

Elizabeth Brunet



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Entry details

Entry Name: Learning beyond the lab

Institution Name: East Mississippi Community College

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Elizabeth Brunet - Area Marketing Manager

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Introduction:

Since 2022, EMCC Dining and Lion Hills have teamed up to get culinary students out of the classroom and into the heat of real service. Instead of just practicing for a grade, students take on actual responsibilities in our dining halls, learning how to handle the pace and pressure of a living kitchen. This structured, ongoing partnership was designed to provide consistent, real-world learning opportunities.

Essay:

The reality is that some lessons can't be taught in a lecture; they must be lived. Through our partnership with Lion Hills, students bring what they've learned in class and test it in a high-stakes environment. Dealing with timing, communication, and forecasting while a line of hungry customers is waiting is where real growth happens.

This collaboration changes the campus vibe, too. Events like Now Boarding: Destination Delizioso give students a platform to show off their talent and connect with their peers. Because we work together year-round, students have the space to make mistakes, adjust, and improve over time.

What really makes this program stand out is the career pipeline we've built. Several Lion Hills students now hold leadership roles within EMCC Dining while still in school. The impact of this program is best demonstrated through Jeremy Dixon, who started as a student worker and is now our Executive Chef. His path proves that when you give

students a supportive, real-world environment to learn in, they don't just graduate; they lead. It's an innovative approach that turns our dining operation into a true steppingstone for the industry.

Introduction:

We make sure the campus knows exactly what these collaborations are about and who is behind them. Our marketing focuses on the students and the partnership between EMCC Dining and Lion Hills, so nothing feels like a random event. By keeping our message clear and consistent, we build a real sense of purpose around what the students are doing. This intentional approach is why we see such strong engagement both in the dining hall and on social media every time we run a session.

Essay:

For events like Destination Delizioso, we hit every channel we have emails, newsletters, posters, and digital screens across campus. We also lean heavily into social media from both EMCC Dining and Lion Hills. We keep the branding clean and put both logos in front and center, so students recognize right away that this is a joint effort.

The goal isn't just to sell a special lunch. We focus marketing on the students who are back there preparing the meal. By highlighting the talent and the hard work behind the scenes, we help the campus see that these events are about education, not just food.

The numbers show that this approach connects with people. During the week of Destination Delizioso, our social media engagement shot up. Shares and reactions both increased by 20%, while our overall commitment jumped by 103%. Those stats prove the campus wasn't just seeing the posts; they were into it. Marketing helped build that hype and made the students' work visible to everyone, even the people who couldn't make it to the serving line that day.

Introduction:

These partnerships bring a lot of value to our students and the entire campus. It makes classroom learning feel real and practical instead of just theoretical. Guests get to see student talent in action through fresh events, and the school gets a bridge between academic and daily life. It is a genuine effort with results you can actually see, from students getting better at their crafts to landing real jobs before they even finish their degrees. It strengthens the connection between academics, campus life, and career readiness.

Essay:

For students, this partnership is the bridge between being a student and being a professional. They learn to manage time, talk to a team, and stay calm during a rush. You can't teach that kind of confidence in a lab.

The campus feels the impact too. These events bring a different energy into the dining hall and let everyone see the talent coming out of EMCC. Recruiting Coordinator, David Williams said, "Bringing our culinary program into experiences like this opens students up to foods and flavors they may not have tried before, while also giving them the chance to see what their peers are capable of. That is inspiring to watch, and it makes the whole experience educational in a very real way."

The long-term results are the best part. In Fall 2025, seven students were working part-time at EMCC Dining. Nine culinary students jumped into multiple kitchens for our Cooking for a Cause event to see how different setups work. Then you have Jeremy. He started as a student worker in 2014 and worked his way up the ranks, and recently became the EMCC Executive Chef in December 2025. His story is the shining example of the program's success.

Introduction:

Our dining hall stops being just a place to eat and becomes a live lab during these sessions. We don't just have students standing around watching us work. They're the ones running the stations, managing the clock, and talking to guests as the rush happens. It turns our entire service area into an active classroom where every mistake is a quick lesson, and every win builds real confidence. With our professional team backing them up, students get the kind of honest practice that prepares them for a career in a kitchen.

Essay:

For Destination Delizioso, we flipped the script on our lunch service and turned the dining hall into a full-scale culinary workshop. We had six Lion Hills students take over four different service points, handling everything from the initial menu planning to the final execution. They had to scale out recipes for a massive crowd, forecast how much food they'd need, and keep their stations stocked once the doors open. We purposefully stepped back to let them lead, only jumping in when they needed a hand.

The real value of this setup is that this environment creates real-time pressure that cannot be replicated in a classroom. Students had to stay organized and talk to each other while troubleshooting issues on the fly, all while maintaining high standards with guests right in front of them. You just can't recreate that kind of pressure in a controlled school lab. By using our space this way, we give these students a 360-degree view of what the job feels like, from the pre-service nerves to the rhythm of a busy rush. It's a grounded, hands-on environment where they can really own their craft while we've still got their backs.

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



Jeremy and stu... 3.5 MiB



Lion Hills Takeo... 682 KiB



Social Media Ta... 758 KiB



Takeover2025.j... 653 KiB



Jeremy Graduat... 421 KiB



chef dwayne wi... 2.2 MiB



students servin... 2.4 MiB



students in lab... 1.9 MiB



golden spoon c... 2.2 MiB



sodexo chef dw... 1.5 MiB



Executive Chef J... 949 KiB



CFAC LionHills ... 3.0 MiB



ig archive emcc... 3.8 MiB



Lion Hills Stude... 5.0 MiB



lion hills takeov... 526 KiB



Lion hills takeov...544 KiB



Attachment name
Local news appearance ...

[https://www.instagram....](https://www.instagram...)

Attachment name
Jeremy Dixon named O...

<https://patch.com/missi...>