



GvaYwbPB

# University of Wisconsin-Madison

## Entry details

|                                                  |                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Entry Name:                                      | Memorial Union Dining                    |
| Institution Name:                                | University of Wisconsin-Madison          |
| Entry Completed By ( <i>name and position</i> ): | Ben Clark, Assistant Director, MU Dining |

The Wisconsin Union has long viewed student employment as more than a workplace: it is an educational environment where students gain leadership experience, professional skills, and a sense of belonging within the campus community. The Union operates across two locations, Memorial Union and Union South, which together support a range of student-driven services and programs. Within Memorial Union Dining (MU Dining), student employees support daily operations while developing competencies beyond their roles. Through structured onboarding, mentorship, leadership pathways, and feedback initiatives, the Union fosters an environment where students grow both personally and professionally while contributing to a dynamic hospitality operation.

Essay:

The Wisconsin Union's employee development approach is built around the belief that student employment can serve as a formative leadership experience. Student employees begin through onboarding processes introducing operational expectations and workplace culture within MU Dining. New hires participate in structured training shifts and shadowing experiences that build knowledge and confidence while developing service, teamwork, and communication skills.

As students gain experience, they are encouraged to pursue leadership roles such as student supervisors and participate in programs like the MU Dining Student Leadership Council (SLC) and Wisconsin Union Student Employee

Advisory Group (SEAG). These opportunities allow students to mentor new employees, coordinate teams, and contribute to daily operational decision-making. Programs such as the University of Wisconsin–Madison Guided Reflection on Work (WiGrow) and SEAG further support development by providing spaces for students to share feedback, reflect, and shape future initiatives.

Full-time staff and managers also play an active role in mentoring students, offering coaching as they grow into leadership roles. This layered support system allows development through training programs and daily workplace interactions. Together, these initiatives create a structured yet flexible ecosystem that supports student growth while strengthening operational excellence across MU Dining.

#### Introduction:

Retention within student-driven operations presents unique challenges due to academic schedules, graduation cycles, and evolving student commitments. Despite these natural transitions, Memorial Union Dining has focused on creating a workplace where students feel motivated to remain engaged beyond their initial employment period. Through structured onboarding, leadership development opportunities, and supervisor support, the Union encourages employees to build lasting connections within their teams. These efforts aim not only to maintain operational continuity but also to cultivate long-term student engagement. As a result, development initiatives within MU Dining have contributed to measurable improvements in employee tenure and overall workforce stability.

#### Essay:

Data collected between 2022 and 2025 demonstrates a clear shift in employee retention outcomes as development initiatives evolved. During the early expansion phase of MU Dining operations, hiring volume increased significantly between 2022 and 2023. While this growth supported operational needs, average employee tenure remained relatively short at approximately 134–145 days.

In 2024, a notable improvement emerged. Average employee tenure increased to approximately 208 days, representing more than a 50% increase compared with the previous year. This trend continued into 2025, where tenure remained above 200 days, indicating sustained workforce stability and longer employee engagement. Together, these results suggest that student employees are remaining in their roles longer, gaining deeper operational experience and strengthening team continuity.

Feedback from student employees and supervisors indicates that leadership pathways and mentorship opportunities play an important role in encouraging continued employment. Positions such as student supervisors allow experienced employees to mentor newer team members while developing management and communication skills.

Although seasonal turnover remains expected due to academic transitions, the data shows employees are staying engaged for longer durations before leaving. By aligning operational responsibilities with personal growth opportunities, MU Dining fosters retention through meaningful development experiences rather than short-term employment alone.

#### Introduction:

Recruitment within student employment environments depends not only on scheduling flexibility but also on the workplace experience reputation itself. At the Wisconsin Union, the emphasis on student development has become a defining feature of its employment brand. Students often learn about opportunities through employees who have previously worked within Union Dining, creating a culture where student recommendations play a central role in recruitment. By emphasizing leadership opportunities, professional skill development, and a supportive workplace environment, alongside benefits such as employee dining discounts and referral incentives, the Union attracts students seeking meaningful employment experiences that complement their academic and personal growth.

#### Essay:

The MU Dining's development initiatives have strengthened recruitment by positioning student employment as an opportunity for growth rather than simply a campus job. During hiring and orientation processes, supervisors

emphasize leadership pathways and the soft skill development that student employees gain through teamwork, communication, and problem-solving in a fast-paced hospitality environment.

Many students are initially drawn to the Union through peer recommendations. Current employees frequently share positive experiences with friends and classmates, highlighting the supportive culture, advancement opportunities, and strong sense of community within MU Dining teams. Referral incentives further encourage these connections, allowing employees to bring new team members into the organization.

Recruitment is also strengthened by the visibility of student leadership roles within daily operations. Seeing peers step into positions like student supervisors demonstrates that advancement is achievable and supported by managers and full-time staff.

Complementing these development opportunities are practical workplace benefits, including a 30% employee dining discount and recognition programs supported by the Thoughtful Investment in the Potential of Staff (T.I.P.S.) fund. Together, these elements reinforce the Union's reputation as a workplace where students can gain valuable professional experience while feeling appreciated and supported within a vibrant campus community.

#### Introduction:

Employee satisfaction is closely connected to workplace culture, mentorship, and growth opportunities. At MU Dining, student employee satisfaction is cultivated through intentional development practices that emphasize support, inclusion, and leadership development. By encouraging collaboration between student employees, supervisors, and full-time staff, the Union creates a workplace where students feel respected and empowered to contribute ideas. Feedback mechanisms such as the Student Employee Climate Survey and advisory groups like SLC and SEAG provide valuable insights that guide improvements in training and workplace practices. These efforts ensure that student voices remain central to the evolution of the Union's employee development initiatives.

#### Essay:

Student satisfaction within Memorial Union Dining is shaped by an environment that prioritizes recognition and collaboration. Through structured onboarding, continued training, and leadership pathways, students develop skills that extend beyond daily operational responsibilities.

Student supervisors and experienced student leaders play a vital role in fostering this culture. Their mentorship helps create an atmosphere where new employees feel supported as they learn responsibilities and build confidence in their roles. Students frequently note that guidance from peers and managers contributes significantly to their sense of belonging.

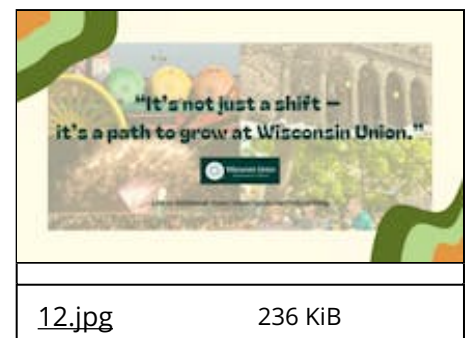
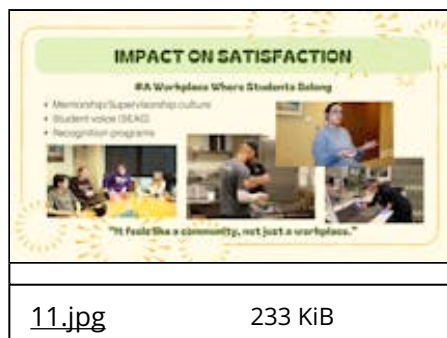
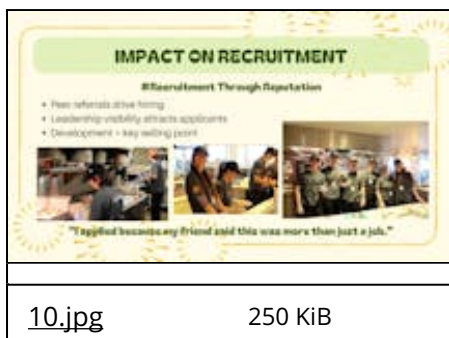
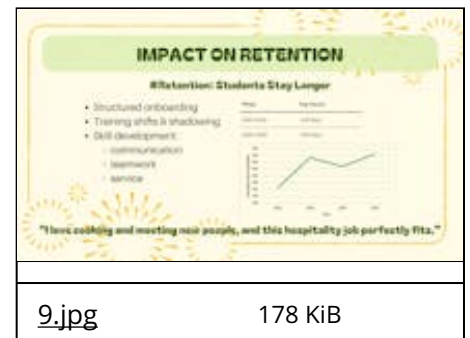
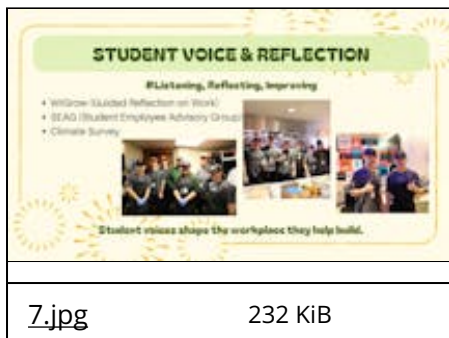
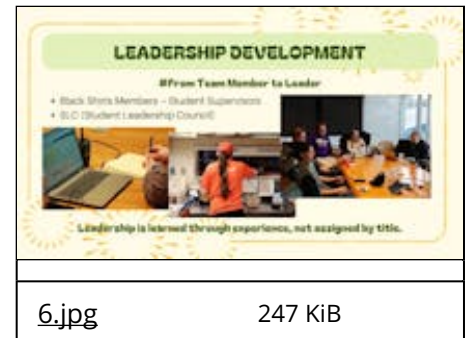
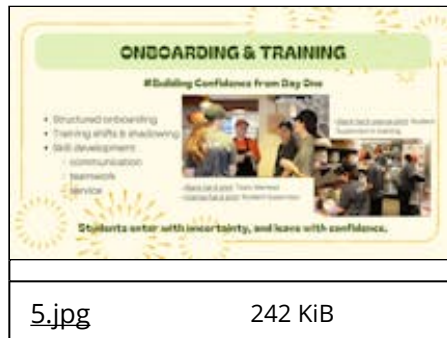
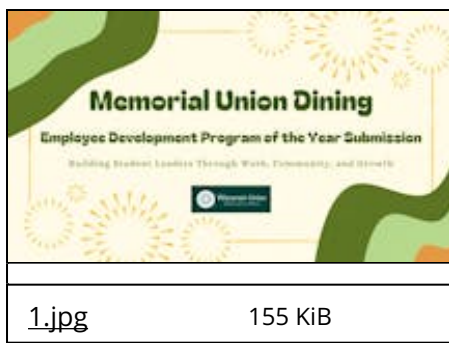
Opportunities for student feedback also strengthen satisfaction. Programs such as the Student Employee Climate Survey and SEAG allow students to share insights about their experiences and contribute ideas that shape workplace policies and development initiatives. This collaborative approach ensures that employees feel heard and valued.

Recognition initiatives further reinforce employee engagement. Programs such as Student Employee of the Month celebrate outstanding contributions, while incentives support through the T.I.P.S. Fund and employee dining discounts acknowledge the everyday efforts of student staff.

Together, these initiatives create a workplace culture where student employees feel appreciated, connected to their teams, and motivated to contribute to MU Dining operations.

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