

UNC Wilmington



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Entry details

Entry Name:	Special Diet Program - UNC Wilmington
Institution Name:	UNC Wilmington
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Joseph Bush, Registered Dietitian

UNCW Dining’s Health & Wellness programming keeps a clear focus on creating a dining program that more than just meets the needs of our students but also creates experiences.

The 2025-2026 Freshmen class saw a 23% increase in students who self-identified following a restricted diet. Nearly 7% of these students reported living with a food allergy, medical restriction, or following a plant-based lifestyle. Peanut and tree nut allergies increased by 15%, making up 54% of reported allergies, making them the most prevalent. Plant-based lifestyles were 20% of self-reported modifications, and Celiac disease or gluten intolerance 15%. With over 7,600 meal plan holders, providing a dining experience that is safe and inclusive remains a top priority.

UNCW Dining has focused on designing space, where students can find a meal that addresses their specific needs. Targeting the most prevalent allergen, Registered Dietitian Joe Bush led efforts to achieve a Certified Free From® certification at Shore Dining Hall. UNCW’s busiest dining hall, The Shore, serves an average of 2,900 guests per day. Nestled in the freshmen neighborhood, we recognize this is where most students with food allergies will spend their time. In December 2025, we partnered with MenuTrinfo to certify this facility as free from both peanuts and tree nuts, providing students with a trusted space on campus to dine without worry.

Student feedback has been instrumental in our programs' growth. Quarterly surveying showed students who avoid gluten felt variety lacked within our Residential dining spaces. To meet these needs, both the Shore and Wagoner Dining Hall were outfitted with dedicated gluten-free ovens and fryers, expanded bread options and menu revisions to guarantee at least 30% of offerings are made without gluten. To increase visibility and clarity, a color-coded basket system was introduced: blue for made-without-gluten and green for plant-based options.

At Dub's Café, we identified a gap in service, where expanded use of kiosk-based ordering improved efficiency but reduced opportunities for guests to communicate dietary restrictions. To address this, dedicated allergen-friendly ordering was added to all kiosks. Guests are prompted to identify allergens among the top nine, including gluten. Orders print on yellow tickets at dedicated printers to increase staff awareness. Dub's features dedicated fryers, panini presses, and prep tables for made-without-gluten items.

Market 47 @ Pelican Hall now includes our third Worry-Free Zone, offering allergen friendly meals, snacks and desserts within UNCW's largest residential convenience store. Signature "Worry-Free Purple" menu boards further reinforce transparency and confidence throughout campus locations.

Recipe transparency is integral in providing a safe program. In 2025 we increased menu transparency from 91% to 98% in residential dining. Across all locations, QR codes on sneezeguards link to real-time ingredient and allergen information, along with contact details for the RD. To remove technology barriers and allow students to make a decision that is best for their individual needs, allergen statements were added to the digital menus at each station.

Through these initiatives, UNCW Dining has built a proactive, inclusive dining environment that prioritizes student safety, responsiveness, and trust.

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





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LEARN ABOUT GUT HEALTH

WITH RD JOE BUSH

Chilled Brown Rice Grain Bowl
with Roasted Portobello
Mushrooms, Quick Vegan
Kimchi, Miso Vinaigrette

FEB 17 11A-2P
@ DUB'S

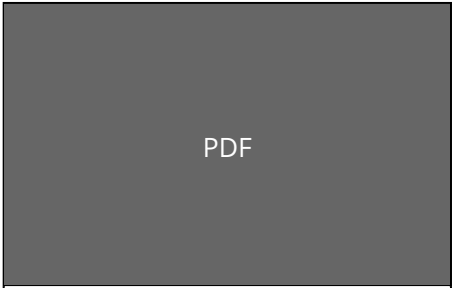
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H&W Program ... 1.6 MiB



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Attachment name

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