NACUFS (2026)
Outreach & Education Program of the Year

Boston University

ZGrdJjGy

Entry details

Entry Name:	Orientation Grub Crawl
Institution Name:	Boston University
Entry Completed By *(name and position)*:	Lynn Cody, Marketing Director

> With Orientation redesigning its entire approach for 2025, Dining partnered closely with their team to create an experience that would help the new model succeed. Instead of hearing about dining through a presentation or resource fair, students actually walked the campus, met our teams, tried samples, and learned how meal plans and programs work. By combining hands-on learning with a welcoming, guided experience, the crawl helped new students feel confident, supported, and ready for their first semester while aligning with Dining and the University's goals of building community and improving the student experience.

Essay:

> What set the Grub Crawl apart was how simple and effective it made learning about campus dining. Rather than overwhelming first-years at a resource fair, the crawl let them experience dining firsthand: walking the routes they'll use during the year, sampling foods they'll see again, and meeting the staff who will support them long after orientation. This transformed something that could feel confusing into something familiar, aligning with Orientation's new immersive format and easing common first week anxieties.
>
> Orientation was rethinking how to make the first-year experience more engaging, and Dining helped to support that goal by designing a program that was both educational and fun. By guiding students through multiple dining locations, answering their real-time questions, and introducing programs like Choose to Reuse, the Grub Crawl gave

students a strong foundation in how dining fits into campus life. By helping Orientation successfully roll out its new model and ensuring students felt informed and welcomed, the Grub Crawl established itself as a standout part of the first-year experience and a strong example of campus partnership in action. It ultimately set students up to start the semester with confidence, clarity, and a genuine sense of belonging.

Introduction:

Because it was offered as an elective during Orientation, Dining worked closely with the Orientation team to make sure students knew what the crawl was and why it was worth choosing. The Grub Crawl Passport became our main visual piece. Unique and informative the passports acted as both a guide for the event and a resource students could keep using long after orientation. Clear wayfinding signage and consistent branding across campus helped unify the experience. Together, these elements made the Grub Crawl easy to navigate and immediately recognizable as a key part of students' first days on campus.

Essay:

Our marketing approach centered on giving students all the information they needed in a format that felt clear, friendly, and easy to follow. Since the Grub Crawl was offered as part of Orientation's new elective model, most students learned about it while choosing their session activities; quickly becoming the most popular choice! Once students arrived on campus, the Grub Crawl Passport took the lead. Designed with a clean, cohesive look, it included a simple map, details about each stop, and space for stamps.

The passport was created to be useful both during and after the crawl. It included a full dining directory, location highlights, and key resources students often need during the semester. Some students kept it as a reference or keepsake; others completed all 11 stops and handed it in for a prize.

We supported the passport with themed "Grub Crawl Destination" signs across campus so students knew exactly where they were headed. Digital and Orientation's social media provided additional visibility. But the most effective marketing happened during the crawl itself where students sampled dishes, met staff, asked questions, and experienced BU Dining firsthand, making the program memorable in a way printed materials alone never could.

Introduction:

The Grub Crawl enhanced the traditional orientation experience by giving incoming students hands-on experiences in BU's dining locations. Rather than learning through brochures or tabling, students experienced dining in real-time, interacted with chefs and managers, and practiced navigating campus with the support of experienced Orientation Leaders. Students shared that the crawl reduced anxiety, answered questions they didn't know to ask, and made them feel more confident starting their time at BU. The program also strengthened alignment between Orientation and Dining, supporting the University's strategic goal of ensuring students feel prepared, informed, and welcomed.

Essay:

Incoming students often arrive to campus with questions about where to eat, how to use their meal plan, what locations offer, and how to fit dining into their new routines. The Grub Crawl made all of that easier by guiding students throughout campus and giving them a chance to experience dining firsthand. Instead of guessing where things were or how the program worked, students explored the locations themselves and learned to navigate campus before classes even began.

The Grub Crawl also gave students the chance to connect directly with the people who make our dining program work. At each stop, chefs and managers offered samples, answered questions, and shared what makes their location unique. Students learned about dietary and allergy support, asked about employment opportunities, and even met our Sustainability Director to explore initiatives like Choose to Reuse. These conversations, combined with the opportunity to explore campus with Orientation Leaders, helped students feel welcomed and supported. By the end of the crawl, many shared that the crawl helped them feel better prepared and less intimidated. Orientation Leaders also noted they would have benefitted from a similar experience in their first year.

Introduction:

BU Dining's Orientation Grub Crawl was an interactive campus tour designed to introduce students to our program in a more engaging and impactful way. With 11 stops across Boston University's two-mile campus, the experience replaced traditional Orientation tabling with an immersive, guided tour. Students received custom Grub Crawl Passports featuring a map, tips about the dining program, and information on meal plans, while each location was clearly marked with themed signage and staffed by chefs and managers offering samples, giveaways, and more. This new format provided an interactive way to experience the many offerings of BU Dining's program.

Essay:

More than 800 students participated in the inaugural Grub Crawl, a three-hour tour designed to introduce first-years to campus dining. Students began at a central meeting point, where they received passports with route maps, location descriptions, and key dining details. They were then divided into small groups and guided by Orientation Leaders along staggered routes, creating a more personalized experience.

Each stop was designed to be both informative and welcoming. Signage clearly identified locations, while chefs and managers offered samples, highlighted signature dishes, and answered questions about meal plans, dietary needs, and overall operations.

In addition to traditional dining locations, the route also included an opportunity to speak with our Sustainability Director and a station highlighting on-campus dining employment. Previous orientations did not offer ways for students to explore the many varied dining locations across our two-mile campus, often leaving first-years unsure about where to go, how to use their meal swipes versus dining points, or which locations supported specific dietary and lifestyle needs. By allowing students to physically visit these spaces and ask questions in real time, the Grub Crawl eliminated uncertainty and helped students feel confident navigating campus and using their meal plan before classes even began.

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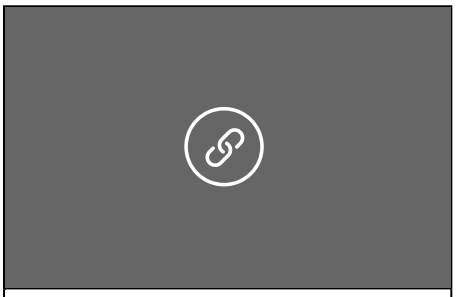

Attachment name
Grub Crawl Presentation

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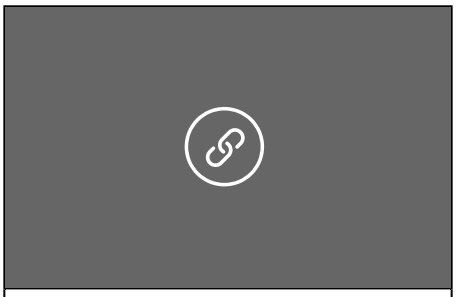

Attachment name
Video of complete pass...

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