

Hispanic and Latinx Heritage Month Celebration

University of Houston

Introduction:

The University of Houston is a Hispanic-serving institution in one of the nation's largest, most diverse cities. Recognizing the rich cultural diversity on the campus is vital. UH Dining has been on a three-year journey to elevate the cultural series of events that are a large part of the residential dining program. UH Dining started the 2024-25 academic year by celebrating Hispanic and Latinx Heritage Month, which is Sept. 16 – Oct. 15 each year. While Texas was once part of Mexico, numerous Caribbean, Central, and South American cultures are part of the rich tapestry of the university.

Essay:

The Hispanic and Latinx Heritage Month menu had a rich mix of cuisine from around the Latin world. There was Mexican menudo and aguas frescas, Argentinian choripan, Columbian perro caliente, Puerto Rican arroz con gandules, Venezuelan cachitos, and so much more. While creating the menu for this event, the UH Dining team highlighted the diverse countries our student body represents. The team used various cooking methods like grilling, roasting, pan searing, sauté, braising, and julienne knife cuts. Guests had the opportunity to dine at seven specially themed stations complete with fresh merchandising, culturally inspired menus, and informational pieces about featured dishes' backgrounds. Serving styles included self-serve, team-served, and action stations. Foods were clearly labeled for allergens, and vegan and vegetarian options were abundant.

## Introduction:

Hispanic and Latinx Heritage Month provides ample opportunities to present the richness that thrives in those cultures. It can be presented authentically without appropriation. Thanks to partnerships with a variety of Hispanic student groups that assisted with the programming, decorations, music, dance, and information were available. UH Dining staff also embraced the challenges of making new recipes they don't make during a typical week. One of our chefs also got to indulge his taste for mofongo by sharing his love for this dish with a new variation.

## Essay:

UH Dining partnered with six student and alumni organizations, including the Association for Latin and Hispanic Advocates and Allies, the Hispanic Business Students' Association, and the Venezuelan Student Union. Part of the festivities included live mariachi performances, ballet folklórico demonstrations, and dance classes. Local artisans and craft vendors were added for this year's celebration. Colorful, textured streamers hung above the entrance to welcome guests, while pillars and register wraps were decorated with bright paper flowers. Inside, guests captured memories in front of a themed backdrop with fringe, beads, pompoms, and a specially designed photo frame.

## Introduction:

Collaboration was key to communicating the Hispanic and Latinx Heritage Month Celebration. Partner organizations used their social and digital channels to share messaging about the event and promote the activities. They also used those same channels during and after the event to showcase the fun. The dining team, along with student groups, developed several activities to engage participants beyond serving up great food for them to eat.

## Essay:

With the approval of UH Dining's partnering organizations, the event marketing material was dispersed in multiple ways, including a monthly calendar, Instagram Reels, yard signs, posters, A-frames, digital screens, and emails. Additionally, collaborating partners communicated the event via their social media channels. All promotional materials included partner logos and featured original artwork inspired by the colors and textures of the celebration. During the event, guests participated in dance classes, viewed performances, learned about foods and traditions, and shared positive feedback via guest interviews, conversations, social posts, and the dining program's text feature. Guest feedback will be used to inform programming for the next heritage celebration.

## Introduction:

The goal of residential special events is to break up the monotony of the menu and drive traffic, sales, and engagement. A food service provider's job is to offer choices, which we do. We serve around 2 million guests each year at nearly 30 locations on campus. Anything different we offer needs to pop! Fortunately, the heritage month is so close to the start of the academic year. It provides a needed boost of enthusiasm and energy when guests could use it most.

## Essay:

Week-over-week revenue at Moody Towers—which hosted the celebration—was up 16%. Sales were up 54%. Cash and credit card transactions were also up significantly, reflecting heavy traffic by guests without a meal plan. That's new business. Several of the recipes featured local vendors, which guests raved about. The event's success and authenticity were largely due to the direct involvement of on-campus partners, including student groups, student interns, associates, and university departments.

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