



Entry details

Entry Name:	Elon Dining - Elevating campus dining with local flavors & sustainable practices
Institution Name:	Elon University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Christian Wallace - Guest Experience Manager

Elon Dining stands apart through a guest experience that is both intentional and consistently visible across all aspects of the operation. Innovation is embedded in how food is prepared, how teams engage with students, and how dining connects to campus life. From scratch cooking and local sourcing to direct relationships with local farmers and fishermen, where teams engage with the source of their food and bring those stories back to campus, dining becomes active, personal, and community-driven. This approach transforms everyday dining into a meaningful part of the student experience, strengthening connection, engagement, and overall campus culture.

Essay:

Elon Dining stands out by embedding innovation into the daily student experience. Culinary practices such as preparing sauces, soups, and dressings in-house and cracking locally sourced eggs reflect a level of hands-on execution that emphasizes quality, transparency, and care. These efforts are paired with clear communication around sourcing, allowing students to better understand and connect with their food.

The difference is the visibility and accessibility of the dining team. Chefs and team members regularly engage with students in the dining spaces and classrooms, encouraging conversation, and building trust. This approach shifts dining from a transactional service to a relationship-driven experience.

Programming further differentiates the operation through a consistent cadence of pop-ups, station takeovers, teaching kitchens, and large events led across culinary, marketing, sustainability, and wellness teams. Unique initiatives such as Bites Abroad extend this model beyond campus by funding student food experiences while studying abroad, with those insights brought back to inform menus and programming.

As a result, students are more engaged, more willing to explore new foods, and more connected to the people behind the program. They become fans of the dining experience, contributing to a campus culture where dining becomes a meaningful and memorable part of student life.

Introduction:

Elon Dining's marketing approach is designed to reflect the energy, creativity, and experience of the program itself. Visual identity remains flexible, aligning with university branding when appropriate while allowing individual events and pop-ups to stand out. Through a combination of digital media, in-person collateral, and student-driven content, marketing enhances both daily dining and special programming. The goal is to create immediate clarity while also delivering a strong first impression, where students, families, and visitors can quickly understand the scale, quality, and excitement of the dining experience.

Essay:

Marketing at Elon Dining is built around storytelling, consistency, and student connection. Collateral is designed to match the tone of each experience, ranging from cohesive branded materials to more playful, event-specific designs. Hand-drawn chalk art adds a distinctive and personal touch within dining spaces, reinforcing daily engagement and highlighting menu features.

Communication is delivered through multiple platforms to ensure broad reach and real-time awareness. Newsletters and push notifications through the mobile ordering app are used to promote upcoming events, limited-time offerings, and surprise pop-ups. Social media serves as a central storytelling platform, with consistent posting that highlights everyday dining, special programming, and behind-the-scenes moments.

Student interns play a key role in content creation, helping ensure messaging reflects the voice and interests of the campus community. The Instagram presence is intentionally curated to showcase the full scope of the program, allowing viewers to quickly understand the quality and variety of the dining experience.

This approach creates a strong visual and emotional impact, generating excitement and delivering a "wow" factor that encourages participation and reinforces engagement.

Introduction:

Elon Dining menus are designed to be flexible, inclusive, and reflective of student preferences while maintaining a strong foundation in scratch cooking and culinary creativity. Menus evolve through daily service, special programming, and campus collaboration, allowing for both consistency and innovation. A wide variety of options are offered to meet diverse dietary needs, ensuring all students can dine with confidence. From global features to wellness-focused offerings, menus are intentionally developed to balance flavor, accessibility, and cultural relevance.

Essay:

Menus at Elon Dining emphasize variety, adaptability, and inclusivity, supported by scratch cooking and thoughtful menu development. Core offerings are complemented by rotating features, cultural programming, and special events, allowing menus to remain dynamic and responsive to student interests.

A dedicated station provides meals free from the top nine allergens, supported by a separate kitchen space, equipment, and trained team members to ensure safety and consistency. This station also serves halal-certified chicken, expanding access for students with both allergen and religious dietary needs.

Menus are further developed in collaboration with campus partners to support religious observances and cultural traditions. Special offerings for programs such as Ramadan and Passover are created in partnership with university departments to ensure accuracy and respect.

Additional menu options include vegetarian, vegan, and wellness-focused items, providing students with a range of choices that support different lifestyles and preferences. Clear labeling and consistent communication help guide students through dining spaces with confidence.

Through this approach, menus are not only diverse and innovative, but also inclusive and intentional, ensuring every student has access to a high-quality dining experience.

Introduction:

Elon Dining approaches innovation through the lens of the guest experience, where culinary, engagement, technology, and feedback continuously inform one another. Rather than relying on single initiatives, the operation is designed to evolve in real time based on student behavior and campus collaboration. Flexible dining stations, scratch cooking, and data-informed decision making allow menus and experiences to shift throughout the day. This approach reflects the future of collegiate dining, prioritizing flexibility, experience-driven programming, wellness, and transparency. By combining local sourcing, student engagement, and digital tools, Elon Dining creates an environment that is responsive, scalable, and aligned with evolving student expectations.

Essay:

Innovation at Elon Dining is centered on creating an experience-driven environment that moves beyond transactional dining. Service design is built around adaptable stations that shift identity based on meal period, menu focus, and programming, allowing spaces to transition from daily service to experiences.

Staffing is structured around participation trends, supporting an undergraduate population of over 6,000 students, with 69% on a meal plan and 42% participation among voluntary students. Cross-functional collaboration is highly visible, with culinary, marketing, wellness, and sustainability teams each leading their own events. These teams regularly engage directly with students in the dining spaces, building relationships, and shaping the program through interaction.

Menus are rooted in scratch cooking, with in-house sauces, soups, and dressings, and locally sourced ingredients such as farm eggs. Themed Farm to Table dinners create curated, small-format experiences that connect students directly to sourcing and culinary storytelling. Bites Abroad extends dining beyond campus by funding student food experiences while studying abroad, with students documenting their journey and translating those experiences into menus, content, and programming upon return.

Sourcing emphasizes transparency and sustainability, including North Carolina seafood partnerships. Data from surveys and digitized Napkin Talk feedback informs adjustments, ensuring the experience remains responsive and student-driven.

Introduction:

Elon Dining functions as an extension of the campus experience, supporting the university's mission through connection, engagement, and experiential learning. The program is intentionally designed to contribute both inside and outside the classroom, creating opportunities for students to interact, learn, and build community through food. By aligning with institutional priorities such as sustainability, student development, and campus collaboration, dining plays an active role in shaping the overall student experience. This approach positions Elon Dining as a partner in campus life, where food serves as a platform for connection, education, and shared experiences.

Essay:

Elon Dining impacts campus life by creating consistent, visible opportunities for student engagement. A high frequency of events, pop-ups, and activations generates excitement and anticipation, with students actively seeking

out experiences and engaging with the program both in person and online. This level of connection has led to strong loyalty, where students become fans of the dining program and the people behind it.

Student involvement is a key driver of this impact. Teaching Kitchens connect dining directly to academic experiences by partnering with faculty and student organizations for hands-on learning. Internships provide students with experience in marketing, wellness, sustainability, and operations, allowing them to contribute directly to programming and storytelling. Programs like Bites Abroad further extend this engagement by sponsoring student interns studying abroad to explore local cuisine and share those experiences through content and campus programming.

Dining also collaborates closely with academic departments, student organizations, and auxiliary services, including cross-campus workshops that strengthen alignment and shared understanding of student needs. As one campus leader shared, “The Elon Dining team goes beyond a traditional vendor role and operates as a true partner in advancing the university’s mission and strategic priorities.”

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PDF MARKETING - In... 1.1 MiB	PDF overall - Innovat... 1.0 MiB	
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