch of our in-house themed food truck, the CHOMP TRUCK.

Essay:

United Table is a new international food hall showcasing a diverse mix of global flavors, including Indian BBQ, boba, sushi, bao buns, and international street food. The space also features a monthly rotating Student Choice station, giving students a direct voice in shaping the menu and highlighting cuisines they're excited to see on campus. This location opened in August 2025. We hosted a grand opening week where students received daily deals each day.

Introduction:

Florida Fresh Dining emphasizes sustainability and wellness through initiatives that encourage responsible dining habits and healthier lifestyles. One such program is its partnership with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).

Through this collaboration, Florida Fresh Dining prepares dishes using produce grown by students on the UF horticultural farm.

As part of their coursework, students learn how to cultivate vegetables, and twice each semester, campus chefs incorporate those ingredients into meals served during the fall and spring festivals.

This program promotes environmentally conscious food choices, strengthens nutrition education, and supports responsible sourcing and food preparation practices.

Essay:

Florida Fresh Dining immerses students throughout their entire journey at UF, from the first time they step on campus to Senior Send-Off at the end of four years. Dining isn't just a service; it's a central thread woven into campus life.

Fall Welcome Week kicks off the Florida Fresh experience. Florida Fresh Dining curates a unique move-in experience with events like Midnight Munchies and Welcome Back BBQ, introducing students to dining as a vibrant part of campus culture in the heart of campus, not just a place to eat.

Throughout the year, we strengthen our connection with events like a teaching kitchen for students, themed dining events, and menu pop-ups; vendor takeovers featuring speciality cuisine; Mean Plan Holder appreciation events; and Swipe+ events that include speciality meals such as steak nights and shrimp boils.

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