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# Grand Valley State University

## Entry details

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|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Entry Name:                                      | Laker Food Co.'s Launch Crew      |
| Institution Name:                                | Grand Valley State University     |
| Entry Completed By ( <i>name and position</i> ): | Anna Post - Marketing Coordinator |

Launch Crew is an early acclimation program for incoming freshmen working with Laker Food Co. (LFC) at GVSU. Launch Crew students move onto campus one week before campus-wide move-in. Early arrival provides a lower stress move-in experience, and creates time for employee team building exercises, food service and customer service training, and goal planning workshops. Some sessions include campus resources and visits to campus spaces, putting students at ease beyond the workplace. Acquiring an in-depth understanding of work expectations before full service begins sets students up for success with LFC and as a new member of the campus community.

### Essay:

Launch Crew was born out of the operational strain experienced during fall launch and student move-in. High service demands make new student employee onboarding complicated, slowing development and comfort on the job.

To ease the strain, LFC's HR team created Launch Crew. Like a pre-season athletic or band camp, participants move in early and adjust to life on campus while developing a foundation for successful employment.

Daily schedules include campus programming, activities, and job training, helping students bond and become comfortable on campus and in their work environment. Student employees develop confidence on the job without the demands of full service, form friendships and learn about campus resources.

To drive recruitment, Launch Crew was promoted during summer New Student Orientation through presentations, tabling, social media posts, and a brochure.

Launch Crew is for first year students joining LFC in an operations position. Goals include: developing a strong, cohesive team ready for service on day one, building relationships and loyalty among team members, retaining student employees for the current year and beyond. Long term goals include strengthening the student manager and senior student manager pools. Program success is measured through retention, student employee satisfaction surveys, workplace morale, and feedback from participants.

#### Introduction:

2025 Fall to Winter student employee retention was 80% with 60% of program participants indicating that they plan to stay with LFC for their entire 4 year career. Specific strategies within the program that contributed to keeping students engaged were team bonding opportunities. Curated events like an Ice Cream Social, Taco & Tie-Dye, and campus tours encouraged engagement. These opportunities to bond, outside of work, while exploring campus with fellow students that are adjusting to a new home and job, are unmatched. Students developed a comfort level with their fellow Launch Crew members that translated into team and job loyalty.

#### Essay:

Launch Crew students take their roles seriously and are more likely to set a positive examples for other student employees. Of those who continued working with LFC, 100% were promoted to student management positions. Launch Crew students perform their work at higher levels and indicate more job satisfaction than non-participants. Due to its success, the program will continue next year.

Overall student employee retention is up 20% from Fall to Winter semester compared to previous years, a testament to the Launch Crew students who created a foundation for all student employees. Students state that they have a strong sense of community and understanding of their job and expectations. Launch Crew supports students' professional growth and encourages them to remain in their roles by expanding their training beyond normal offerings. With more time and resources, students can obtain a deeper understanding of the position they are working in and how they contribute to the team's success as a whole. The program has reduced turnover and maintained team consistency, contributing to student and program success. Developing dependable student managers has significantly improved other student employee's work experiences as they have a consistent team and student leadership.

#### Introduction:

The Launch Crew program enhanced LFC's ability to attract new students by creating a unique and marketable experience. Early move-in, a perk rarely given, is an attractive benefit. It's not just an opportunity to get established and comfortable. It includes the ability to move in on a weekend (other new students move in on a weekday which can be difficult for families to schedule). Other benefits include: team bonding with staff at all levels, personal campus tours from leadership, widening connections and understanding, campus acclimation, building friendships early before academic pressures begin, and extra training that enhances professional readiness.

#### Essay:

Word spread about the Launch Crew program which drew questions, enthusiasm, and a desire to be part of it. Many current student employees have asked if they are eligible for the Launch Crew experience. Human Resources noticed an increase in quality applications that more closely fit the positions available. The Launch Crew program presents many positives for students, with no negative financial impact to participate. Students are compensated for the hours they work and when they are in learning sessions that do not apply directly to their job. This incentivizes them to participate in all aspects of the program.

Students who started, but did not complete the program were compensated for their time and removed from the scheduling system. All students that requested to be removed were surveyed and indicated the following reasons for leaving their position: they had other commitments; the job required more time out of their day than they

expected, school was more difficult than they expected, they were presented with another opportunity that more closely aligned with their goals.

#### Introduction:

Students have shared their positive experiences through anonymous feedback surveys:

"I gained connections with managers to open doors for future jobs."

"It helped me transition more easily into GVSU."

The Launch Crew program has formalized the introduction to, and experience of, working with Laker Food Co. The program has influenced students' perceptions of working with LFC and has created more pride in their jobs. Surveys indicate that students care more about their position and consistent attendance than in the past and they actually enjoy their role. Overall, students take their jobs more seriously and it shows every day.

#### Essay:

The Launch Crew program plays a role in building a positive employer image among students. It helps establish expectations and professionalism. And it demonstrates that LFC genuinely cares whether or not students understand and enjoy their roles and responsibilities. It also confirms that LFC is dedicated to the students we serve and the experiences they have in our restaurants.

For example, LFC provides proper allergy training to all staff members to keep guests safe. The program also formalizes some of the things students learn verbally, on the job. Students that feel more prepared, educated, and included, create support for management during busy times of the year. It greatly strengthens the team.

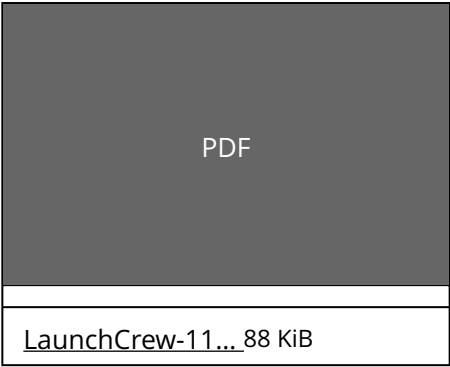
One success story emerged from Catering. Xavier, a 2025 Launch Crew participant, is consistently on time, respectful, asks questions, and is willing to learn on the job. He takes his position with Catering seriously and offers to help in whatever ways he can, even beyond his job description. Xavier wants to continue working with Laker Food Co. and assist with future trainings. He is driven to do so based on his experiences and a desire to give other students the same opportunity. Xavier wants to propel the program forward.

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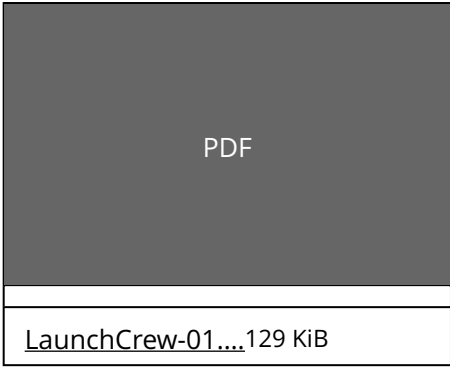
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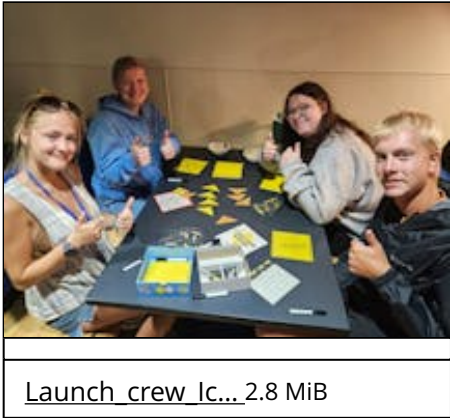
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