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Central Washington University

Entry details

Entry Name:	CWU Dining Services Student Leadership Program
Institution Name:	Central Washington University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Dean Masuccio, Director of Dining Services and 1891 Catering

CWU Dining Services developed its Student Leadership Program in 2020 to professionalize student leadership, strengthen operational scalability, and elevate the student employee experience. What began as a Student Coordinator initiative expanded in 2021 to include Student Managers, creating a tiered leadership structure that supports over 300 student employees annually. With 43 Student Coordinators and 33 Student Managers, the program serves as a development pipeline within the university's largest student employer. Designed to balance operational excellence with personal development, the program prepares students to lead with professionalism, empathy, and accountability while directly supporting Dining's mission and the larger campus community.

Essay:

The Student Leadership Program was created to support campus operations while developing student employees into confident, capable leaders. Implemented by the Dining Leadership team and supported and refined by Student Managers, the program integrates structured training, advanced onboarding, mentorship, and real-world application.

Student Coordinators complete formal training in leadership, communication, conflict resolution, DEI, responsible reporting, and operational support. Student Managers build on this foundation through advanced coaching and communication models such as the F.U.E.L. framework, emergency preparedness, active floor management, and

accountability practices. Training content aligns with NACUFS Body of Knowledge competencies in talent management and professional intelligence.

Participants are selected based on performance and leadership potential and invited to interview for an elevated role. The program is reinforced through onboarding conversations, peer mentorship, and leadership training sessions that prepare students to guide teams while maintaining professional standards.

The goal is to strengthen Dining's leadership infrastructure while preparing students for post-graduate careers. One student leader reflected that the program helped her "learn to have a voice and help others grow," demonstrating the confidence and leadership development the program fosters. By investing in student growth, CWU Dining has built a sustainable leadership pipeline that strengthens both guest experience and student success.

Introduction:

Dining Services' Student Leadership Program was intentionally designed to bridge the gap between student workers and leadership. By creating clear advancement opportunities, increasing responsibility, and offering higher compensation tiers, the program incentivizes student employees to remain within Dining Services beyond entry-level roles. With 76 student leaders serving within a workforce of 317 student employees, the program builds continuity, peer accountability, and peer-to-peer mentorship that strengthens unit stability. Over the past year, the student leadership program has supported operational consistency, reduced turnover in key positions, and distinguished Dining Services as an employer that invests in student growth and long-term student employment.

Essay:

The Student Leadership Program strengthens retention by creating visible pathways for advancement within Dining Services. High-performing student employees are encouraged to pursue Student Coordinator and Student Manager roles, reinforcing that leadership opportunities and increased responsibility are attainable outcomes. This internal mobility encourages long-term commitment and reduces the likelihood that experienced team members seek employment elsewhere.

Multi-year survey data reinforces this impact. The number of student leaders with over two years of employment has grown significantly, increasing from 4 in 2022 to 26 in 2025, demonstrating sustained engagement among participants. In contrast, entry-level student roles more commonly reflect short-term employment patterns, while leadership roles support longer-term commitment as students progress through the program.

Student leaders also serve as peer mentors, onboarding trainers, and customer service ambassadors. Their presence improves new employee integration and strengthens team continuity. One student leader reflected that advancing through the program allowed them to become "the helping hand that was offered to me when I first started," demonstrating how leadership development encourages students to remain engaged, support their peers, and pay it forward.

By investing in leadership from within, Dining retains institutional knowledge, strengthens workplace culture, and creates meaningful reasons for students to remain year after year.

Introduction:

The Student Leadership Program strengthens CWU Dining Services' recruitment strategy by recognizing employment as a professional development opportunity rather than hourly work alone. In a competitive campus employment environment, Dining differentiates itself by offering clear advancement pathways, leadership training, and skill-building experiences aligned with students' academic and career goals. With 76 structured leadership roles embedded within a workforce of 317 student employees, Dining communicates that growth, responsibility, and increased compensation are attainable outcomes. This emphasis on development attracts motivated applicants seeking meaningful campus employment that supports both their financial needs and prepares them for long-term career success.

Essay:

Recruitment messaging for CWU Dining Services highlights opportunity, advancement, and leadership development. During interviews, onboarding conversations, and peer referrals, student leaders share their experiences progressing through the Student Leadership Program, reinforcing that Dining offers more than entry-level employment by providing a clear pathway from team member to Student Coordinator and Student Manager.

This leadership structure appeals to students seeking to build transferable skills such as communication, delegation, coaching, and problem solving. One student leader pursuing a Business Administration degree noted that leadership roles provided “hands-on experience in delegating tasks, problem-solving, communicating effectively, and creating a safe work environment,” demonstrating the program’s relevance to future careers.

Student leaders also support recruitment through their daily presence on the floor, modeling professionalism and mentoring new employees. Their involvement reinforces Dining’s commitment to student growth and leadership development.

Survey data further supports this approach. In 2025, over 80% of student employees reported they would recommend working for Dining Services, reflecting strong employee advocacy that reinforces peer-driven recruitment and sustained applicant interest.

By communicating these opportunities and fostering a visible leadership culture, Dining Services attracts motivated applicants and builds a strong pipeline of students prepared to contribute and grow within the department.

Introduction:

CWU Dining Services’ Student Leadership Program strengthens employee satisfaction by creating opportunities for building confidence, developing genuine connections, and advancing professional growth among student leaders. Through structured mentorship, leadership training, and increased responsibility, participants develop communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills while contributing meaningfully to their teams. Annual Student and Staff Satisfaction Surveys segmented by employment level allow Dining Services to measure engagement across student employees, Student Coordinators, and Student Managers. Results consistently show that leadership participants report strong workplace engagement and professional development, demonstrating that intentional investment in student growth enhances both job satisfaction and the overall workplace experience.

Essay:

The Student Leadership Program has measurably and meaningfully impacted student satisfaction by transforming employment into a developmental experience. Student testimonials reflect consistent themes of increased confidence, voice, and belonging. One Student Manager shared that the program helped her move from feeling reserved and anxious to leading with empathy, confidence, and purpose. Another described learning to navigate difficult conversations professionally while building accountability and strong communication skills.

These experiences are reinforced through structured training in coaching models, DEI principles, conflict resolution, and professional boundaries. Student leaders are empowered to actively manage their teams, resolve challenges, and contribute ideas, creating ownership and pride in their work.

Survey data segmented by role allows Dining Services to track satisfaction trends among general student employees, Coordinators, and Managers. Across multiple years, student leaders report approximately 12% higher agreement that their roles prepare them for future careers compared to non-leadership student employees (7.09 vs 6.34 out of 10).

As leaders model professionalism and inclusion, satisfaction extends beyond the leadership cohort to the broader Dining workforce.

By intentionally creating pathways for growth and voice, Dining Services has cultivated a culture where students feel valued, prepared, and supported — outcomes that directly correlate with both retention and operational success.

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CWU Dining Stu... 3.3 MiB

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CWU Dining Stu... 2.2 MiB



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