

NACUFS (2025)

Residential Dining Facility of the Year

The Lodge Dining Center

University of Montana Campus Dining

Introduction:

Marketing at The Lodge Dining Center focuses on clear communication, polished design, and inclusive outreach. Our custom Nutrislice menus balance creative flair with essential dietary information, while signage and guides support a smooth guest experience. We work hard to make sure every campus audience feels informed and welcomed, whether they are prospective students, current staff, or first time visitors. Consistent branding, active engagement, and multiple feedback channels help us connect with guests and improve service. By pairing strong visuals with thoughtful messaging, we make dining easier to navigate and more enjoyable for everyone who walks through our doors.

Essay:

Our published menu and materials are descriptive, informative, have a creative flair, and are polished in design and appearance. Each station uses a branded Nutrislice menu that shows the top nine allergens, dietary preferences, and our custom Farm to College icon. Staff add playful biline messages for a personalized touch.

We prioritize informational signage that provides customers clear guidance through food stations. Guests receive printed maps of the facility, and branded wayfinding signage directs them throughout the building. Each concept has signage showing current status or opening times. Stanchions form lines, close sections for cleaning, and reinforce visual clarity. Our menus also switch to digital ads when a station is closed.

Marketing efforts target all segments of operation's clientele. The dining hall is promoted on over 120 campus TVs, social

media, Griz Hub, new employee orientations, and the Admissions tour path. Our director also hosts custom tours for campus committees and departments.

Customers are surveyed on dining preferences and involved in recipe, menu, and product evaluations through our HappyOrNot stations and Food for Thought focus groups. These sessions have led to direct changes, like vegan ranch and Alfredo, while building connection across campus through shared meals and discussion.

Introduction:

At The Lodge Dining Center, we prioritize student health by providing nutrition and wellness support that is accessible, accurate, and easy to use. Our in-house Registered Dietitian works closely with our chefs and marketing team to provide dietary options, maintain labeling accuracy, and offer nutritional counseling. We use Nutrislice and printed guides to help students make informed choices, including support for allergies and food preferences. We focus on transparency and education, offering consistent communication and individual guidance. From daily menus to long term health goals, our approach supports the whole student and helps them eat with confidence.

Essay:

We provide students with printed and digital materials that support nutrition and wellness. Our Nutrition Guide outlines allergen protocols, dietary preference identifiers, oil use, and tips for dining with restrictions. It also includes instructions for using Nutrislice and information on nutrition counseling. This guide is available in print and online formats.

Detailed information is available regarding dietary options and nutritional content through Nutrislice. The platform displays ingredient lists, allergen information, and dietary labels across app, web, digital menu boards, and food line signage. This data is maintained by our Registered Dietitian for accuracy.

We regularly offer special dietary options such as low-fat, vegetarian, and vegan through scratch-cooked meals designed to reduce allergens and support diverse needs. Menus are clearly labeled for vegan, vegetarian, halal, and other preferences.

The Dietitian meets weekly with culinary and marketing teams to keep offerings aligned with student preferences.

Nutritional counseling is provided on a consistent, inviting, and professional basis by a full-time, credentialed Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. Services are free and available in person or virtually. Students can schedule flexible appointments to address goals, allergies, or disordered eating concerns. These services help make healthy eating a practical part of campus life.

Introduction:

We take great pride developing our menu around guest experience preferences, current dining trends, and our continued commitment to variety, safety, and culinary exploration. Our new facility features seven micro-restaurants, offering a constantly evolving, globally-inspired menu that has evolved around student feedback. New programs such as our Mindful Eating Series and Food for Thought Focus Groups guide menu development, while frequent monotony breakers and special events help us exceed guests' expectations. Our menu features Farm-To-College locally sourced ingredients, highlights Native American dishes unique to the region, all while maintaining strict food safety practices

Essay:

Menus reflect current dining trends through the "Mindful Eating Series" which encourages students to be present and engaged while eating. Our Food for Thought focus groups allow our culinary team to receive input from the campus community that helps us with menu development, including vegan and vegetarian guests. This led to the development of pop-ups and new breakfast items like our chia seed pudding bar.

A variety of menu choices are available through seven micro-restaurants representing global cuisines, including Jamaican Pepper Steak and Argentinian Pastel De Choclo. Using HappyOrNot feedback system, new items are frequently introduced like horchata, new sauces on Mongolian, and customizable options.

We continually add specials events like outdoor s'mores or Valentine's Day churros with UM's Mexican Marimba Band. We feature concept takeovers such as Big Dipper Ice Cream and Eson Gib Sushi night.

Our Farm-To-College program partners with 200+ farms in Montana ensuring our menu reflects fresh, seasonal quality produce. Our menu promotes culinary exploration with flavors and products unique to the region, including Native

American dishes Shawnee wild rice cakes, Indian Tacos, and Berry Soup.

Food safety practices include ServSafe certification, temperature logs, kiosk-based preparation, and pre-service quality checks.

Introduction:

At The Lodge Dining Center, we focus on how food is experienced, not just eaten. Every element of food presentation is intentional, from the layout of our stations to the dishware at each concept. Custom bowls, curated plating, and thoughtful color add visual appeal and freshness to each line. Our stations are designed to move guests naturally through the space, with curved islands inspired by the nearby Clark Fork River. This flow supports quick service and reduces congestion, while also creating opportunities for students to explore. The result is a dining experience that feels personal, inviting, and worth returning to.

Essay:

We present food choices effectively and look appealing to customers through custom bowls and plating that match each concept's cuisine. Smaller pans at breakfast create a fresher, homestyle feel. Where possible, dishes are plated family style in upgraded serveware such as cast-iron pasta bakes to give a more refined touch.

Food presentation reflects a balance of color, texture, flavor, and temperatures across all concepts. Terra and La Mesa De Lula feature fermented, sweet, and sour flavors for variety. Our Bear Grass Salad Bar uses chilled dishes and serves produce grown on campus at the Iron Griz Garden. Hot and cold wells appear on each line for contrast.

We prioritize food presentation that is creative and attractive. Garnishes are applied in the pan, and in-house microgreens are used to connect with our sustainability efforts. E

The layout of the service area enhances flow of service and adds to overall ambiance. Modeled after the Clark Fork River's movement, curved islands break up the space and create natural zones. This helps reduce crowding and encourages exploration. The result is a dining room that moves well, looks good, and gives students space to enjoy their meal.

Introduction:

At The Lodge Dining Center, we work toward more than great meals. We create a dining environment that is flexible, student driven, and grounded in purpose. Hours of operation offer flexibility with continuous daytime service and a new late night service open until 10 PM, a first for our campus. Student employees have a direct role in the residential dining concept's success, shaping menus and daily operations. We actively pursue selected sustainability goals, emphasizing local sourcing and environmentally responsible design. From station layout to food procurement, every element is intentional.

Essay:

The Lodge's hours of operation offer flexibility with uninterrupted service throughout the day and new late-night dining until 10 PM, expanding access and meeting student demand for extended hours.

Student employees have a direct role in the residential dining concept's success through daily huddles, recipe testing, and operational feedback. Their frontline experience helps guide improvements across service and menu planning.

We meet selected sustainability goals through our Farm to College program and participation in STARS reporting. In 2024 to 2025, UM earned a Gold STARS rating and full points for sustainable dining. The Lodge is LEED Gold certified and invested over \$329,000 in direct farm to institution meat procurement, with roughly 20 percent of purchases sourced from Montana vendors.

The Lodge's wow factor in the concept is its deep connection to Montana's cultural and environmental history. The building design mirrors the movement of glacial floods that shaped the Missoula Valley. Each dining station acts as a love letter to the state. "Yow & Yee" honors Butte's Pekin Noodle Parlor, "Sallies" celebrates early Black entrepreneur Sarah Bickford, and "Square + Compass" showcases Montana's oldest livestock brand. These details turn every meal into a meaningful encounter with Montana's story.

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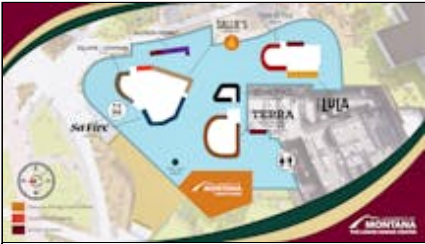
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