



QojEXnyA

Simon Fraser University

Entry details

Entry Name:	Black History Month Collaboration - Flavors of the Caribbean
Institution Name:	Simon Fraser University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Dan Traviss, Director SFU Food ; Gabriela Torres, Content and Engagement Manager, SFU Food

Overall Impact of the Initiative

SFU Dining Commons’ Black History Month culinary collaboration, “Flavours of the Caribbean,” transformed the space into a hub for cultural exchange, storytelling, education, and community connection. In partnership with the Black Student Centre, the initiative brought a local Black chef to campus to co-create a menu that celebrated Caribbean cuisine and the broader cultural significance of Black culinary traditions. More than a dining experience, the program encouraged dialogue and learning to foster cultural connection by highlighting the significance of Black History Month, sharing the chef’s personal stories and the meaning behind each dish, and featuring reflections from SFU’s Black student, faculty, and staff community.

The initiative strengthened relationships between SFU Dining Commons and the Black community on campus, while also increasing awareness and engagement among individuals who may not typically access the Dining Commons. By emphasizing Caribbean cuisine, the initiative expanded cultural exposure while creating an inclusive environment where food became a powerful catalyst for connection, dialogue, and education.

Operationally, the collaboration demonstrated how equity-focused initiatives can be embedded into everyday campus practices. The chef worked alongside the Dining Commons culinary team to source ingredients, test recipes,

manage costs, and scale production—balancing authenticity with operational feasibility. This approach ensured that the initiative was both impactful and sustainable.

Aligned with SFU's adoption of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism, Black History Month, and the launch of the Black Student Centre in February 2026, the program translated institutional commitments into tangible, community-centered action. Overall, it introduced the Dining Commons team and the SFU community to diverse foods, strengthened campus belonging, elevated Black culinary voices, and reinforced the role of Dining Commons as a space for collaboration, cultural celebration, and inclusive engagement.

Innovation and Creativity

The “Flavours of the Caribbean” initiative demonstrated a new model for delivering culturally meaningful programming within a complex, third-party, unionized food service environment. Rather than relying solely on the contracted operator, SFU took a co-creation approach by partnering with a local Black chef, the Black Student Centre, and campus stakeholders to design and implement an authentic, educational, and scalable culinary experience.

A key innovation was the intentional recruitment of a Black chef with strong culinary expertise and a passion for cultural education. Together with the Dining Commons team, recipes were tested, refined, and operationalized to ensure they could be successfully integrated into regular menu cycles—moving beyond a one-time event toward sustained cultural representation. This collaborative process also created knowledge transfer, with culinary staff gaining a deeper understanding of how each dish is prepared, along with the cultural context and stories behind it.

Creativity extended beyond the menu itself. The dining space was transformed with intentional branding and décor inspired by Black History Month colors, yellow, black, red, and green, highlighting unity, resilience, and collective strength. A local Black DJ added to the atmosphere, creating a vibrant experience that engaged our guests.

Educational elements were thoughtfully embedded throughout, including signage, video content, and recipe cards that highlighted ingredients, preparation methods, and cultural significance. These tools created opportunities for direct interaction between the chef and students, deepening engagement, and understanding of the cuisine.

The initiative was highly collaborative, involving the Dining Commons team, the Black Student Centre, University Communications, Residence and Housing, Campus Services, and student representatives. Complimentary meal vouchers helped support accessibility and participation across SFU's community. Recipes developed through the program were also featured at catered events across campus during Black History Month, extending its reach and impact.

Overall, the initiative showcased how innovation and creativity can translate EDI commitments into tangible, engaging, and sustainable campus experiences.

Enhancing Start-up Affordability for High Returns

To support a high-impact cultural food initiative while maintaining affordability and scalability, several key risks were proactively identified and mitigated around cultural integrity, execution, and long-term adoption.

Cultural Representation & Reputation

Protecting the authenticity and integrity of the program was a top priority. The risk of cultural misrepresentation was mitigated through close collaboration with the Black Student Centre, student leaders, and the featured chef. Their input guided menu development, storytelling, branding, décor, and promotional materials to ensure the initiative was respectful, accurate, and reflective of lived experiences. Educational supports, including signage and contextual content, helped communicate the cultural significance of Black History Month and the stories behind the menu items, reinforcing respectful representation and building trust with the Black campus community.

Culinary Execution & Authenticity

Introducing Caribbean cuisine required new ingredients, techniques, and some new preparation methods that were unfamiliar to the Dining Commons team. To address this, the culinary team worked closely with the chef in advance to learn, test, and refine recipes. Dishes were trialed ahead of time to ensure they met both authenticity standards and operational feasibility. Unionized staff were trained to execute recipes consistently and to the chef's expectations. This was especially important given his direct association with the menu.

Adoption & Sustainability

Another key risk was whether the recipes would be sustained beyond the initial event within a third-party operating model. To mitigate this, the Dining Commons Executive Chef was engaged from the outset, supporting sourcing, scaling, and integration into existing systems. Recipes were adapted for large-scale production, and standardized guides were developed to ensure consistency over time. Educational content such as menu signage and video content also helped address potential hesitation from guests unfamiliar with Caribbean cuisine, encouraging exploration and uptake.

Together, these strategies ensured the initiative maintained cultural integrity, delivered a high-quality experience, and achieved strong potential for long-term adoption and impact.

Applicability of the Initiative

With a start-up investment of under \$5,000, "Flavours of the Caribbean" delivered a high-impact initiative that is both scalable and readily replicable across campus and food service environments. The program received strong, positive feedback from SFU leadership, the Black Student Centre, dining staff, students, and visitors, reflecting its broad appeal and meaningful impact. It has also sparked significant interest among campus partners seeking to more intentionally embed Black culture into their programming, as well as food service operators looking for practical, proven approaches to integrating authentic Black cuisine and cultural storytelling into their operations.

Its success is grounded in a clear and transferable framework: partnering with local Black organizations and campus leaders; collaborating with a local Black chef; centering education and cultural storytelling alongside food; sourcing traditional ingredients to preserve authenticity; incorporating meaningful input from the Black Community; and ensuring strong cross-campus collaboration. Establishing defined, measurable objectives from the beginning further supported alignment, accountability, and impact.

Key outcomes demonstrate both depth and scalability. These included introducing chef-created Black cuisine within Dining Commons; educating the campus community on the cultural significance of the dishes; highlighting traditional and locally sourced ingredients; developing, testing, and scaling 12 new recipes; and training culinary staff on both preparation techniques and cultural context. Additional engagement tools such as recipe cards and chef demonstration videos extended learning, while the feature menu authentically celebrated Black History Month.

Importantly, this structured yet flexible model is highly adaptable. The framework and creative assets can be reused for future culturally focused events, with strong potential to evolve into a recurring "Flavours of..." series. The collaborative model of working with local chefs through consultation and recipe development is transferable to other institutions, and the integration of educational storytelling within dining environments offers a replicable approach for embedding culture, learning, and inclusion into campus experiences.

Measuring Success

The success of "Flavours of the Caribbean" was evaluated through a combination of student feedback, partner input, and operational performance. Insights were gathered through surveys, informal conversations, and Dining Commons Committee discussions, alongside qualitative feedback from the Black Student Centre and the participating chef. Together, these inputs highlight a program that delivered meaningful cultural impact, strong engagement, and recognition.

1. Meaningful Impact for Black Students and Staff

The most significant measure of success was the response from the Black campus community. Students expressed genuine appreciation for seeing their culture authentically represented, strengthening their sense of belonging. Black culinary team members also shared pride in preparing and serving dishes that reflected their heritage. This reinforced the importance of inclusive, community-centered programming.

2. Strong Menu Performance and Authenticity

Featured menu items were well received across the broader campus community, indicating both curiosity and engagement. Partnering with a local Black chef ensured cultural authenticity and credibility, building trust while elevating the dining experience. For many guests, the menu introduced new dishes and flavours, expanding awareness and appreciation of Black culinary traditions.

3. Increased Participation and Revenue

The initiative demonstrated that cultural programming can align impact with performance. During the program period, student swipes increased by 10%, and overall guest counts rose by 20%, reflecting heightened interest and participation.

4. Community Connection and Institutional Engagement

The event created a strong platform for the Black Student Centre to connect with students, staff, and the broader community. High attendance, including senior campus leaders at a mid-week evening event, signaled institutional support and the significance of the initiative.

5. External Recognition and Sector Leadership

Interest from other institutions and food service operators, particularly those working within third-party models, underscores the broader applicability of SFU's approach and its leadership in advancing inclusive, culturally responsive dining programs.

Education, Outreach, and Marketing

A comprehensive communications strategy ensured the program delivered both cultural education and meaningful campus engagement through a coordinated, multi-channel approach. Promotion across digital screens in Dining Commons, residence lobbies, and other high-traffic areas across the SFU campus drove event awareness, highlighted the significance of Black History Month, and provided cultural context. On-site signage enhanced the educational impact, including a featured biography of the chef, Black History Month education signage, menu signs including storytelling about each dish, and detailed recipe cards. Together, these elements highlighted the cultural significance of Caribbean cuisine in the context of Black History Month.

Targeted outreach further strengthened inclusion, with custom invitations distributed through the Black Student Centre network to students, staff, faculty, campus groups, and community partners. To reduce barriers to participation, 50 branded meal vouchers were provided to the Centre for community distribution. Social media and campus event platforms, including SFU Food's Instagram and the university's main Instagram account, amplified engagement through promotional content featuring interviews with the chef as well as Black students and staff, centering authentic voices and lived experiences.

The initiative also extended beyond the event itself, with the chef's recipes integrated into campus catering throughout Black History Month, increasing exposure to authentic cuisine and supporting sustained cultural representation. Overall, this integrated strategy across digital promotion, educational materials, targeted outreach, social media, and catering fostered awareness, accessibility, and community connection, while pointing to future opportunities for deeper student storytelling and cultural representation.

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