

Nico SanFilippo



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Entry details

Entry Name:	Wildcat Flavors of the World
Institution Name:	Johnson & Wals University-Providence
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Introduction:

The menu for Wildcat Flavors of the World was intentionally designed to center student identity, cultural authenticity, and high-quality execution within a residential dining setting. Rather than developing a globally inspired menu internally, students were invited to submit personal recipes that reflected the flavors of their home and cultural background. Selected dishes were refined through collaboration with campus dining professionals and scaled for high-volume service while maintaining integrity and flavor. This approach ensured the menu was not only diverse and engaging, but deeply personal, transforming the dining experience into a meaningful representation of the student community.

Essay:

The menu featured a diverse range of student-authored dishes representing global cuisines, including Lebanese Shish Tawouk, Korean Bulgogi Bibimbap, Indonesian Beef Rendang, Sandwich Salvadorian, Persian Khoresht Karafs, Tahchin and Rice Pudding, Nigerian Jollof Rice, Puerto Rican Yucca Frita and Guava Puff Pastry, and Indian Papdi Chaat. Each dish was selected for its cultural significance and personal connection to the student chef, ensuring the menu reflected authentic lived experiences rather than generalized interpretations.

Recipes were tested alongside student chefs to refine flavor, technique, and presentation while ensuring scalability for residential dining. The culinary team worked closely with students to preserve authenticity while adapting

recipes for operational efficiency, including ingredient sourcing, batch production, and service flow. This collaboration ensured consistency without compromising cultural integrity.

Stations were designed to highlight both the dish and the student behind it, incorporating signage that connected each item to its origin and story. This created a dining experience that encouraged exploration and conversation. More than a menu, the meal served as a collection of student stories translated into food, allowing guests to connect with one another through shared cultural appreciation and personal narrative.

Introduction:

The theme of Wildcat Flavors of the World was developed to center student voice and foster a sense of belonging within residential dining. Rooted in the idea that food is a powerful expression of identity and brings us together across all cultures, the event invited students to share dishes that reflect their personal and cultural backgrounds. In collaboration with JWU Global and The Bridge, the theme was aligned with broader institutional efforts to create an inclusive and supportive campus environment. The result was a cohesive experience that integrated food, cultural engagement, and student participation into a unified and purposeful event.

Essay:

Theme execution was driven by collaboration, authenticity, and intentional design. Students were invited to submit recipes representing dishes they grew up with or felt connected to, ensuring the theme was built directly from the student community. Selected students participated in tastings and recipe refinement, creating a sense of ownership and shared responsibility in the final menu.

Partnership with JWU Global and The Bridge strengthened the event's foundation by aligning it with campus initiatives focused on connection, support, and inclusive engagement. More than ten student organizations participated, contributing cultural context, programming, and presence throughout the event. This ensured that the experience extended beyond food and into meaningful interaction.

The physical space was designed to support exploration and engagement. A passport-style activity encouraged students to visit each station, while cultural organization tables created opportunities for conversation and learning. A live performance by the JWU Stomp Team added energy and reinforced the celebratory atmosphere.

Every element of the event worked together to bring the theme to life. The result was not just a cohesive concept, but a fully realized experience where students could see themselves reflected and feel connected to the broader community.

Introduction:

Marketing for Wildcat Flavors of the World was designed to reflect the core values of the event by centering student voice and storytelling. Rather than relying solely on traditional promotional methods, the campaign focused on building a personal connection between the campus community and the students behind each dish. By highlighting authentic student experiences, the marketing strategy created early engagement and anticipation. This approach positioned the event as more than a themed dinner, but as a unique, student-driven experience that encouraged participation and fostered a sense of excitement across campus.

Essay:

The marketing strategy was anchored in student storytelling. Student chefs recorded short videos following recipe testing sessions, sharing what their dish was and why it was meaningful to them. These videos were shared across dining and university social media platforms, creating a consistent and authentic narrative leading up to the event.

This approach allowed students to connect with the event before attending by hearing directly from their peers. It built anticipation and created a sense of ownership within the campus community. The campaign generated strong digital engagement, reaching 32,141 views, with 1002 likes and 193 comments, shares and reposts, with student-centered content driving the highest interaction.

On the day of the event, Snowden Dining Hall was transformed to match the energy created through the campaign. Stations were clearly branded with flags, student chefs were recognized, and engagement elements encouraged movement and participation. A passport-style activity guided students through the experience, while cultural organizations added depth through their presence.

The event also generated strong organic engagement. One student chef shared, "People were texting me from the event. That alone brought a smile to my face." These efforts created a marketing approach that extended beyond promotion and amplified connection across campus.

Introduction:

Wildcat Flavors of the World demonstrates how residential dining can serve as a platform for student engagement, belonging, and institutional impact. By integrating student voice, cultural identity, and cross-campus collaboration, the event aligned with Johnson and Wales University's broader mission to create a welcoming and supportive environment for all students. The program extended beyond a single dining experience by fostering meaningful connections, encouraging student involvement, and reinforcing the role of dining as a contributor to student success.

Essay:

The event's impact extended beyond attendance and satisfaction by influencing student engagement with the dining program and the broader campus community. One student employee shared that participating in the event strengthened her connection to campus dining and reinforced her sense of belonging within the department. Another student, after attending the event, was inspired to inquire about employment opportunities with dining, demonstrating how the experience translated into continued involvement.

These outcomes highlight the role of residential dining as a gateway for student connection and participation. By creating an environment where students feel seen and valued, the event supported early engagement, particularly among first-year residential students, a key population for retention.

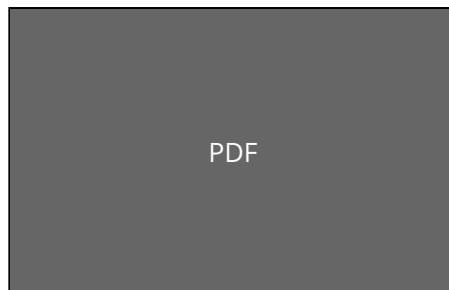
The program also demonstrated the strength of cross-campus collaboration. Partnerships with JWU Global, The Bridge, and multiple student organizations ensured the event was inclusive, representative, and aligned with institutional priorities. External media coverage further validated the program's impact and reach.

Wildcat Flavors of the World illustrates how dining can move beyond service to become an active contributor to student experience. By turning participants into contributors, the event fostered a deeper sense of belonging and created lasting connections within the campus community.

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Wildcat Flavors ... 2.1 MiB



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Johnson & Wale... 194 KiB



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Immigrant chef... 118 KiB



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Wildcat Flavors ... 653 KiB



Screenshot 202... 86 KiB



Screenshot 202... 102 KiB



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Wildcat Flavors ... 424 KiB



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251029-PVD-Wil...4.4 MiB



251029-PVD-Wil...4.0 MiB



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251029-PVD-Wil...4.1 MiB



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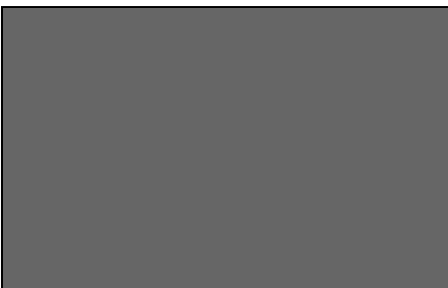
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251029-PVD-Wil...4.3 MiB

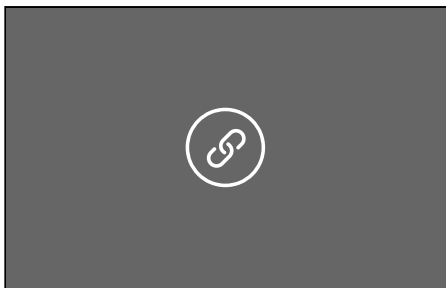


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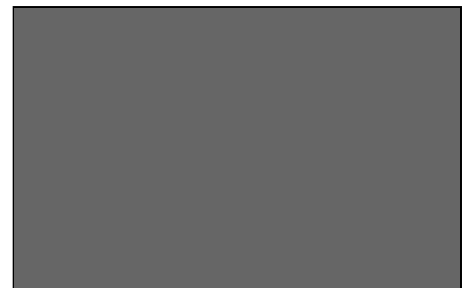
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Providence Journal Article

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