

Samantha Troost



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Entry details

Entry Name:	The Associate Special
Institution Name:	Pace University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Samantha Troost - MARKETING MANAGER
Email Address:	Samantha.troost@compass-usa.com
Phone Number:	+17189167449
Address:	15 Beekman Street
City:	New York City
State:	NY
Zip Code:	10038
Country:	United States of America

Introduction:

The Associate Feature Special is our ongoing initiative dedicated to associates' growth, not just menus. Each month, a frontline team member becomes the creator in chief by developing a signature dish that reflects their interests and style, refining it with support from our culinary mentors, and sharing their story in a featured video with the campus community. The dish is offered for the month, giving students a delicious way to celebrate the associate behind it. Through this experience, employees build confidence, gain visibility, strengthen valuable skills, and contribute meaningfully to a community that values their growth.

Essay:

The Associate Feature Special was created after conversations with Pace Auxiliary Services and the dining team, which revealed how much pride our associates take in their work. Eating in the café daily and learning their favorite station items, we saw an opportunity to highlight their creativity and honor the individuals who bring our operation to life. The program is structured as a monthly feature in which any interested associate collaborates with our executive chef and dining managers to develop a personalized dish and film a video introducing themselves to the campus community.

Because most orders on campus are placed through Grubhub, students rarely interact directly with associates. This program creates a warm, human connection by giving employees a chance to introduce themselves, share their

story, and engage with students. The dish is promoted through digital screens, Instagram reels, onsite photos, and Grubhub, ensuring both the story and the associate's creativity reach students.

Success is measured through teamwork, customer service, and the associate's ability to balance daily responsibilities while taking on a leadership moment. NACUFS professional development strengthens the program by equipping leaders with coaching and communication skills that enhance the mentoring process and support meaningful employee growth.

Introduction:

Retaining great people begins with making them feel seen, valued, and connected to their work. Many of our associates are their own chefs and appreciate the art of food. By creating an environment that invites culinary creativity, associates feel genuinely connected to their station and the food they prepare. When an associate creates a special, they are not just completing another order but crafting a customized meal that reflects their personality and skill. The Associate Feature Special strengthens this experience by giving employees meaningful opportunities to grow, express themselves, and take pride in their contributions.

Essay:

Since launching the Associate Feature Special, every highlighted associate has remained on our team. The monthly spotlight offers a clear pathway for growth, beginning with the creation of a signature dish and continuing through guided storytelling and campus-wide recognition. Supervisors consistently observe higher motivation, stronger initiative, and increased engagement after an employee is featured. "Our spotlight program offers a meaningful opportunity to showcase your talent and creativity... it empowers and motivates others while giving the associate a sense of pride in the work they do every day," shares Roberto Abud, Director of Operations.

Associates report feeling more confident and valued, and several have pursued or prepared for advancement opportunities. Interest in being featured again or proposing new specials remains strong, demonstrating continued engagement rather than a temporary boost. The program also encourages cross-training and readiness for additional responsibilities, helping employees envision a longer-term future within our operation.

On a campus where most orders are placed through Grubhub, public recognition and social storytelling help employees feel connected to students despite limited face-to-face interaction. The result is a more stable team, stronger morale, and a culture where people choose to stay because they feel seen, supported, and appreciated.

Introduction:

The Associate Feature Special has become an increasingly valuable part of how Pace Dining showcases its culture, celebrates its team, and strengthens its presence across campus and on socials. While the initiative began as an internal recognition effort, it has organically evolved into a tool that influences referrals, boosts visibility, and supports overall recruitment. By highlighting real employees, their creativity, and their day-to-day experiences, the program helps prospective candidates form a more authentic and positive impression of working at Pace Dining.

Essay:

The Associate Special has become a meaningful point of interest during recruitment, particularly for referred employees and interns. Current associates often share their experience with friends, and this genuine peer-to-peer excitement led to a new hire who joined after hearing about the program from a participating team member. During student interviews, applicants frequently mention the specials and express enthusiasm about joining a workplace that celebrates creativity and recognizes individual contributions. The visibility of the program through digital screens, Instagram content, and Grubhub also helps candidates see that our operation is a place where employees can feel proud.

Some of our interns specifically referenced the employee specials during their application process. They appreciated the idea of working in an environment that highlights associate and were eager to contribute to the continued

growth of the content connected to the program. Their interest demonstrates how the initiative enhances our employer brand and helps attract applicants who value creativity, teamwork, and recognition.

While the program is still growing, the early response from applicants shows that it strengthens recruitment conversations and makes our operation more appealing. The Associate Special helps potential employees view our team as an engaging work place, which positively influences interest.

Introduction:

The Associate Feature Special strengthens the dining experience by letting employees personally introduce themselves to the Pace community. Each featured associate shares how long they have worked at Pace, what inspires their signature dish, and the ingredients they love to use and why. This gives students a deeper connection to the people behind their meals and helps them discover new ways to customize their orders based on the associate's style and story. By pairing each introduction with a month-long special, the program makes the dining experience more personal, memorable, and engaging for students and staff alike.

Essay:

When Eric's feature appeared on the cafe screens, something small but powerful changed at the smoothie station. Students who often grabbed their drinks quickly began stopping to talk. They asked about favorite blends, complimented Eric's spotlight, and treated him like someone they felt connected to. The recognition meant a great deal to him, and he later said, "I never felt more appreciated at work." His experience reflects a growing shift across Pace Dining, where employees feel more valued and confident because their stories are being shared.

The excitement surrounding the features has created a sense of unity. Associates ask eagerly about when they might be featured, and many proudly show their videos to friends. Managers notice brighter moods and more supportive teamwork, while students respond with genuine enthusiasm. One student shared, "It is nice to see the dining staff getting recognized. They are such a big part of campus life," a sentiment that reinforces how meaningful these spotlights are.

Culture has also become a part of these celebrations. When Sous Chef José introduced a Dominican-style special inspired by his heritage, students connected not only with the meal but with the story behind it. These moments highlight the heart of Pace.

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

PDF	PDF	PDF
Associate Colla... 3.7 MiB	NACUFUS Insta... 2.9 MiB	Instagram insig... 2.8 MiB

PDF

Pace- associate ... 97 KiB

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Associate speci... 3.8 MiB

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Associate speci... 1.7 MiB

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Associate speci... 1.7 MiB

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Associate speci... 4.2 MiB

Attachment name
The Courtney Special

<https://youtu.be/m8-C3...>

Attachment name
The Jennyfer Special

<https://youtu.be/NZ9iIY...>

Attachment name
The Kane Special

<https://youtu.be/DvI5Vfl...>

Attachment name
The Kareem Special

<https://youtu.be/03uIT...>

Attachment name
The Vanessa Special

<https://youtu.be/X1xua...>

Attachment name
The Eric Special

<https://youtu.be/4nP9K...>