

Victoria Coldiron



koalOZD

Entry details

Entry Name: West Texas A&M University Dining Hall Renovation

Institution Name: West Texas A&M University

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Introduction:

Construction for the WTAMU caf began May 2025 and lasted until November 2025. With over 1,800 students just on a meal plan, the caf faced challenges with limited station flow, outdated equipment, and limited menu options. Summer orientations allowed the dining team to communicate these limitations and address how the renovations would allow for a student-centered dining experience that the university had envisioned. The renovation process began with multiple focus groups to help identify key goals; which included expanding menus, improving flow, and integration of state of the art equipment.

Essay:

Planning for the renovation began with identifying the core limitations of the previous space. The renovation intended to create a dynamic, student-focused environment with improved menus, faster service, and innovative features. When designing the space, architects took into account trending accents and textures, such as wooden features and asymmetric tiles that would ultimately create a space that was unique and trending.

Vendor engagement played a critical role throughout the planning process. TriMark partnered with the team to source and spec equipment, while visits to Middleby Kitchen Innovations helped evaluate cutting-edge commercial equipment solutions uniquely suited to our operational needs.

Staff preparation was also a major focus. Employees were strategically placed at stations based on strengths, trained on sample menus, and guided through scenario-based exercises. Equipment training was delivered by regional culinary teams, location leadership, and manufacturer representatives, followed by live-test sessions to ensure recipe adherence and operational readiness. Staffing needs were reviewed, and targeted hiring—supported by Aramark Talent Acquisition—helped fill skill-specific roles.

Menu research incorporated historical student feedback, multiple focus groups, equipment capabilities, and collaboration with regional culinary leadership to finalize offerings. Together, these planning efforts ensured a cohesive, student-driven, and operationally strong foundation for the renovation.

Introduction:

The first week back allowed students to explore the new stations and improved flow at their own pace. The official grand opening included signature beverages created in partnership with Student Government, served in souvenir cups, the launch of our signature cookie, the "Thunder Crunch Cookie" (named after the university Buffalo mascot, Thunder), university leadership appearances, and the university mascot to energize students and celebrate the milestone.

Feedback:

"The new menu is delicious!"

"The staff was extremely helpful in navigating the new space."

"The layout of the new space helps with the flow of the stations much better than before."

Essay:

The marketing and launch strategy for the renovation focused on transparency, anticipation, and strong campus engagement. Throughout construction, the dining team built excitement with sneak-peek reels, photo teasers, and storytelling campaigns that highlighted the progress and purpose behind each upgrade. Historical photos of the dining hall were shared to illustrate just how far the space had come, reinforcing the impact of the investment.

During the first week in the new space, dining hall staff helped students navigate the new layout and showcased the new menu offerings. Engagement on social media surged with an 85% growth of community size and 45% growth in engagement rate. Early data confirmed strong interest, with 11,000 guests served during the opening week, compared to around 8,500 in a normal week.

The Grand Reopening featured speeches from the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Student Government President, the University President, and the director, Michael Ives, showcasing our integration into the campus community and our partnership. The campus community came together to celebrate the hard work and determination that went into renovating the Caf, also known as the "Living Room" and the "Kitchen" of the campus due to the community of the space.

Introduction:

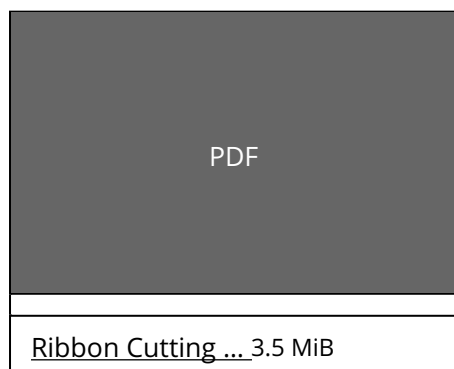
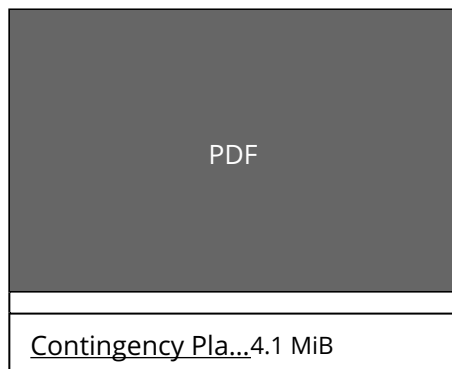
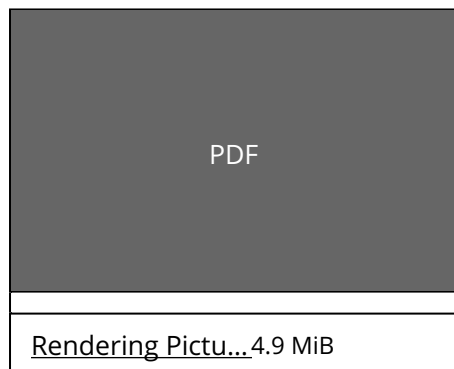
Collaboration was central to the WTAMU Dining Hall renovation, bringing together university departments, campus leadership, student groups, facilities partners, and dining staff. Each stakeholder contributed expertise that shaped design choices, operational planning, and communication strategies. Our partnership with Student Affairs helped ensure the renovation aligned with student-life priorities, while the university leadership and facilities teams supported project sequencing and infrastructure decisions. Dining staff played a key role in menu development, equipment planning, and flow optimization. This multi-department effort created a renovation process that was cohesive, informed, and deeply connected to the broader campus community.

Essay:

Collaboration across campus ensured the WTAMU Dining Hall renovation remained aligned with student needs, institutional standards, and operational realities. Student Affairs served as a central partner by gathering and elevating student feedback, ensuring the renovation supported community-building and student-life initiatives. Their involvement helped prioritize engagement, accessibility, and service experience throughout the design process. University leadership—including the CFO and key administrative partners—guided budget alignment and long-term planning, while Residential Living supported planning for student traffic patterns and residence-hall proximity.

Facilities Management (SSC) provided essential oversight on construction sequencing, infrastructure updates, and vendor coordination. Their involvement ensured the renovation stayed on schedule and within scope. At the same time, the communications and marketing teams crafted clear messaging to share progress updates and maintain student excitement across social and digital platforms. Dining staff contributed expertise in layout functionality, menu development, equipment selection, and workflow optimization. Culinary teams collaborated with regional leadership to ensure menu offerings reflected student preferences while matching equipment capabilities. The result was a renovation shaped not by a single department but by a network of integrated partners whose combined efforts produced a cohesive, student-centered dining environment.

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





Attachment name
University press release

<https://www.wtamu.ed...>



Attachment name
Ribbon cutting - March ...

<https://www.myhighplai...>

Attachment name
University collaboration...

[https://www.instagram....](https://www.instagram...)

Attachment name
Opening day post

[https://www.instagram....](https://www.instagram...)

Attachment name
Temporary Setup Reel

[https://www.instagram....](https://www.instagram...)