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University of Colorado Denver

Entry details

Entry Name:	Haunted Halls: A Spooktacular Culinary Collaboration
Institution Name:	University of Colorado Denver
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Brian J. Moffitt, Ed.D., Executive Director

Haunted Halls featured four separate stations at different locations on campus, each one centered around a distinct thematic experience and all four coming together for an immersive Halloween adventure. Two locations served extensive menus and the other two themed snacks. We kept the food fun and interesting, dressing up campus favorites and using the daring atmosphere to encourage students to try new, bolder dishes. With something for everyone, including allergen-free options at every event, we brought the entire campus community together and created a food-led experience that gave students a thrilling and safe way to engage in the holiday spirit.

Essay:

Haunted Halls at CU Denver transformed campus dining into a creative, culinary, Halloween adventure, featuring memorable and delicious, photo-worthy meals. The event began at City Heights Dining Hall with Nightmare in the Bayou. Here we served New Orleans inspired dishes with a haunting twist. Dishes like Bayou Mud Cajun Gumbo topped with real edible bugs and Bloody Chicken Feet Soup were designed to intrigue and delight students with an authentically thrilling lunch experience. While City Heights highlighted exciting new flavors, our menus at Lynx Crossing got creative by taking familiar flavors and dressing them up with playful Halloween imagery. Fright Bites put a ghoulish twist on campus favorites with Bat Wings (GF), Mummy Meatballs, and Slaughter Sliders. Spooky Cinema paired chilling films with popcorn and Bloody Egg Rolls. The Crossing Carnival recreated a fall festival and gave it a Halloween twist with nostalgic flavors like Caramel Apples, Piranha Plant Cookie Bites, and Vanilla Bean

Panna Cotta with Strawberry Sauce and Lychee Eyes. From snacks to desserts to hearty meals, Haunted Halls highlighted CU Denver Housing and Dining's commitment to food, fun, and community, delivering an unforgettable student experience through inventive dishes, playful presentations, and immersive themed menus.

Introduction:

Haunted Halls' goal was to make Halloween at CU Denver feel like home. Everyone grows up with their own holiday traditions, and whether students wanted to spend their Halloween marathoning spooky movies, dressing up with friends, or relaxing with fall crafts, we had something for them.

We transformed the campus with themed decor, lighting, music, elaborate signage, staff in costumes, and interactive elements. Collaboration between staff, students, and campus partners strengthened themed activations. This teamwork helped create a festive, high-energy atmosphere that permeated across campus and reinforced community through creativity, letting students share ownership of the overall event experience.

Essay:

Haunted Halls was an expansive, cross-campus experience, immersing students in festivities and treating them to delicious food every step of the way.

Students began their journey with Nightmare in the Bayou at City Heights Dining Hall. Playing with exotic cajun flavors and spooky New Orleans imagery, we built anticipation for the evening events to come.

Later that day, students congregated at Lynx Crossing for the remaining experiences. Fright Bites, Spooky Cinema, Crossing Carnival, and the Fever Frenzy Escape Haunted House each offered their own distinct atmosphere, all contributing to the overall Halloween experience. Each space offered unique decor, menus, and activities for guests to engage with.

We tied the event into Vax Day at City Heights. Vaccinated students got a fast pass to The Fever Frenzy Escape, a haunted house where students had to work together to solve puzzles to escape.

Planning began in the summer, giving Housing and Dining and our campus partners time to collaborate on vision, logistics, and execution. Student volunteers for the Fever Frenzy Escape had mandatory training sessions to go over their role, safety precautions, and emergency protocols.

Haunted Halls reinforced community and created memorable student experiences with one immersive celebration.

Introduction:

Haunted Halls was more than an event, it was a campus-wide celebration that brought students together through food, fun, and tradition. To this end, it was important the marketing felt inclusive, widely visible, and community-driven.

CU Denver Dining and Housing reached a wide cross-section of the student body by promoting the event through social media, digital screens, email blasts, and posters around campus. Partnering with student organizations and directly engaging with student groups on campus ensured excitement was spread through word-of-mouth, building anticipation and preparing students for participation.

Essay:

A robust marketing plan was key to building excitement and ensuring the widespread success of Haunted Halls. Our multifaceted promotional strategy reached students online, in residence halls, and throughout campus spaces.

A social media campaign teased out the event with sneak peeks of menu items and location themes. Digital screens and large-format posters in high-traffic areas served as visual reminders around campus leading up to the event. Email blasts provided clear event details and encouraged participation from both residents and commuter students.

Along with physical and virtual media, word-of-mouth played a powerful role in driving curiosity and generating buzz leading up to the event. Dining staff spoke with students during meals and community gatherings, encouraging them to attend and participate in the festivities. Student organizations collaborating with us lent authenticity to the event by spreading awareness through their own networks, creating a sense of shared ownership in our success.

This comprehensive approach, combining strategic outreach with genuine student engagement, built momentum towards Haunted Halls and helped it become more than a one-off event. It became a memorable celebration that strengthened connections across the campus community.

Introduction:

Strategic partnerships were key to setting Haunted Halls apart. The logistics, staffing, and safety necessary for an event of this scale was made possible via coordination between Dining and Housing and other campus partners. Managing traffic flow, maintaining food quality, and keeping events accessible required consistent communication and thoughtful planning between teams. Additionally, student groups and campus partners with tables and activities at the Crossing Carnival helped drive engagement. This collaboration elevated Haunted Halls into a memorable, cohesive, and welcoming celebration for the entire campus community.

Essay:

Haunted Halls required a significantly deeper level of structural planning than just menu development and themed decor.

Coordinating logistics across several venues, each with its own operational needs, meant collaborating to manage food preparation timelines, transportation of supplies, and storage requirements. This was how we ensured every station maintained fresh, high-quality food items throughout the day.

Creating a safe, hospitable, and immersive atmosphere took careful planning of staffing needs. Team members had to balance efficiency and student engagement while wearing costumes, running interactive elements, and serving food.

Safety and accessibility were key considerations for an event at this scale, especially as attendance increased. Clear signage, strategic crowd flow management, and coordination with housing staff all made navigation between locations easier for students. Accessible pathways and activity areas and menu items made to accommodate dietary restrictions all helped keep the event welcoming to everyone.

Smooth communication across teams—spanning Housing and Dining, student organizations, and campus partners—kept the event running seamlessly. So all participating students could have fun, whether they were helping run the event or just there to celebrate.

By balancing creativity with structure, Haunted Halls was able to deliver a memorable experience for everyone.

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