

NACUFS (2025)

Innovative Dining Program of the Year

Boston College Dining Services NACUFS Innovative Dining Program of the Year

Boston College

Introduction:

As one of the few self-operated, declining balance dining programs in the country, Boston College Dining Services (BCDS) has redefined the campus dining experience thanks to its commitment to new technology, culinary excellence, student engagement, and sustainability. BCDS's à la carte model requires constant innovation in menu planning, streamlining operations, innovative sourcing, and marketing. This forward-thinking approach ensures that BCDS is a vital part of campus culture.

Essay:

Boston College's mission is rooted in cura personalis—a "care for the whole individual" and the dedication of being "women and men for and with others." The dining program strives to provide an experience beyond the dining halls where the BC community can come together over innovative meals to enhance community, cultural appreciation, and student development. Through innovative menu development, cutting-edge technology, recruitment, and industry leading training programs, BCDS continuously evolves to make sure that every meal is an opportunity for learning, connection, and sustainability.

With continued integration with technology, sustainability, student development, and culinary artistry, BCDS remains a leader in campus dining because of its commitment to innovation while staying true to the mission of the University. The department's dedication to enhancing the student experience through forward-thinking initiatives and a commitment to

excellence continues to set new standards for collegiate dining, ensuring that Boston College remains a model for the future of campus food service.

Introduction:

Strategic and innovative marketing and communications are vital for capturing the campus community's attention. Central to its marketing, BCDS created a distinct brand look and feel that touches everything from uniforms, signage, packaging, and marketing materials. BCDS employs a dynamic multi-channel approach, utilizing social media, digital advertising, and weekly campus events to captivate students. This strategy highlights new offerings, sustainability initiatives, and upcoming events that create a vibrant and informed campus culture.

Essay:

In a competitive landscape, a cohesive brand is crucial for building loyalty and trust at Boston College. BCDS created a unique brand to unify its 15 dining locations and over 1200 employees. Comprehensive brand guidelines ensure effective and consistent marketing communications.

BCDS leverages a multichannel marketing strategy to reach students, staff, and faculty. This includes agile social media tactics, point-of-sale signage, email marketing, a website, videos, and events. The cohesive look and tone of BCDS marketing stem from its established brand.

To engage directly with customers, BCDS hosts tabling events several times a week, providing opportunities for students to ask questions, for the team to gather feedback, and connect the dining staff with students.

To execute this innovative marketing strategy, BCDS offers a robust marketing internship program. Marketing interns gain hands-on experience in developing marketing plans, social media campaigns, graphic design projects, market research, public relations, and more. "Since Fall 2022, I've been impressed by BC Dining's Marketing internship. Interns gain hands-on experience in design, copywriting, and leadership collaboration. Specializing in social media, graphics, or video, we improved followers and engagement through creative, student-focused content," said Katherine Conforti, a student intern on the Marketing team.

Introduction:

As a self-operated, a la carte dining operation, BCDS works to create a multitude of creative and delicious menus across its 15 locations. A robust, five-week cycle menu at its main dining halls includes crowd-favorites to innovative plant-forward options and new Global Flavors. Students can also find specialty menu items and convenient Grab and Go options at its markets. A variety of innovative and fresh options keep students hungry for more.

Essay:

Unique & Innovative Menus:

BCDS hosts monthly culinary showcases featuring creative events like the Native American Heritage Dinner featuring indigenous cuisine and a spooky Halloween meal with Walking Dead Tacos and Fried Bat Wings.

BCDS collaborates with student cultural groups to create a Global Flavors menu showcasing diverse heritages through unique menus. This singular program involves brainstorming, tastings, and service, bringing special flavors to the community.

Cooking competitions between dining locations challenge chefs and engage students as diners and judges. Chefs demonstrated their culinary skills by creating dishes using kelp at the buzz-worthy "Under the Sea Showdown."

Grab and Go items, including plant-based options like Vegan Nuggets with Chipotle Ranch and Curry Quinoa Salad with Grapes and Walnuts, meet the growing demand for plant-based, convenient meals.

With many students managing dietary restrictions, BCDS ensures transparency and safety through allergy labels, digital nutrition guides, and meal accommodations. BCDS' online menu lists options with nutrition information and guidance for

religious needs. Students can also purchase Grab & Go meals made without the top 9 allergens and gluten, access Allergy Eats dinner stations, and use dedicated gluten-free appliances. The Nutrition Navigator program offers personalized peer support within our dining program.

Introduction:

Innovation at BCDS is driven by Boston College's motto, "Ever to Excel." This commitment to excellence can be seen in food and menu design, employee satisfaction, campus partnerships, and new technologies. Continuous training of culinary staff on industry trends and the ongoing collection of student feedback contribute to a forward-thinking dining program. These elements combined to create a dining program that is not only innovative but also inclusive and sustainable.

Essay:

Food and Menu:

Executive Chef Phyllis Kaplowitz and her team create a five-week cycle menu featuring various cuisines, seasonal ingredients, and customizable meals. Interactive food stations cater to diverse tastes while service design focuses on sustainability and technology.

Staffing:

BCDS values talent recruitment, development, and retention in shaping workplace culture. Employees receive growth opportunities, including industry training on trends. A culture of growth and inclusion is reinforced by employee recognition programs.

Campus Collaboration:

BCDS collaborates with campus groups to enhance the dining experience. Partnerships with student organizations focus on sustainability, cooking skills, cultural menus, and events. BCDS also works with the student government and academic departments on student-led challenges to address the food waste.

Sourcing and Procurement:

Through the innovative FRESH initiative to promote sustainable sourcing, BCDS has doubled procurement of Fairly Traded, Regional, Equitable, Sustainable, and Healthy ingredients this year.

Technology & Data: BCDS leverages technology to improve operational efficiency and customer satisfaction with self-service kiosks, digital signage, reusable packaging tracking, LeanPath food waste solution, and Grubhub mobile ordering. BCDS analyzes data from kiosks and Grubhub to forecast production, staffing, and product mix. LeanPath data helps minimize food waste, while Toppinga tracks reusable containers and adoption rates.

Introduction:

Since Boston College does not have a student center, BCDS is central to campus life. The program's impact can be primarily seen in three areas: Education & Engagement, Sustainability, and Service. These efforts, along with offering a much welcomed gathering space, provides a sense of community and fills a vital role in student life. In addition, these areas support BC's Jesuit's ideals of "caring for the whole person" and "women and men for others," ensuring BCDS' impact is felt beyond the campus walls.

Essay:

Education & Engagement:

BCDS hosts events that educate students about nutrition, sustainable eating, and life skills. Weekly FRESH demos showcasing local vendors to nutrition events and dining advisory board meetings, BCDS empowers students to make informed choices.

Sustainability:

BCDS prioritizes environmental stewardship and ethical sourcing to make a positive impact on campus and beyond. To reduce waste, Green2Go offers reusable containers made from recycled materials. With over 1800 students participating,

Green2Go has saved 20,136 single-use containers, 1,938 pounds of waste, 12,957 gallons of water, 13,472 pounds of CO2 since the program started.

Using the FRESH (Fairly Traded, Regional, Equitable, Sustainable, and Healthy) framework, nearly 19% of all food purchases are grown or processed in New England, 20% of all seafood is certified to be sustainable, and 6% of all purchases come from women-owned, certified B-Corps, or BIPOC-owned businesses.

Service:
BCDS leads initiatives that support local communities. In collaboration with student and local food rescue organizations, surplus food is redistributed to those in need. BCDS also supports charitable initiatives with end-of-year point drives, Thanksgiving food drives, and hosts cooking classes to local high school students to empower them with skills and knowledge to make healthy choices.

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