

NACUFS (2025)

Retail Sales: Single Concept of the Year

FlavUR

University of Richmond

Introduction:

In the spring of 2024, an alumni-owned retail operation vacated its location at the University of Richmond. Staff immediately began creating a self-operated replacement unit to serve a healthful menu by the 2024 fall semester. Culinary and retail teams worked closely throughout the summer on menu ideation, research, and development. Key stakeholders were invited for a preliminary tasting in June to determine if the menu direction would be popular. By August, the initial preview lunches and soft opening were so successful that regular service began one week before the start of classes, and operation has not slowed since.

Essay:

"We looked at restaurant trends and what was popular on campus," said Tyler Betzhold, executive chef for the University of Richmond's Dining Services. "The flavors found in Latin and Mediterranean cuisines offer endless customization, which students love, while also being the basis of well-balanced meals." Staff also referenced NACUFS benchmarking survey data that said restaurants like Roots, Cava, and locally operated Latin-based locations were popular with students.

As flavor was the main topic of all conversations around the new concept, the name FlavUR (pronounced flavor) was chosen with a nod to the University of Richmond.

FlavUR's scratch-made menu involves signature wraps, bowls, and all-day breakfast options ranging from vegan breakfast wraps to tropical overnight oats. Guests can also create custom wraps and bowls, choosing from a base of starches or greens, added proteins, like house-made beef birria, vegetables, additional toppings such as pickled strawberries, white bean dip, and grilled corn salad, and seven house-made dressings. Signature, build-your-own smoothies, and popular packaged drinks like Topo Chico and Natalie's Juices round out the menu. UR's Dining Services partners with locally owned businesses, offering locally roasted Afterglow coffee and locally made pastries from Ironclad Bakery.

Introduction:

The physical layout of FlavUR was inherited from the previous concept, and capital funding was unavailable, so the café concept needed to work with the current space. One Rationale oven was added, but the rest of the kitchen and the front of the house remained the same except for signage. The relatively new kitchen opens into the serving area, with space for presenting fresh ingredients and made-to-order preparation in front of guests. The light-filled interior with natural wood finishes suggests health and well-being and blends perfectly with the menu and vibe of the concept.

Essay:

Visitors savor the transparency, inclusivity, and flow of the modern, open-kitchen atmosphere and inviting indoor and outdoor seating. Large, colorful digital menu boards and user-friendly Grubhub kiosks inspire customized orders. Mouth-watering merchandise displays feature house-made ingredients, locally baked pastries, and iced beverages.

Designers with food service expertise prioritized employee health, safety, and customer experience while constructing the original cafe. Staff have an efficient and comfortable work environment with linear, adjustable prep spaces, under-counter sinks that allow for more interactive production surfaces, and a state-of-the-art hood system that helps everyone breathe easily.

We eat with our eyes first, which is integral to the experience at FlavUR. Guests see an array of fresh vegetables, steaming proteins, creative toppings, and chilled house-made dressings right at the counter, with prep happening before their eyes. The display of ingredients is also meant to inspire customer experimentation; trying new flavors is inherent in the menu, and samplings are encouraged. Those customers who order their meals on Grubhub find an impressive list of customization options in the app, accompanied by photos.

Introduction:

The exit of a popular and alumni-owned concept was a political challenge, and the timing of the messaging played an essential role in the perception of FlavUR, focusing on the menu's affordability, fresh quality ingredients, and customization. Crucial in the marketing plan was the inclusion of feedback from key stakeholders. Participants in the June menu testing and August preview lunches completed feedback surveys, and data was shared with the culinary and production teams, overwhelmingly confirming the menu's success. The result was a built-in customer base that felt heard and included in the new concept.

Essay:

FlavUR's brand is intentionally bright and fresh, reflecting the menu's freshness and the blues and greens in the established interior design. Lit brand signage was the only addition to the established space.

A comprehensive marketing effort to launch the concept ensured Spiders knew everything they needed to enjoy FlavUR's first semester. Before opening, key stakeholders and offices near the café were invited to a free lunch in exchange for their feedback on the concept. This highly successful approach drove word-of-mouth efforts during the first few weeks of operation.

The replacement of the former café drew the attention of returning students. Communication channels included the Dining Services website, campus-wide digital signage, branded menu boards, printed stanchion signs, and daily university e-mails called "SpiderBytes." Digital signage showed educational messages about ingredients that may have been new to customers, like birria. QR codes posted throughout the seating area encourage immediate customer feedback via URHeard, an online

form that allows managers to communicate directly with users and guests. @URDining social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) promoted the new FlavUR menu to a growing, and engaged audience. The student-run newspaper, The Collegian, ran an article, as did local media.

Introduction:

FlavUR resides in the University of Richmond's Well-Being Center, which echoes the institution's commitment to campus wellness. Surrounded by an interior meditation garden, health promotion offices, a relaxing salt room, and a yoga studio, FlavUR highlights the integral role of nutrition in overall well-being. It also shares its seating space with a popular Demonstration Kitchen, which is often used for tastings of local items available at FlavUR. Neighboring the café is the office for one of the university's nutritionists, conveniently located to offer nutritional counseling.

Essay:

The presence of FlavUR in the Well-Being Center, alongside a Demonstration Kitchen to teach students about nutritious meal preparation, furthers the university's holistic commitment to health and wellness. Thanks to an on-site office, busy students can easily interact with one of two full-time dietitians.

FlavUR's menu provides a well-balanced meal. With the customizable bowls, wraps, smoothies, and breakfast all day, the student can choose from various proteins, carbohydrates, fruit, and vegetables to create a meal full of color and nutrients. Guests can use the Dining Services Nutrislice app to see dietary information, including a nutrition breakdown and ingredients.

When building the menu, dietitians and chefs focused on healthy ingredients with options for everyone. For example, of the 33 food choices in the made-to-order menu, 31 are gluten-free, and 19 are vegan. At the same time, guests can build a meal around Peruvian chicken and birria beef with cheese selections and creamy dressings.

"Even if the customer has dietary restrictions such as food allergies or is gluten-free, vegan or vegetarian, the menu is diverse," says Karen Hensley, senior dietitian for Dining Services. "It allows everyone to create a balanced plate to their liking."

Introduction:

FlavUR replaced an organic café that was meant to be a healthy dining spot for the campus community, but only a tiny percentage could afford to dine there. FlavUR needed to be healthy and affordable. It has successfully achieved these goals and has become one of the top-grossing locations on campus.

FlavUR's most significant selling points may be the affordability, the diverse selections, or the serene environment. It may also be the care taken in crafting the menu and experience for our students and guests.

Essay:

Special Touches

Leading the menu research and development was Chef Lillianna Diaz Duran, an experienced chef on four continents and a native of Mexico. Chef Lillianna brought the tastes and textures of her homeland, from the batidos to the birria, and blended them with the adaptability of the Mediterranean. She even handcrafted seven delicious sauces, including her mother's hibiscus chipotle dressing recipe.

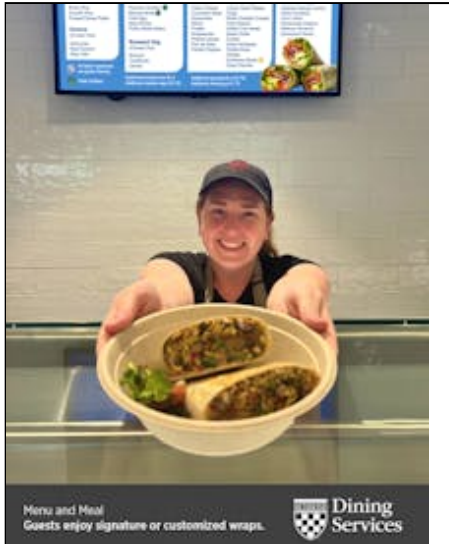
Increased Sales

FlavUR became popular quickly, with 5,000 more transactions during the fall semester than the previous café in the same period from the prior year. The previous café had a check average of \$13.01 per transaction, while FlavUR's check average is \$10.50 per transaction. This means that overall, the check average is \$2.51 less. So, while overall sales are slightly down, more people are eating at FlavUR, which means more well-balanced delicious meals are being enjoyed on campus.

Happy Customers

Over 100 faculty and staff joined us for free preview lunches the week before opening and completed a feedback survey. When asked if they would recommend their meal to a friend, 95% responded Yes! These key stakeholders have done just that, repeatedly returning and bringing along their staff and colleagues, helping us build a loyal customer base.

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



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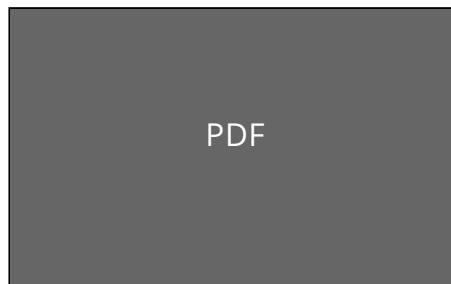
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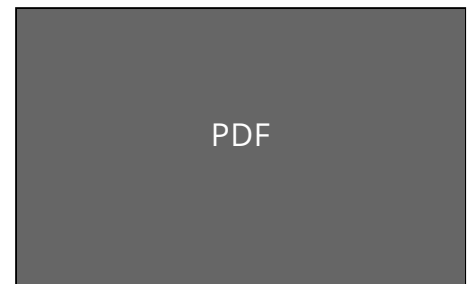
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Marketing
Campus stakeholders listen to Tyler Batfield introduce the menu at the June tasting.



Marketing-June t... 1.1 MiB



Marketing
Guests were able to try new smoothies, custom bowls, wraps, and more.



Marketing-June t... 1.2 MiB

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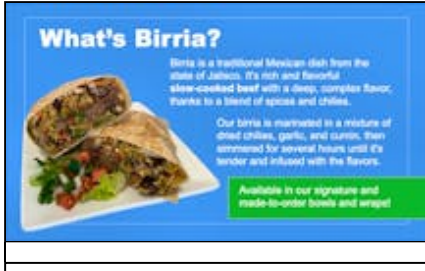
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Attachment name
Article in The Collegian, U...

<https://www.thecollegian...>



Attachment name
FlavUR Press Release

<https://news.richmond.e...>