

Eliza Haffey



zMGBAVlv

Entry details

Entry Name: Dining as Education: Empowering Informed Choices for Health and Sustainability

Institution Name: University of Michigan

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Eliza Haffey, MPH, RD - Senior Culinary Nutrition Specialist

Email Address: ejarman@umich.edu

Phone Number: +19894449898

Address: 541 Thompson St

City: Ann Arbor

State: MI

Zip Code: 48109

Country: United States of America

Essay:

In an increasingly competitive collegiate dining landscape, University of Michigan Dining is redefining the student well-being experience through an innovative, education-centered approach that empowers informed choices for both personal health and environmental sustainability. By integrating two complementary labeling systems, the MHealthy Nutrition Guidelines and Carbon Footprint Icons, Michigan Dining transforms everyday meals into meaningful, educational experiences that engage students at every point of decision.

Developed collaboratively by registered dietitians, physicians, and other health care providers across the University of Michigan's academic and medical campuses, the MHealthy Nutrition Guidelines are reviewed and updated every five years to reflect the latest nutrition science. Menu items are evaluated using standardized criteria including protein quality, fiber, saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium content. Foods are assessed within their category and assigned a nutrient-density score on a one-to-five scale, visually represented by a multi-wedge citrus icon. The more wedges filled, the higher the nutrient density, providing a clear and immediate visual cue for healthier choices.

These icons are displayed consistently across dining hall point-of-service signage, digital menu boards, and online menus, ensuring that students encounter the information in multiple settings throughout the day. This omnipresence encourages repeated engagement, helping students internalize nutrition principles and empowering

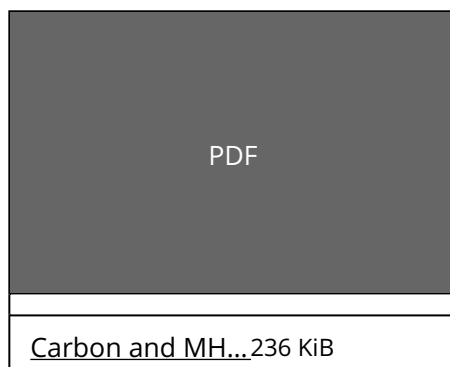
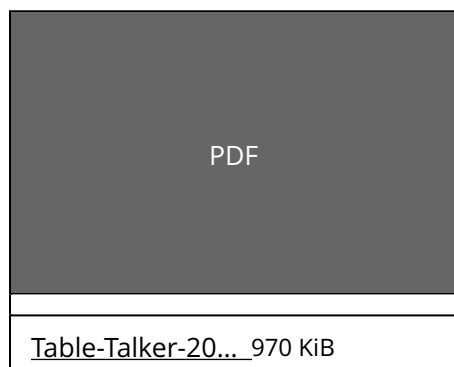
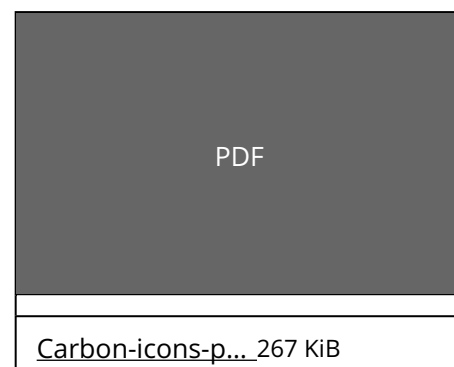
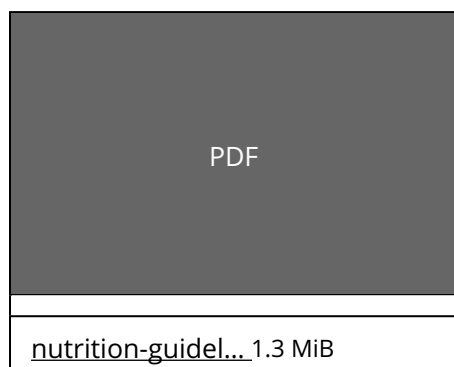
them to make healthier daily decisions. By integrating the system into routine dining operations rather than treating nutrition as a separate initiative, Michigan Dining fosters a culture of ongoing education and personal responsibility.

Complementing this health-focused framework, Michigan Dining introduced a Carbon Footprint labeling system to highlight the environmental impact of menu selections. Each item features a stoplight-style CO₂ icon: green for low carbon impact, yellow for moderate impact, and red for high impact. The system was developed in partnership with the UM School of Public Health and the UM School for Environment and Sustainability, with research validating its effectiveness in influencing food choices. Following measurable success during the pilot phase, the labeling program was permanently adopted, exemplifying how academic research can be translated into operational practice with tangible campus-wide impact.

Plant-forward and minimally processed items generally receive lower carbon ratings, while animal-based and dairy-intensive dishes tend to score higher. By providing clear, at-a-glance environmental information, the program equips students with actionable knowledge, linking everyday dining decisions to broader issues of sustainability and climate responsibility.

What distinguishes this initiative is its holistic, research-driven approach. Rather than relying solely on traditional nutrition facts or dietary preference labels, Michigan Dining integrates health and sustainability education directly into daily operations. Through innovative visual communication, cross-campus collaboration, and evidence-based evaluation, the program exemplifies leadership in collegiate wellness and nutrition education, cultivating a culture of informed decision-making that supports both student well-being and long-term environmental stewardship.

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.





Attachment name
MHealthy Website

<https://hr.umich.edu/be...>



Attachment name
MDining Sustainability ...

<https://www.canva.com...>



Attachment name
MDining Nutrition Guide

<https://www.canva.com...>