2027 Culinary Challenge Rules & Eligibility

The National Association of College & University Food Services (NACUFS) Culinary Challenge is sanctioned by the American Culinary Federation (ACF) and is classified as a Category W - Customized Wildcard Category.

Individual competitors will have a 30-minute prep window before the competition begins where they will be required to break down the mandatory protein. The live competition will consist of 5 minutes to set up, 60 minutes to cook, with 10-minute service window for plating, to prepare four portions of an original hot entrée featuring the mandatory ingredient(s) selected for the competition, followed by 5-minute clean up.

General Rules and Guidelines

- The entrée recipe must feature the mandatory ingredient(s) selected for the competition.
- The mandatory protein for 2027 must be prepared using **two different cooking techniques**.
- Competitors are required to prepare four plates, one for each of the three judges, and one for display that incorporates the mandatory ingredient(s), two classic cuts, and traditional cooking techniques.
- Each competitor will be required to create one unique entree consisting of protein, vegetable and starch with accompanying sauce and garnishes, creating a well-balanced plate. *Remember, to get maximum scores, promote the required ingredient(s) supplied for the competition. They should be featured and built around. For more guidance, please look to acfchefs.org and review competition guidelines for competitions.*
- No advance preparation or cooking of protein is allowed.
- Each competitor will be required to break down the mandatory protein during 30-minute prep time. Any additional prep needed can be finished during this time as well. *This is a required part of the competition and will be judged on skill, sanitation and organization. Practice for this section is suggested, especially any butchery, deboning and cleaning you might not be professional in. This 30-minute prep time is part of your overall score.*
- Competitors may bring pre-marinated protein but will be required to demonstrate making of the marinade during either the 30-minute preparation time or the 60-minute cooking time. Competitors are responsible for providing

their own protein for this purpose. (Supervised access to the kitchen before the competition may be scheduled if needed to allow marinating of the protein.)

- All vegetables can be washed and peeled prior to entering your prep time and **can** be cut or shaped as long as they are not final cuts. Final cuts must be done during the 60-minute cooking time. (Exceptions: garlic, shallots, herbs, should be chopped and ready to use ahead of time.
- Mirepoix can be cut ahead of time to be used for stock, sauces, or as seasoning. **No formed cuts will be allowed.**

- Legumes, grains or lentils may be pre-soaked.

- All ingredients should be pre-portioned in small portion cups. Refrain from bringing large containers, jars, bottles of products not needed. *The object is to have as close as possible to what you need and have almost nothing left. A small amount of extra seasoning is acceptable, but you should get your production as close as you can. Overproduction and excess of unused ingredients will cost points during your competition.*

- Puff pastry, phyllo dough and Brik are allowable in the Culinary Challenge.

- Competitors are only allowed to bring in whole and raw materials in an unprepared state. No finished sauces are allowed; however, basic stocks may be brought in as necessary for the assignment. No clarified consommés or reduced stock are allowed.

- Competitors will work unassisted.

- Butane burners will be provided as the primary heat source for the Regional competitions. ****New for 2027 Competitors are allowed to use one additional electrical heat source during the competition.**

  Induction burners will be provided as the primary heat source for the National competitions. ****New for 2027 Competitors are allowed to use one additional electrical heat source during the competition.**

- Competitors must provide their own knives, small wares, cookware, and/or small appliances. Butane burners will be used for the regional competitions. The National competition will require the use of induction burners therefore, all cookware for the National competition must be compatible with induction burner. Small appliances may not be used during preparatory time with the exception of a small grinder.

- Competitors are allowed to bring and use a heat lamp, heating pad or heating plate to keep food warm.

- Competitors may bring small appliances (such as food processors, handheld food smokers, immersion blenders, or blow torches) to assist in the preparation of the recipe during the competition time. In all cases, if a competitor brings any type of appliance, it must be listed and detailed on the entry form and include wattage required.

- Except for the mandatory protein(s) and required sponsored foods, all other recipe ingredients are the responsibility of the competitor. All ingredients will be proctored and only those ingredients listed on the competitor's recipe will be allowed for use.

- Any alterations to the recipe submitted with the official entry form must be submitted to the NACUFS office no later than one month prior to the regional competition. Changes after this time will result in a reduction of points.

Eligibility

The NACUFS Culinary Challenge (National competition) is open to the winners of the six regional Culinary Challenges. Regional competitions must be conducted in a like manner to the national Culinary Challenge, using the same rules and judging criteria.

- Competitors' institutions must be NACUFS members in good standing.

- Regional Culinary Challenges are open to all culinary professionals (chefs, cooks, and production personnel) employed at member schools. Individual competitors must have worked at the member institution for a minimum of six months, on a full-time basis. The member institution may have a self- operated, contracted, or co-sourced management system.

- In the event a regional winner leaves their institution before the national competition and is employed by a member institution in the same region, they may represent that region and compete in the NACUFS Culinary Challenge.

- In the event a regional winner leaves their institution before the national competition and is no longer employed by a member institution in the same region, the region will send its second-place winner to compete in the NACUFS Culinary Challenge.

- Members of the Culinary Challenge task force committee are not eligible to compete, but other members of their institution are eligible.

- Applicants must submit the Official Culinary Challenge Entry Form completed in full, and all attachments by the entry deadline.

- The recipe submitted must be original and in compliance with all rules outlined in the NACUFS Culinary Challenge rules.

Each entry must include:

- Official Culinary Challenge Entry Form

- An original hot entrée recipe and recipes for side dishes and sauces in Microsoft Word format.

- Color photo of the original signature dish (in electronic format, preferably .jpeg).

- Each recipe submitted to the national competition must bear a strong resemblance to the winning regional recipe. Providing the main ingredients are the same as those in the winning regional recipe, small alterations may be approved. To request approval, you must submit your request to the National Culinary Challenge Chair no later than 30 days prior to the national competition. Changes after this time will result in a reduction of points.

- If selected to compete, you will be asked to submit your headshot (in electronic format, preferably .jpeg).

Selection Procedures

- The total number of competitor slots will be limited to a maximum of six competitors per region and may be less if facility space is limited.

- Only one entry will be accepted per school. If multiple entries are received, the voting delegate for that institution will be notified and will select the one entry that is accepted.

- If the region receives more entries than the total number of "regional slots", then the selection will be made as follows:
  - All eligible entries will be stripped of any identification of individual or school.
  - All eligible entries will then be forwarded to a team of culinarians who will evaluate each entry. Available competition slots will be awarded according to the combined rankings. Alternates will also be selected should a selected competitor withdraw, and a competitor slot become available.

- You will be notified if you have been selected to compete after review in January.

CULINARY CHALLENGE

NACUFS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY FOOD SERVICES
The Resource for Campus Dining Professionals

Regional Competitions

- All competitors are required to attend a pre- and post-competition briefing, at times determined by the Culinary Challenge chair.

- The following equipment will be provided at the competition site:
  - 1 – 6-foot and 1 x 8-foot skirted tables set in an "L" shape with the 8-foot table being the front table
    - 1 - tall speed rack with 8 sheet pans
    - 1 – full-size rectangle chaffer with two half pans
    - 2 - 6-hour sternos
    - 2 – single butane burners with fuel
    - 2 – large cutting boards
    - 4 – 10-inch white dinner plates (if requested on entry form)
    - 1 – trash container with liner
    - 2 – towels
    - 1 – container of water and cleaning supplies (including sanitizer)
    - 1 – wet waste bucket

- The primary heat source for recipe preparation will be the butane burners supplied by the competition. Additionally, **competitors may bring small appliances up to 1800W/120V (such as food processors, handheld food smokers, immersion blenders, or blow torches) to assist in the preparation of the recipe during the competition time**. In all cases, if a competitor brings any type of appliance, it must be listed and detailed on the entry form and include wattage required.

- Competitors are required to prepare four plates, one for each of the three judges, and one for display that incorporates the mandatory ingredient(s).

- Competitors will have a total of 80 minutes to compete:
  - 5 minutes to set the station
  - 60 minutes to fabricate and cook
    - 10 minutes for service window. (Competitors cannot serve the judges before the end of 60 minutes of cooking time. Final plate up should not be done prior to the 60-minute cooking time.)
    - 5 minute clean up and exit station.

- Competitors will be penalized in scoring if either your food is not to the judges at the end of 75 minutes, if your dishes are plated up prior to the completion of the 60 minutes of cooking time or you have not cleaned and exited your station at the end of 80 minutes.

- Volunteers will be available to assist each competitor in bringing hot plates to competitors and delivering them to the judges. No other

assistance is allowed.

- Competition start times will be staggered with 10-minute intervals between competitors. Start times will be randomly assigned onsite.

National Competition

- All competitors are required to attend a pre- and post-competition briefing, at times determined by the Culinary Challenge chair.

- The following equipment will be provided at the competition site:
  - 1 – 6-foot and 1 x 8-foot skirted tables set in an "L" shape with the 8-foot table being the front table
    - 1 - tall speed rack with 8 sheet pans
    - 1 – full-size rectangle chaffer with two half pans
    - 2 - 6-hour sternos
    - 2 – single induction burners
    - 2 – large cutting boards
    - 4 – 10-inch white dinner plates (if requested on entry form)
    - 1 – trash container with liner
    - 2 – towels
    - 1 – container of water and cleaning supplies (including sanitizer)
    - 1 – wet waste bucket

- The primary heat source for recipe preparation will be the induction burners supplied by the competition. Additionally, **competitors may bring small appliances up to 1800W/120V (such as food processors, handheld food smokers, immersion blenders, or blow torches) to assist in the preparation of the recipe during the competition time**. In all cases, if a competitor brings any type of appliance, it must be listed and detailed on the entry form and include wattage required.

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Judging

Three ACF-approved judges will judge the competitors, using a 100-point scale, as follows:

Organization: Total of 25 points

- Sanitation/Work habits (HACCP guidelines will be followed)
- Utilization of ingredients and use of allotted time
- 1-point deduction for each minute late

Cooking Skills and Culinary Technique: Total of 25 points

- Creativity, skills, craftsmanship
- Serving and portion size

Taste: Total of 50 points

- Flavor and texture
- Ingredient compatibility and nutritional balance
- Presentation

Competitors may lose points or be disqualified from the challenge for lack of compliance with contest rules.

Competitors will be penalized in scoring if either your food is not to the judges at the end of 75 minutes, if your dishes are plated up prior to the completion of the 60-minute cooking time or you have not cleaned and exited your station at the end of 80 minutes.

Noncompliance may include, but is not limited to:

- Use of copyrighted or unoriginal recipe
- Significant difference from what was prepared at regional competition
- Lack of mise en place, or disorganization
- Deviation from the recipe; lack of cooking integrity or ingredients that do not meet the guidelines as stated above
- Inappropriate or unsafe food handling practices
- Improper portion size
- Inappropriate conduct or unethical behavior
- Tardiness
- Late submission of final recipe

Judges will offer critiques to competitors at the close of the competition.

The decisions of the judges are final.

Although we intend and strive for both the National and Regional competitions to be exactly the same, some slight variations may arise at the National Competition due to a different competition venue or other unforeseen circumstances. Although we cannot eliminate all unforeseen issues, we are committed to dealing with them in a professional manner to produce a fair and level playing field for all the competitors. The National Culinary Challenge Chairperson has the reserved right of making final decisions on unresolved issues for what they believe to be the benefit of the competition and to ensure consistent standards.

Prizes

- At the national competition, first, second, and third place NACUFS prizes will be awarded based on total points:
    - First place: Trophy engraved with winner's name, $1,000 gift card, the opportunity to compete at the ACF National Convention the following year.
    - Second place: $750
    - Third place: $500

- ACF medals will also be awarded, based on the following point totals:
    - ACF Gold medal (90-100 points)
    - ACF Silver medal (80-89 points)
    - ACF Bronze medal (70-79 points)

All contestants will receive certificates of participation.

All recipes and photos entered into the Culinary Challenge become the property of NACUFS.

By entering, competitors grant permission to NACUFS to publish and/or use in any way the materials submitted, including the recipes and names and photos of competitors.

Permission to use copyrighted materials, symbols, etc., must be verified with a copy of the permission from the copyright owner.

NACUFS shall not be liable or responsible for personal, college, or company equipment that is lost, stolen, or broken unless such equipment has been authorized in writing by the CEO for use in connection with association activities.