

University of North Carolina at Charlotte



njpPNxBE

Entry details

Entry Name:	Upper Prospector Dining Renovation – UNC Charlotte
Institution Name:	University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Mrinali Rao, Senior Marketing Director – UNC Charlotte Dining Services

Upper Prospector Dining Facility at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte reopened on August 20, 2025, after a 17,000-square-foot renovation that transformed an aging retail location into a modern, student-centered destination. Last renovated in 2005, the facility no longer matched how students moved, dined, or gathered on campus. Located near East Deck along a major academic corridor, it serves a large commuter population throughout the day. Planning began in 2021, followed by student research in 2022 that shaped decisions around layout, concepts, technology, and atmosphere. The renovation improved circulation, flexibility, and long-term operational efficiency.

Essay:

We surveyed more than 1,000 commuter students to understand how they use campus dining. Speed, proximity, and variety were the biggest drivers of dining decisions. Students wanted a space that could support both quick meals between classes and longer stays for studying, conversation, and connection. Those insights shaped every major planning decision.

The renovated facility was designed as a destination rather than a pass-through space. Three entrances align with major pedestrian routes, including a commuter-facing entry with daylight and bold graphics. Two main entrances

connect through a central open area anchored by ordering kiosks and a large digital display wall, keeping queues away from seating and improving flow.

The Oasis Café anchors the central rotunda as an in-house concept inspired by airport lounge spaces and built with commuter students in mind. Its menu includes local Charlotte vendors such as Lenny Boy Kombucha. Throughout the facility, “spaces within spaces,” created through furniture and ceiling elements, support conversation, quiet study, and group use. Technology also plays a central role, including digital menu boards, kiosk ordering, mobile ordering, Starship delivery, and ListenWiFi audio streaming, giving students more control over how they order, dine, and engage in the space.

Introduction:

UNC Charlotte Dining Services used a multi-phase marketing strategy to keep students engaged throughout the Upper Prospector renovation and build anticipation for reopening. The campaign combined transition programming, digital communication, and campus partnerships to maintain visibility before, during, and after construction. During closure, alternative dining solutions and communication tools kept the location relevant to daily student life. The reopening during Gold Rush was positioned as a campus-wide moment supported by Student Government Association, Auxiliary Services, University Communications, and Alumni Engagement, driving strong awareness, participation, and a smooth return to the space.

Essay:

Marketing began before closure with a Goodbye Upper Prospector event, where students wrote farewell messages and left handprints on the walls, reflecting on memories tied to the space and building excitement for what came next.

During construction, Dining Services made sure students were not left without food or a place to gather. A Food Truck Village was created directly outside Upper Prospector and supported by a website with menus and schedules. Transparent tents gave students a place to sit, eat, and talk with friends, while heat provisions kept the area active during colder months. Even during construction, Prospector remained part of daily student life.

The grand reopening created immediate energy and demand. More than 200 students lined up before the ribbon cutting, which featured the UNC Charlotte Marching Band. The first 49 students received mobile dining credit, driving early traffic. The launch included a live DJ, giveaways, photo activations, a raffle, a mocktail demonstration at The Oasis, and tastings from the new concepts. After opening, The Oasis sustained engagement through weekly trivia nights. The campaign helped reposition Upper Prospector as a destination and supported a 218 percent increase in sales and a 96 percent increase in patron visits year over year.

Introduction:

The Upper Prospector Dining Facility renovation was driven by collaboration across campus departments, student organizations, and design partners. UNC Charlotte Dining Services worked with Auxiliary Services, Facilities Management, Planning, Design and Construction, University Communications, Student Government Association, Student Involvement, Alumni Engagement, and architectural teams from concept through reopening. These partnerships shaped both the physical environment and the student experience, ensuring alignment with university priorities and student needs. Coordinated communication across digital and physical channels amplified awareness, resulting in a space that reflects campus identity and strengthens its role as a central hub for connection and community.

Essay:

Collaboration played a central role in both the design and success of Upper Prospector. Dining Services worked closely with campus planning, facilities, and architectural partners to create a space that balances operational efficiency with a welcoming student experience.

Student identity is embedded throughout the facility through murals created by UNC Charlotte student designers, reflecting academic diversity, campus landmarks, and community connection. Branded elements such as the All-in-C

moss wall reinforce campus pride. Student Government Association also supported the grand opening by providing leadership presence and direct engagement with students during the event.

Collaboration extended to concept development as well. The Oasis Café was developed and branded in-house through a partnership between Dining Services and Auxiliary Services, with its identity carried through the space, menus, and staff elements to reinforce its role as a central gathering point.

Alumni Engagement expanded the opening beyond current students, with a UNC Charlotte alumnus performing live and alumni guests welcomed into the space. Auxiliary Services and University Communications amplified the reopening across website, posters, social media, mobile app, email, and the university newsletter, ensuring strong campus-wide visibility and sustained engagement.

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Attachment name
Upper Prospector Gets ...

<https://www.youtube.co...>

Attachment name
Look inside prospector

<https://www.instagram....>

Attachment name
Pre Promotion

<https://www.instagram....>

Attachment name
Pre Promotion

<https://www.instagram....>

Attachment name
Food Truck Village Post

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Goodbye Party

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