

BU Dining's Holistic Approach to DEI & Social Justice

Boston University

Essay:

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice are embedded throughout Boston University Dining Services' (BU Dining) operations; from the products we purchase and the vendors we partner with, to how we engage, support, and elevate diversity amongst the student body, to efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming workplace for our entire team.

Diverse and Responsible Sourcing

BU Dining is committed to sourcing from minority-, women-, veteran-, LGBT-owned, small, or disadvantaged businesses. Additionally, we source from a variety of Certified B Corps, which exhibit transparent commitments and practices regarding social and environmental performance, and a variety of fair-trade certifications ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions for those producing products we purchase. We work with Supplier.io and MaetaData to ensure we are accurately reporting both Tier 1 and Tier 2 diverse and responsible purchases.

At the start of 2024, we established a regular sustainable purchasing meeting with our Director of Dining, Culinary Director, Director of Residential Operations, Executive Chef for Residential Dining, Director of Retail Operations, and Sustainability Director. At first meetings were twice a month, and after a semester moved to monthly. These meetings focus on opportunities to increase local, sustainable, and diverse sourcing, and provide an opportunity to troubleshoot any challenges with procurement, implementation, etc., discuss the reporting process and how we are tracking, and hold tastings of new potential products. As a result of these meetings, we have introduced new diverse suppliers and responsibly sourced

products into our operations, including True Made Foods, a veteran-owned clean label condiment company, Three Fins Coffee Roasters, a woman- and veteran-owned coffee roaster, and more.

In FY24, we saw an 8% increase in diverse purchases compared to the year prior, and towards the end of 2024 also identified additional diverse and Certified B Corp vendors and Fair-Trade products that were since introduced in early 2025.

Storytelling is an important part of our diverse and responsible sourcing efforts. We communicate these efforts to students and the broader BU community through physical and digital signage, spotlights on social media and in our monthly sustainability newsletter, our annual sustainability report, pop-up tabling events with our vendor partners, and more. It's equally important to communicate our efforts with our team. New sourcing partners are introduced during annual frontline associate and manager and supervisor trainings. Diverse and responsible sourcing are also included as sustainability brief topics, which are shared during team huddles.

#### Student Programming (student cultural events in dining halls, Ramadan, Hillel, allergy work)

Celebrating cultural diversity is a crucial part of all BU Dining's operations, but especially our residential dining program. Each year we work with student groups and different campus departments to host a variety of themed events in our residential dining halls. These can range from a station takeover to a full immersive event with playlists and decorations to accompany the menu. In 2024, we hosted over a dozen of these collaborative events including Lunar New Year, Diwali, Students of Caribbean Ancestry, African Diaspora, Hispanic Heritage Month, International Education Week, Pride, and more. More than hosting a meal, these collaborations have become a platform to promote culture and pride for our diverse student population. The joy exemplified by students explaining their national dishes to others that are unfamiliar creates an opportunity for students of different backgrounds to bond over the shared experience of a meal. In addition to these events serving as a way for students to learn about other cultures, they also allow our diverse population of students to feel seen and comforted, something that is incredibly important when students might be thousands of miles and many time zones away from home. In the words of one student "To get a bowl of longevity noodles tonight is one thing, but to participate like I am at home with the lion dance is much more that spectacular. Thank you so much!" Beyond these collaborations with partners at the University, we also work with our diverse and responsible sourcing partners for pop-up tastings in our dining halls. These events are a wonderful opportunity for our vendor partners to engage with students and tell their story to and receive feedback directly from students.

In 2024, we took a new approach to Ramadan programming from what had previously been a one-time event to what is now an expected tradition rooted in inclusivity with authentic food and the hospitality of home. We spent months working with members of BU's Muslim Student Association, Residence Life, Religious Life, and other campus partners to identify a location adjacent to prayer space that would be suitable for daily Iftar meals and developed a cycle menu of Iftar and Suhoor menus for the duration of Ramadan. The menus were incredibly varied in the cultural origins to be representative of the diversity of BU's Muslim student population. Once menus were created, students were able to sample the menu items and provided feedback that we incorporated before the start of Ramadan. Once Ramadan began, we served around 180 students at the Iftar meal every evening, and had Suhoor meals that students could take with them for their pre-dawn meal. As a result of this collaboration, we now serve these verified Halal menu items that were featured in the Iftar meal on an ongoing basis in our residential dining program. We have also expanded other Halal offerings, one of the most notable in 2024 being Halal turkey pepperoni, which has allowed our daily pizza offerings to be Halal.

BU Dining has a longstanding partnership with BU Hillel, most notably with our Fresh Fuel at Granby Commons Dining Hall, which is a Kosher location. However, we recognize that Shabbat and holiday meals are special and celebratory and have taken steps to ensure that they shine above what we do on a day-to-day basis in the dining hall at Hillel. Taking the lead from Adeena Sussman, author of SHABBAT and Faith Kramer author of 52 SHABBATS, we have been working with administration, Rabbis, The Vad, and students to define and deliver delicious Kosher meals on a consistent basis.

Beyond cultural diversity and inclusion, BU Dining's robust food allergy programming ensures that students with food allergies feel included in our dining spaces and can partake in the community dining experience. We take a multi layered approach to focus on our students with the highest risk needs as a priority. We have developed programs to educate and train our employees on food allergies, the dangers of cross-contact, where cross-contact frequently occurs in production and service, and the processes and procedures needed to mitigate this risk. We are supported on the education student engagement side by Boston University's Sargent Choice Nutrition Center, which works directly with students with food

allergies, so they understand what to be mindful of, how to communicate their allergies and needs with the BU Dining team, and the different programs and resources available.

Online menus with full ingredient transparency are available for all dining halls and nutritional information of retail food items is available upon request. Two dining halls have gluten-free kitchens serving a variety of menu options made without ingredients containing gluten and one dining hall has a True Balance Station, serving food made without ingredients that contain the top 9 allergens and gluten. Additionally, our three largest dining halls include gluten and nut free pantries that are only accessible to students granted access through their student IDs to reduce the risk of cross contact. These pantries contain a wide variety of snacks and microwaveable meals, which can be heated in the pantry, providing additional options beyond what is being served at the station. For students with complex allergies that cannot be self-managed or met through the stations and pantries, BU Dining's special meals program allows students to special order customized meals prepared by allergen-trained cooks so students can eat safely while still engaging in the communal dining atmosphere.

#### Fostering Inclusivity in our Team

Our annual 'Welcome Back' training for our full team provides an opportunity for us to welcome our staff back after many of them were off for the summer, share important updates, and conduct a variety of trainings. Over the years, we recognized that there was an opportunity to make this programming more inclusive, especially given the multilingual needs of our diverse staff. We sought to add translation services to the programming but were quickly met with high costs for live interpretation services and other logistical challenges. After significant research, we realized Zoom, a platform already widely used on campus, could provide live translations in each of the languages needed on screens throughout the event space for a nominal fee. To ensure people did not feel singled out, we broadcast Spanish translations, the language that the largest percentage of our non-English speaking staff speak, on the main projection screen and placed large televisions with Mandarin and French in the meeting room as well, so people had the freedom to sit wherever they wanted for the best experience. We also displayed English subtitles to ensure a deaf team member did not miss anything.

In 2024, 28 BU Dining frontline associates participated in and graduated from our English as a Second Language for Dining Services program, which is offered in partnership with Boston University's Center for English Learning & Orientation Programs (CLOP). This was the second year of the program, which has graduated nearly 50 individuals. Last year the curriculum was updated to be better suited to the needs of our team members, with the inclusion digital literacy programming. Both in prior semesters of the ESL program and our everyday interactions with team members, it was clear that different technologies - email, mobile apps, etc. - often posed a challenge. The ESL program curriculum now includes the use of a mobile app and has increased technical competency amongst participants.

Since we have such a diverse team, beginning last academic year and now held annually, we also partner with CLOP for an Intercultural Competency training for all BU Dining managers and supervisors. This training discusses culture and values and how they differ across the world and is particularly focused on how different cultures view time, context and social hierarchy, individualism and collectivism, and power distance. Each of these topic areas are especially useful to understanding how culture can influence workplace dynamics and expectations and lead to challenges and miscommunication regarding punctuality, following direction, being a part of the team, and more. Through real-world case studies and group discussions, the training reminds our managers and supervisors that intentions can be easily misinterpreted across cultures and languages and the importance of simplifying language, using multiple modes of explanation, and confirming understanding to ensure successful communication.

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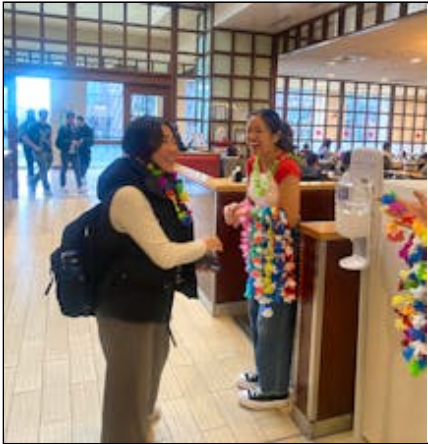


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