



RxxBILXL

# University of Kansas

## Entry details

|                                                  |                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Entry Name:                                      | Blend                                           |
| Institution Name:                                | University of Kansas                            |
| Entry Completed By ( <i>name and position</i> ): | Lindsay Robinson, Director of Dining Operations |

Blend is the answer to healthy, flavorful eating on the University of Kansas campus. Blend opened at the KU Memorial Union within The Market—upgrading a basic salad bar to a substantial, nutritious options concept.

With an elevated ingredient list and a thoughtfully crafted menu of composed salads, brown rice bowls, and sorbet bowls, Blend offers something for everyone. The concept has recently expanded its focus on plant-forward proteins such as beans, quinoa, chickpeas, and falafel, ensuring an inclusive and approachable menu for all dietary preferences.

Blend is about balance—offering nourishing, wholesome foods without sacrificing bold, delicious flavors.

### Essay:

At Blend, every meal is made fresh to order, allowing guests to customize their bowls to fit their individual needs. Blend’s vibrant ingredients set the tone for a fresh and nutritious dining experience.

The guest experience begins with a choice of greens, including nutrient-rich kale and spinach, followed by the option to add any of the assorted toppings. These include marinated mushrooms, pickled red onions, lentils, feta cheese, and sunflower seeds. In addition to customizable salads, Blend also offers hearty grain bowls and acai and dragon fruit sorbet bowls.

Blend also offers a selection of thoughtfully composed bowls. The newest addition is the Falafel Bowl; mixed greens, falafel, roasted vegetables, hummus, feta, pickled onions, pita chips, lentils, brown rice, and skhug. This bowl is packed with protein to help fuel students throughout their day.

During the warmer months students can cool off with the Jayhawk Bowl—a blend of acai and dragon fruit sorbet with bananas, blueberries, coconut, and granola.

Blend's menu is designed to provide a wide variety of vegetarian and vegan options using high-protein, plant-based ingredients, while still offering lean meat such as grilled chicken. The result is a menu that is nourishing and satisfying, without sacrificing flavor.

#### Introduction:

Guests are welcomed by a digital Blend menu screen as soon as they enter The Market, with the service line conveniently beginning at the entrance for an intuitive flow. As guests move through the line, ingredient names are displayed on the glass in the same order they appear on the cold line, guiding selections and highlighting the freshness and variety of offerings.

Once bowls are complete, guests proceed to check out with a friendly cashier. For added convenience, Blend also offers mobile ordering for guests who prefer to skip the line while still enjoying the same fresh, customizable experience.

#### Essay:

Blend is located on the third floor of the KU Memorial Union. Guests are greeted by an inviting digital menu screen. Specials are showcased in framed signage mounted to adjacent pillars. The overall design of Blend is fresh and modern, reflecting the wholesome and vibrant nature of the food it serves.

Blend operates as an open-concept space, allowing guests to view the entire preparation process. The colorful, high-quality ingredients naturally enhance the space, creating a visually appealing and mouthwatering color palette. This transparency reinforces trust and highlights the care put into each bowl.

Food safety and quality are a top priority at Blend. Staff members are fully trained in proper food handling procedures, with raw proteins such as poultry prepared in the back kitchen and plant-forward ingredients handled in separate prep areas. Items that do not require cooking are prepared directly in front of guests, serving as an engaging action station.

Blend exceeds expectations of a traditional campus salad bar by combining thoughtful design, elevated ingredients, and intentional branding. Meals are packaged in branded boxes, complete with playful stickers inviting guests to share feedback—"lettuce" know how your visit was—creating a memorable and engaging guest experience.

#### Introduction:

Blend's marketing strategies focus on promoting plant-forward, sustainable, and healthy options for the campus community. In collaboration with the Marketing team, Blend utilizes multiple platforms to clearly communicate its commitment to nutritious offerings and inclusive menu choices.

Digital menus are designed to be colorful and visually engaging, with clear, concise descriptions. Food imagery and menu descriptions were also updated within the Grubhub app, ensuring consistency in both ordering platforms.

Printed posters and handbills promoting specials and upcoming events are displayed across campus. Social media serves as Blend's strongest engagement platform, to capture student interest and drive traffic to the concept.

#### Essay:

The marketing department has played a significant role in the successful rebranding of the salad bar at The Market into what is now known as Blend. This rebranding effort began at the start of the 2024–2025 academic year and focused on creating a fresh, modern concept centered on healthy, plant-forward dining.

Initially, Blend offered seasonal ingredients during the fall and spring semesters. In fall 2025 staff identified the most popular ingredients to remain available throughout the academic year, balancing innovation with consistency.

Marketing efforts were executed across multiple platforms, with graphic design and social media proving to be the most impactful tools. Graphic designers created whimsical, branded stickers featuring salads and acai bowls, National Nutrition Month promotions, and clear ingredient lists displayed directly on the glass above the service line.

In addition to ongoing promotions, the marketing team supported several events, including a Faculty and Staff BOGO Day and a salad sampling event in the Memorial Union that showcased Mediterranean-inspired flavors. To further encourage guest engagement and continuous improvement, the team also developed QR code feedback stickers placed on each to-go box, making it easy for guests to share their experiences.

#### Introduction:

Nutritional information for Blend is available through the KU Dining website and NetNutrition, allowing guests to easily access detailed ingredients and allergen information. To support nutrition education, Blend recreated the MyPlate model using familiar Blend ingredients.

Digital menu boards and the Grubhub mobile ordering platform clearly list ingredients and menu details, ensuring accuracy across all ordering channels. The menu is intentionally designed to support vegan and vegetarian dietary needs, featuring a wide variety of nutrient-dense, plant-forward proteins.

All nutrition platforms are regularly updated to ensure accuracy, empowering guests to make educated food choices that align with their individual dietary needs.

#### Essay:

Nutrition and wellness were the driving forces behind Dining's decision to transform a traditional self-serve salad bar into Blend—an elevated salad and grain bowl experience. Feedback from faculty and staff highlighted a lack of healthy dining options on campus, while students expressed a need for more vegan and vegetarian offerings. Blend was created in direct response to these needs.

One of the most successful additions to the menu has been the falafel, which quickly became a guest favorite and further strengthened Blend's plant-forward protein offerings. Blend's full menu is available on the KU Dining website, with a direct link to NetNutrition where guests can easily access nutrition facts and allergen information to support informed food choices.

Blend also plays an active role in National Nutrition Month by promoting wellness-focused initiatives, including Wellness Wednesday, featuring 15% off all salad and grain bowls, and Chill Out Friday, offering 15% off acai bowls. In addition to these promotions, the team hosts tabling events across campus to highlight Blend's healthy options while educating guests about nutritious choices available throughout KU Dining.

Through these efforts, Blend continues to support the health and wellness of the campus community while offering flavorful, satisfying meals.

#### Introduction:

KU Dining made a strategic commitment to deepen our understanding of sustainability and identify meaningful ways to reduce waste while expanding access to healthier dining options. Through our membership in the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC), our team has actively engaged in webinars and virtual town halls to learn how peer institutions are leading change in this space.

While sustainability initiatives are being implemented across multiple dining locations, Blend has served as the cornerstone of this journey—acting as a pilot for innovative, wellness-focused, and environmentally responsible menu concepts that set the tone for what's possible campus-wide.

#### Essay:

KU Dining has long been committed to reducing food waste while expanding access to healthier and more diverse dining options. Recognizing that composting is not a viable solution, KU Dining set out to identify alternative ways to reduce waste.

On a larger scale, we partnered with a produce vendor that shares our sustainability mission. Loffredo aligns closely with KU Dining’s goal of creating a greener tomorrow by sourcing produce from local farmers and participating in recognized sustainable programs.

Locally, KU Dining has strengthened its commitment to food security through a partnership with Just Food, our community food pantry. Just Food collects usable dishes from catering events and retrieves leftover products from dining units at the end of each semester—ensuring excess food supports those in need.

Education plays a critical role in waste reduction. We encourage students to be mindful of portion sizes. To support this message, we created whimsical graphics paired with bold, fact-driven signage highlighting the realities of food waste, its environmental impact, and the connection to food insecurity.

Through thoughtful partnerships, education, and intentional menu design, KU Dining is transforming sustainability from a concept into a daily practice.

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Blend Salad Sa... 2.6 MiB

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Blend Survey.pdf 99 KiB



Blend\_glass\_sel... 4.2 MiB

KUDS\_BlendFee...87 KiB

blend | MCURC  
special offer | available 8/26-9/26  
the jayhawk bowl  
acai and dragonfruit sorbet with banana, coconut, granola, and blueberries  
available only at blend in the market, kansas union, level 3

KUDS\_BlendLT... 1.6 MiB

blend | MCURC  
salads \$10.45  
caesar: kale, tomato, spinach, red cabbage, pickled red onions, quinoa, parmesan, croutons, and caesar dressing  
mediterranean: mixed greens, chickpeas, black olives, pickled red onions, tomatoes, roasted red pepper, cucumber, feta, and green vinaigrette  
tex mex: mixed greens, roasted corn, pickled red onions, avocado, tomato, black beans, mozzarella, and chipotle ranch  
spinach cobb: spinach, pickled red onions, tomatoes, hard-boiled eggs, avocado, croutons, and ranch dressing  
sorbet bowls \$9.25  
your choice of acai or dragonfruit  
assorted toppings: strawberry, banana, blueberry, honey, mango, dark chocolate, almonds, coconut flakes, granola, peanut butter  
blend

KUDS\_Blend-M... 1.1 MiB

blend

KUDS\_BlendStic...790 KiB

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KUDS\_Falafel B... 1.6 MiB

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KUDS-Blend-My...1.6 MiB

