

Margaret Massie



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Entry details

Entry Name: Catering Program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)

Institution Name: Virginia Commonwealth University

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Chase Sylver, Marketing Coordinator

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Introduction:

Catering at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is defined by creativity, service excellence, and a commitment to delivering memorable experiences. The operation stands out for its ability to provide everything from simple boxed lunches and coffee sets to elegant pre-fixed multi-course meals, demonstrating the skill, flexibility, and professionalism of the culinary and service teams.

Essay:

The program balances culinary artistry with thoughtful planning and a strong commitment to community connection. Events at VCU consistently showcase exceptional food, refined presentation, and sincere hospitality. This dedication positions Catering at VCU as an essential resource for both the university and the greater Richmond community.

Over the past year, VCU Catering introduced a redesigned menu structure that emphasizes seasonal ingredients and modernized presentations. This refresh has enhanced both guest satisfaction and operational efficiency. Following a full departmental revamp, the team has strengthened key campus partnerships while elevating the program's overall quality, creativity, and operational capacity.

A major innovation has been the launch of the VCU Catering Showcase, successfully hosted for two consecutive semesters. One showcase—held in collaboration with event coordinators across multiple university departments—

generated over \$10,000 in new catering sales and expanded the partnership network. These showcases have become a cornerstone strategy for demonstrating capability, building relationships, and reinforcing the reputation as a high-performing campus catering provider.

Introduction:

Marketing materials for VCU Catering are crafted to reflect the vibrant identity and unique strengths of the institution. The marketing team conducts ongoing market research and incorporates client feedback into the development of collateral to ensure relevance, appeal, and impact

Essay:

The brochures, menus, and digital promotions feature cohesive graphic design, original photography, and storytelling that emphasize the quality and creativity of our program. Catering is promoted through campus expositions, email newsletters, and strategic partnerships with university departments to ensure visibility and engagement.

Customer satisfaction plays a key role in the sales approach. Clients receive personalized communication, menu guidance, and optional tastings to support informed decision-making and confidence in planning their events.

One of the most successful initiatives is the automated Catering at VCU newsletter, sent to clients who have previously utilized the services. This visually engaging infographic highlights recent events, limited-time offers, and featured menu items. It has significantly improved client retention and continues to generate strong interest among campus partners.

Introduction:

Catering at Virginia Commonwealth University is guided by thoughtfully curated menus that emphasize culinary excellence and reflect the diverse tastes of the campus community. Standard ordering menus offer a wide range of selections, while specialty menus highlight unique events and seasonal themes. The culinary team is eager to accommodate a wide variety of dietary restrictions, viewing each client request as an opportunity to expand the expertise and deliver an exceptional experience.

Essay:

The menu development process celebrates the cultural richness of the university. Specialty offerings incorporate seasonal ingredients, regional influences, and global traditions that resonate with VCU's diverse community. Each menu is crafted with a strong commitment to inclusivity: items are clearly labeled for allergens, plant-based diets, and gluten-free needs. When possible, parallel versions of dishes are created so guests with dietary restrictions can enjoy the same flavor, creativity, and presentation as the primary menu items.

This approach is especially important when serving board members, whose dietary restrictions require the omission of sodium, meat, butter, oil, salt, seafood, and raw citrus. The team skillfully meets these guidelines while maintaining exceptional culinary quality.

We also offer a dedicated student-organization menu that features popular student favorites and high-value options. In addition, we provide access to student-friendly menus from five retail partners—from Starbucks coffee gallons to Ram's Coop chicken tender tailgate trays—ensuring students have numerous options to support successful events.

Introduction:

The Culinary Institute of America-trained Executive Chef ensures that every event—from intimate plated dinners to large-scale conferences—delivers both exceptional taste and memorable presentation. Because guests “eat with their eyes first,” the goal is to present food in the most appealing and appetizing way possible. Food presentation at VCU embodies the campus spirit of creativity, artistry, and vibrant expression.

Essay:

The catering team intentionally considers color, texture, and flavor to create visually striking and flavorful dishes. Fresh herbs, produce, and thoughtful garnishes contribute to a complete sensory experience.

Presentation is tailored to each event type. Boxed lunches are artfully arranged in recycled packaging with balanced assortments designed to maintain freshness and appeal. Coffee breaks feature curated arrangements of pastries, fruit, and beverages that encourage interaction. Student-focused events often include customized stations such as dirty soda bars, build-your-own bowls, and global tasting tables, fostering creativity, fun, and engagement.

Recently, Director of Catering Justin Parkinson dedicated time to studying Afro-Vegan by Chef Bryant Terry—a cookbook that blends African, Caribbean, and Southern flavors through plant-based techniques. The team successfully executed several of Chef Terry's recipes for a campus event featuring him as a guest speaker. He was pleasantly surprised by the authenticity and care reflected in the dishes. These items were presented in a pre-portioned buffet format, allowing guests to quickly grab bowls while continuing conversations with colleagues.

Introduction:

Staffing and service design at Catering at VCU are intentionally planned to ensure seamless hospitality that aligns with the scale and purpose of each event. The team is trained in fine dining service, bartending, and customer engagement. We prioritize creating a comfortable environment where guests can network, connect, and enjoy delicious food.

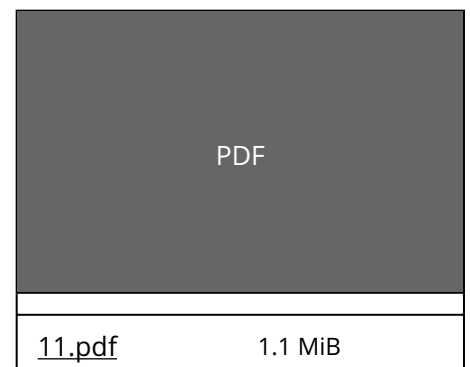
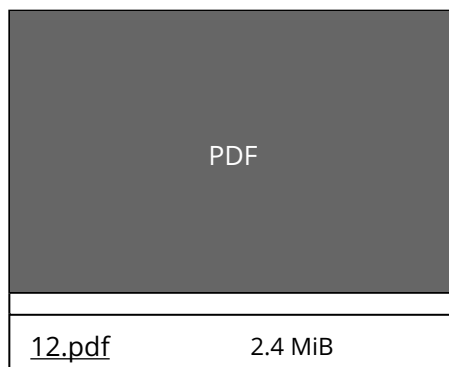
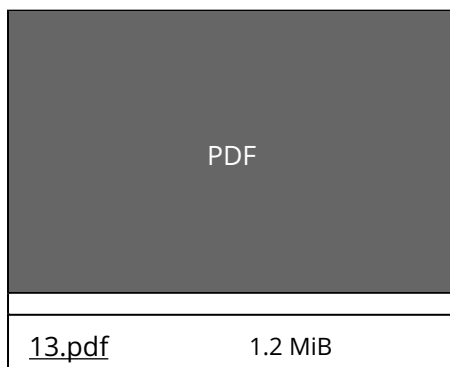
Essay:

Each event begins with a customized service plan that identifies staffing needs to ensure smooth operations and attentive hospitality. The team participates in continuous professional development to maintain a guest-first mindset and uphold the highest standards of service.

Service design is flexible and adapts easily to formal seated meals, casual receptions, or dynamic action stations. Layouts are thoughtfully arranged to support accessibility, efficient guest flow, and visual appeal. Stations often incorporate thematic elements, decorative accents, and personalized details inspired by the client's vision.

The Catering Coordinator collaborates personally with each client to gather inspiration, refine expectations, and ensure that their event is executed exactly as envisioned. The result is a polished, cohesive, and memorable experience for every guest.

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