

Jennifer Bostedo



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Entry details

Entry Name:	Montclair State University's Freeman Dining Hall - "Just hits different!"
Institution Name:	Montclair State University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Jennifer Bostedo, Dir of Dining and Wellness
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Introduction:

Our marketing strategy blends creativity, community partnerships, and data-driven insight to engage students, faculty, staff, and non-traditional learners. Through dynamic programs, monthly event-rich menus, and collaborations like the Poetry Slam with Cookie and Freeman Friday band features, we reach audiences across campus life. Surveys from partners such as Tajín and Bush's Beans help us measure flavor readiness and menu preferences. Initiatives like the Farm Box email campaign, Dine with the Director, and even our classic suggestion box fuel honest feedback. These efforts drive meaningful connection and contributed to a 135% increase in participation year over year.

Essay:

Our marketing is built on inclusive engagement, strategic partnerships, and strong listening. Campaigns resonate with students, faculty, and adult learners, ensuring everyone feels seen. Feedback is central to our approach: surveys from student research collaborations and industry partners (Bush's Beans) station takeovers, provide insight into flavor trends, helping us introduce bold, new options driven by student preference. Dine with Director and the old-fashioned suggestion box remain two of our strongest sources of candid, actionable input.

The Freeman Friday band series, paired with cross-posting alongside student groups, strengthens student visibility and draws diverse audiences. Monthly event-packed promotional calendars, giveaways, and monotony breakers

that begin in the dining hall and culminate at our retail pub create a seamless flow of engagement across dining spaces. Farm Box's direct email launch successfully introduced a new local produce initiative, reinforcing our commitment to sustainability and community partnerships.

Descriptive allergen signage is life-saving guidance and was recognized by Celiac College Guide.

Community-building materials were developed for 'Viv' events to encourage family-style dining. Creative experiences—such as the Poetry Slam with Cookie—promote connection for adult students.

Together, these initiatives create a vibrant, responsive dining environment, contributing to a remarkable 135% increase in participation.

Introduction:

Wondering what nutrition engineered into every menu and programming event looks like? Wellness commitment is obvious the moment you step foot in Freeman. Brightly fruited and herb-infused water is the first hint that things are different here. Dietitian influence is evident: expansive menu offerings, informative nutrition labeling, and nutrition resources throughout the dining room. Our dietitians pivot from leading super-food cooking sessions, faculty wellness retreats, to educating on social media and in classroom lectures. Resources such as individual counseling and Allergen Safe Dining Tours are essential to the campus admissions process and campus engagement.

Essay:

"Hey, you're the dietitian in the picture!"

Word has spread about our Campus Dietitians. As nutrition experts, they translate science into engaging and informative moments, fulfilling a mission to elevate wellness for the student population through food. Nutritious options are built into the menu, even for those with religious, medical or lifestyle preferences. Dietitians set up custom accommodations to support more extensive dietary restrictions. Weekly tablings, Teaching Kitchens, and engaging annual contests like 'Healthy U Challenge' invite students and employees to utilize this valuable resource.

Nutrition education is emphasized and personalized through free nutrition counseling, virtually and in person. Widespread wellness collaborations connect Dietitians with organizations such as Commuter Life, Food Pantry, Health Services, Office for Social Justice and Diversity, MSU Dietetics, and athletics.

Services are promoted through public speaking events, dining hall signage and televisions across campus. QR codes whisk students straight to our contact and Instagram account, where they can schedule appointments, ask their burning nutrition questions, or find evidence-backed information.

Wellness is also echoed and celebrated in Mindful Eating classes held by acclaimed celebrity chef, Jehangir Mehta. Students embrace the chance to focus on being in the moment and savoring food sensations with the Chef.

Introduction:

What if every trip to the dining hall felt less like "What's left?" and more like "I'm-texting-friends-about-this"? Our dietitian-chef duo craft energetic menus with elevated vibes; integrating trends like fusion or elevated comfort, while emphasizing cultural diversity with 21 featured cuisines. Seasonal menus also incorporate student-suggested items, like Caprese Wrap or Caribbean Day. Emphasis on variety, cultural exploration, and local produce prevails. Brussel Sprouts Hash at breakfast? Yes! Students choose delicious and come away with a side of healthy. From pop-ups to teaching kitchens to food days or family-style group dining, diversity allows a different experience each time.

Essay:

Diverse students appreciate global influences and customizable made to order at our 'FRESH' restaurant line, or AYCTE at 'GROVE' (Vegan) and 'LIFE' (Top 9 Friendly) stations. Menus feature 21 ethnic or trending cuisines including "fusion-comfort" like our Mac-N-Cheese BBQ Pork Tacos and Kimchi Grilled Cheese. Updating offerings seasonally thrice per year ensures familiarity and novelty. Our 'Teaching Kitchen' encourages flexibility and student culinary exploration. Recognition as "TK Student Chef" is coveted! Seasonal 'Farmer's Market' ingredients, mirrored from restaurant line, are added to the staples students cook with daily from 7am - 10pm.

Plant-forward is everywhere! Menued on grill, salad, and sandwich lines (Whole Grain Samosa Smash Wrap, Umami Burger, Vegan Omelets, fresh crafted salads with optional grilled chicken).

Monotony breakers celebrate students AND staff! Our Haitian cook kept flavors authentic during a 'Carnival' collaboration with our Haitian Student Organization. "Disney Day" theme brought Mickey Waffles to Lion King Bobotie – earmarked with crafts, movies, and nostalgic menu. Multiple station takeovers, and National Food Days kept us buzzing this year. We are honored to grow student collaborations like those with Latin Student Organization for Hispanic Heritage Month events.

Biannual food safety remains a priority and includes FARE certified allergen training with our dietitian.

Introduction:

Our residential dining program demonstrates a commitment to exceptional merchandising and presentation through innovative service styles, elevated culinary craftsmanship, and thoughtful guest-centered experiences. By integrating made-to-order flexibility with sustainably minded design elements, we create a dining environment that is both welcoming and memorable. From allergen-friendly aquafaba sauces to fine stoneware plating and specialty holiday touches, every detail is crafted to enhance the guest experience. Whether serving students during peak periods or quieter break weeks, our team ensures that each meal reflects quality, inclusivity, and creativity—hallmarks of a facility striving to set the standard for excellence in residential dining.

Essay:

Since you "eat with your eyes" presentation is prioritized. Foods are creatively garnished with fresh herbs, citrus, or bright veggies whether in pan or individual plate. Contemporary earthenware plates, cozy mugs, upscale drink and silver ware elevate the calming vibes students appreciate. From fruit compote brightening pancakes to allergen friendly garnishes, no plate or bowl goes unadorned. The inviting fresh colors of the three hydration stations are a first view that signal this is going to be different!

Service areas vary the flow from self-serve, to allergen certified staff-served, to chef-plated, and cook your own creation, elevating convenience and engagement. Students enjoy AYCTE vegan and TOP 9 Friendly Allergen stations. A Grubhub-enabled pickup window lets students understand the daily cuisine and 'Always Available's'. Allergen-friendly innovation is demonstrated through aquafaba-based sauces and the placement of nut-free candy at every station during Halloween—not just at the allergen station. These efforts ensure equitable access and thoughtful inclusivity. We ensure access to the Teaching Kitchen in special classes for Inclusive Programs.

Still there's room at the high tops for the whole team after practice, or quiet booths for faculty meetings. "Freeman Friday" pushes tables together for Jazz student performances as the sun sets.

Introduction:

Our program exemplifies innovation, community collaboration, and a deep commitment to student wellbeing and sustainability. Through the integration of student dietetic, athletic training, and marketing interns, we make space for learning experiences that directly elevate service and engagement. Signature initiatives—such as the year-round

Farm Box local produce program, Farm Dinners, and seasonal Teaching Kitchens—highlight our dedication to education through food. Sustainability remains at the forefront with our redesigned Green to Go program achieving a 400% increase in container returns, expanded waste-reduction initiatives, and a new composting partnership. These efforts reflect our culture of continuous improvement and purposeful impact.

Essay:

Advancing our mission through sustainability leadership, student engagement, and culinary education leads to our strong campus presence. A robust interdisciplinary internship program—featuring dietetics, athletics, and marketing students—ensures that tomorrow’s professionals actively contribute to community and performance nutrition outreach campaigns, and grow appreciation for campus dining as a profession..

A signature strength is our commitment to local agriculture. The weekly Farm Box Program continues year-round, even during summer, ensuring uninterrupted access to fresh regional produce. These ingredients are spotlighted during our Farm Dinners, with select dishes replicated later in the Teaching Kitchen to extend learning across campus.

Sustainability practices are embedded throughout operations. Our redesigned Green to Go system, powered by an easy-to-use mobile app, has achieved a remarkable 400% improvement in container return rates compared to the previous model. In the kitchen, the Waste NOT program identifies opportunities for pre-consumer waste reduction, while a new partnership with a local composting company ensures responsible food-scrap management. Our dietitians were also invited to present at the campus Sustainability Breakfast, where repurposed local menu items—especially the standout coffee-ground cookies—demonstrated creativity and environmental stewardship.

Together, these initiatives create a holistic, student-centered, sustainability-focused dining experience that strengthens campus wellbeing and elevates residential dining excellence.

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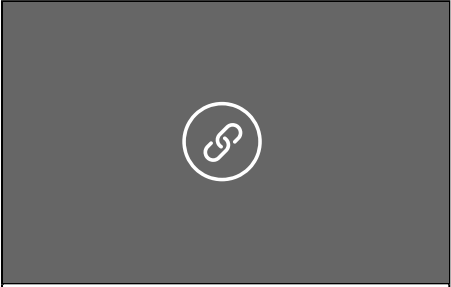
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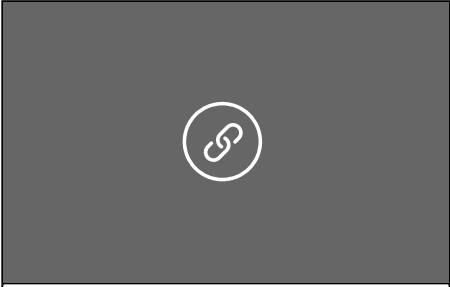


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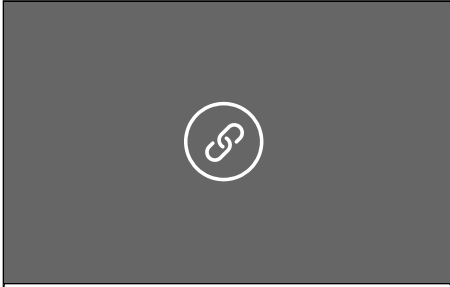
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