





The Loyal E. Horton Dining Awards continue to recognize excellence in collegiate dining, which plays a key role in supporting student success. The National Association of College & University Food Services (NACUFS) Dining Awards celebrate NACUFS members in various categories, and highlight programs that foster the growth and success of both students and dining employees. The awards focus on forward-thinking initiatives and programs that prioritize educating their customers. These values are also reflected in NACUFS' Nutrition and Sustainability Awards. A significant change for the 2024 awards was the move to online submission, making the process more inclusive by allowing more operations to participate. This shift also ensures that judges can concentrate on the content of the submissions rather than the presentation of printed materials. Due to the success in 2024, the 2025 submissions will also be online.

Categories:

1. **Retail Sales: Single Concept of the Year**
Awarded to outstanding single concept retail facilities.
2. **Retail Sales: Multiple Concepts of the Year**
Awarded to outstanding multi-concept retail facilities.
3. **Retail Sales: Marketplace of the Year**
Awarded to outstanding marketplace concepts.
4. **Catering Special Event of the Year**
Awarded to a special event put on by the catering department of the university.
5. **Residential Special Event of the Year**
Awarded to an outstanding event taking place in residential dining for its strong focus on the student experience.
6. **Catering Program of the Year**
Awarded to outstanding catering programs who show value to their campus in everyday ways.
7. **Renovation of the Year**
Awarded to an outstanding renovation that opened in the calendar year of the awards.
8. **New Facility of the Year (biennial award - not accepting applications in 2025)**
Awarded every other year to an outstanding new facility that opened within the previous two years (i.e., 2024 awards will be for new facilities in 2022 and 2023, 2026 awards for 2024 and 2025).
9. **Innovative Dining Program of the Year**
Awarded to dining programs who were forward thinking in all aspects of their operation, including, but not limited to, technology, menu, guest experience, student affordability, staffing, and employee development.
10. **Employee Development Program of the Year**
Awarded to dining programs who place an emphasis on growing and developing their team at all levels.
11. **Residential Dining Facility of the Year**
Awarded to an outstanding dining facility that encapsulates the spirit of enhancing the student experience. The facility does not need to be new to enter and can be entered in multiple years. Second entries and onward must highlight new aspects of the operation that were created to enhance the student/guest experience in the facility (i.e., staffing improvements, technology improvements, menu changes, educational programming).
12. **Outreach & Education Program of the Year**
Awarded to outstanding programs who place an emphasis on teaching their guests new skills. These skills could be culinary and based in a teaching kitchen, cultural experiences, nutritional experiences, or otherwise.



Grand Prize Determination

The grand prize will be determined in each category by examining those who receive the highest award in all size categories and considering:

- The biggest impact on the student experience
- Overall impact of the submission based on criteria
- Wow factor and achievements in comparison to size of staff, budget, etc.

Contest Rules:

1. The contest is open to all NACUFS institutional members in good standing. Entries must be designed and produced by the institution entering the contest. Entries cannot be of company-wide promotions/menus/concepts that are for use at multiple campuses or institutions as a company program. The actual entry must be new and cannot have been previously submitted.
2. All entries must be received by the deadline March 31, 2025.
3. All portions of the online entry form must be completed.
4. Up to 20 attachments may be included on the last submission tab.
5. If an entry uses materials that could be subject to copyright and/or trademark protections, the entrant institution should consult with the entrant's legal counsel or appropriate institutional office as to whether written permission from each copyright and/or trademark owner is required. If written permission is required for the purposes reflected in the entry, a copy of each such written permission shall be submitted to membership@nacufs.org, and such written permission shall also be provided for further publication and use by NACUFS.
6. The dining awards chair and NACUFS staff will review all entries upon receipt for rule adherence, qualification, and classification, and reserve the right to recategorize entries if deemed appropriate.
7. The decision of the judges is final.
8. By entering the contest, permission is thereby given to NACUFS to publish and/or use in any way the material so submitted.
9. Events must have occurred in the calendar year prior to the year of the awards (i.e., 2025 awards will be given to events and programs operated in 2024) to be considered, unless otherwise noted within individual categories. Entries for events outside the defined time period will be disqualified.



Retail Sales: Single Concept of the Year

Description

Written submission explains the campus dining program and a brief overview of the facility. Judges should look for items that convey creativity, atmosphere, and uniqueness. The concept does not have to be a new concept.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menu and Meal	Actual menu is included and appropriate to the theme of the concept.	10
	Menu is reflective of current dining trends and guest dining preferences.	
	A variety of specials are offered.	
	An appropriate variety of colors, shapes, textures, temperatures, and flavors are available.	
	Include typical production sheets (maximum of three production sheets).	
	Food items are presented to ensure quality and food safety (include at least one actual temperature log).	
Facility Design and Merchandising	Concept is imaginative, creative, and unique.	10
	Effective use of space maximizes efficient customer flow and product distribution.	
	The design of the concept enhances desired atmosphere.	
	Overall design reflects current industry trends.	
	Food choices are presented effectively and look appealing to customers.	
	Food presentation reflects a balance of color, texture, flavor, and temperatures.	
Marketing	Food presentation is creative and attractive.	
	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for marketing are included (maximum of five marketing pieces).	10
	Published menu and materials are descriptive, informative, have a creative flair, and are polished in design and appearance	
	Informational signage provides customers with clear guidance through food concepts.	
	Appropriate promotional methods utilized to target the specific audience(s).	
	Specials advertised attractively and successfully.	
	Customers are surveyed on food preferences and product evaluations.	



Retail Sales: Single Concept of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Nutrition and Wellness	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for nutrition and wellness are included (maximum of five pieces).	10
	Information is available regarding dietary options and nutritional content.	
	Special dietary options (e.g., low-fat, vegetarian, and vegan) are regularly available.	
Additional Considerations	The predicted financial goals are tracked and met or exceeded.	10
	Evidence is provided that customer satisfaction goals were accomplished.	
	Selected sustainability goals are achieved when applicable.	
	There is an overall "wow" factor in the concept.	
Total Points Possible		50



Retail Sales: Multiple Concepts of the Year

Description

Written submission explains the campus dining program and a brief overview of the facility. Judges should look for items that convey creativity, atmosphere, and uniqueness. The facility does not have to be a new facility.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menu and Meal	Actual menu is included and appropriate to the theme of the concept.	10
	Menu is reflective of current dining trends and guest dining preferences.	
	A variety of specials are offered.	
	An appropriate variety of colors, shapes, textures, temperatures, and flavors are available.	
	Include typical production sheets (maximum of three production sheets).	
	Food items are presented to ensure quality and food safety (include at least one actual temperature log).	
Facility Design and Merchandising	Concept is imaginative, creative, and unique.	10
	Effective use of space maximizes efficient customer flow and product distribution.	
	The design of the concept enhances the desired atmosphere.	
	Overall design reflects current industry trends.	
	Food choices are presented effectively and look appealing to customers.	
	Food presentation reflects a balance of color, texture, flavor, and temperatures.	
Marketing	Food presentation is creative and attractive.	
	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for marketing are included (maximum of five marketing pieces).	10
	Published menu and materials are descriptive, informative, have a creative flair, and are polished in design and appearance.	
	Informational signage provides customers with clear guidance through food concepts.	
	Appropriate promotional methods are utilized to target the specific audience(s).	
	Specials advertised attractively and successfully.	
	Customers are surveyed on food preferences and product evaluations.	



Retail Sales: Multiple Concepts of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Nutrition and Wellness	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for nutrition and wellness are included (maximum of five pieces).	10
	Information is available regarding dietary options and nutritional content.	
	Special dietary options (e.g., low-fat, vegetarian, and vegan) are regularly available.	
Additional Considerations	The predicted financial goals are tracked and met or exceeded.	10
	Evidence is provided that customer satisfaction goals were accomplished.	
	Selected sustainability goals are achieved when applicable.	
	There is an overall "wow" factor in the concept.	
Total Points Possible		50



Retail Sales: Marketplace of the Year

Description

Written submission explains the campus dining program and a brief overview of the facility. Judges should look for items that convey creativity, atmosphere, and uniqueness. The marketplace does not have to be a new facility.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menu and Meal	Actual menu is included and appropriate to the theme of the concept.	10
	Menu is reflective of current dining trends and guest dining preferences.	
	A variety of daily and weekly specials are offered.	
	An appropriate variety of colors, shapes, textures, temperatures, and flavors are available.	
	Include typical production sheets (maximum of three production sheets).	
	Food items are presented to ensure quality and food safety (include at least one actual temperature log).	
Facility Design and Merchandising	Concept is imaginative, creative, and unique.	10
	Effective use of space maximizes efficient customer flow and product distribution.	
	The design of the concept enhances the desired atmosphere.	
	Overall design reflects current industry trends.	
	Food choices are presented effectively and look appealing to customers.	
	Food presentation reflects a balance of color, texture, flavor, and temperatures.	
	Food presentation is creative and attractive.	
Marketing	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for marketing are included (maximum of five marketing pieces).	10
	Published menu and materials are descriptive, informative, have a creative flair, and are polished in design and appearance.	
	Informational signage provides customers with clear guidance through food concepts.	
	Appropriate promotional methods are utilized to target the specific audience(s).	
	Specials advertised attractively and successfully.	
	Customers are surveyed on food preferences and product evaluations.	



Retail Sales: Marketplace of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Nutrition and Wellness	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for nutrition and wellness are included (maximum of five pieces).	10
	Information is available regarding dietary options and nutritional content.	
	Special dietary options (e.g., low-fat, vegetarian, and vegan) are regularly available.	
Additional Considerations	The predicted financial goals are tracked and met or exceeded.	10
	Evidence is provided that customer satisfaction goals were accomplished.	
	Selected sustainability goals are achieved when applicable.	
	There is an overall "wow" factor in the concept.	
Total Points Possible		50



Catering Special Event of the Year

Description

Written submission explains the campus catering department, the client who hired them, and the goals of the event. Judges should look for items that convey the creativity, atmosphere, excitement, and success of the event. Judges may take into consideration the budget available for the event in determining the extent to which the event performed in regards to the below criteria.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menu and Meal	Menu is included and is creative in design and style.	15
	Menu is complementary to the overall theme.	
	A variety of menu choices are available.	
	Menu items offer various colors, textures, flavors, and temperatures.	
	Various methods are used in food preparation.	
	Various trends, creativity, and originality are represented.	
	Consideration is made for food allergies and special dietary preferences.	
	Evidence of food safety and nutritional content is available where appropriate. Explain your HACCP practices.	
Theme Development and/or Execution	The special event or theme is innovative in concept.	10
	Theme fits the purpose of the event.	
	Imagination or creativity was used to create a “wow” factor to support the theme.	
	Evidence is included of the methods that were utilized to develop and/or execute the theme.	
Making It Special	Evidence and description of presentation strategy are shown.	10
	The theme or concept is carried through in décor and decorations.	
	The event space design enhances desired atmosphere; creative use of facility space.	
	Service style is appropriate for the theme of the event.	
	Food presentation is creative and attractive.	
	Evidence of service and table-scape decorations: centerpieces, color coordination, napkin folds, and other event enhancements.	



Catering Special Event of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Additional Considerations	Evidence is provided that the goals of the event were met (such as customer feedback, financial analysis, etc.).	5
	Where appropriate, show evidence of collaboration with other campuses and/or outside organizations.	
	Sustainability efforts were included in the event design and implementation when applicable.	
	There was an overall “wow” factor in the event. The “wow” factor will be based on factors that judges deem important based on their experience and knowledge, not just budget.	
Total Points Possible		40



Residential Special Event of the Year

Description

Written submission explains the campus dining program, how residential dining fits into the program, and the basic goals of this particular event. Judges should look for items that convey the creativity, atmosphere, excitement, and success of the event.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menu and Meal	Actual menu is included and is creative in design and style.	15
	Menu complements the theme.	
	Menu items offer various colors, textures, flavors, and temperatures.	
	A variety of menu choices are available.	
	Various methods are used in food preparation.	
	Consideration is made for food allergies and special dietary preferences.	
	Food items were presented to ensure quality and food safety (include at least one actual temperature log).	
	Production sheets are appropriate and complete for this specific event (maximum of three production sheets).	
Theme Development and/or Execution	The special event or theme is innovative in concept.	10
	The theme or concept is enhanced through décor, decorations, service style, buffet settings, and/or service areas.	
	Food presentation is creative and attractive.	
	Various service methods such as action stations, self-service, carving stations, etc. were utilized where appropriate.	
	The room design and/or location enhanced the desired atmosphere.	



Residential Special Event of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Marketing and Making It Special	Promotional materials are original, descriptive, and enhance the theme of the event.	10
	Graphic designs are cohesive and reflect an artful and creative flair; the final product is polished in design and appearance.	
	Event is effectively marketed through a variety of media.	
	The event or concept is imaginative and appealing to customer base.	
	Customer feedback about the event was gathered and can be used for future events.	
	Where appropriate, activities to engage the customer were planned and supported the theme.	
Additional Considerations	Evidence is provided that the goals of the event were met (such as attendance, financial analysis, etc.).	5
	Students and/or staff had a direct role in event's success.	
	Sustainable efforts were included in the event design and implementation when applicable.	
	There was an overall "wow" factor in the event.	
Total Points Possible		40



Catering Program of the Year

Description

Written submission should include a summary of your catering program, highlighting creativity and innovation. Judges may consider the size of the team operating the program in determining the impact of the program.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menus	Examples of specially created menus are included.	25
	Menus for standard ordering options are included.	
	Sample menu of program is included.	
	Consideration for special dietary needs including religious restrictions, allergens, and intolerances is included.	
	Show how color, textures, flavor, and presentation of food and beverage support the catering program.	
Food Presentation	Descriptions of how food is presented in different scenarios, i.e., boxed lunch, coffee break, student group event.	25
	Creativity and innovation for food presentation.	
	Examples of set-ups throughout the year are included.	
Staffing & Service Design	Service design options should be included.	25
	Food station design is featured.	
	How staffing was determined is included.	
	Unique elements of your catering service are incorporated.	
Marketing	Promotional materials are original, descriptive, and enhance the program.	15
	Graphic designs are cohesive and reflect an artful and creative flair; the final product is polished in design and appearance.	
	Program is effectively marketed through a variety of media.	
	Where appropriate, activities to engage the customer were planned.	
Overall	Sales process and client communications.	10
	Incorporation of tastings.	
Total Points Possible		100



Renovation of the Year

Description

Written submission should include an overview of the renovation, when it was decided, how long it took, and what the original goals were.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Planning	Budget and timelines are included.	40
	Approach to planning is included.	
	Describe how the style (retail, coffee, boba, sweets, AYCTE, etc.) was determined.	
	Include reasons for renovation and guiding principles used in the planning.	
	Demonstrate incorporation of staff in the planning process.	
	How the menu was developed.	
	How was the story communicated to students and guests on why the facility was being renovated?	
	How vendors were engaged with the renovation.	
	Training and preparation of staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how staff was trained and readied for the renovation. How staffing was managed. Describe menu research and development process. 	
Marketing & Launch	Were the original goals achieved?	40
	How was the launch of the renovation special?	
	How did you build anticipation for your campus community?	
	Provide feedback from the campus community upon launch.	
	Were the financial operational goals realized?	
	How was the new or updated facility marketed?	
	Promotional materials are original, descriptive, and enhance the facility.	
	Graphic designs are cohesive and reflect an artful and creative flair; the final product is polished in design and appearance.	
	Facility is effectively marketed through a variety of media.	
	Where appropriate, activities to engage the customer were planned.	



Renovation of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Collaboration	How was the rest of campus involved?	20
	What other departments were engaged?	
Total Points Possible		100



Innovative Dining Program of the Year

Description

Written submission should include an overview of how the overall operation is innovative and looking to the future of collegiate dining.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Innovation	Service design, including food stations, should be included.	30
	Describe how staffing is determined.	
	Share unique elements of the operation in each area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and menu • Staffing (i.e., culture, recruitment, employee development) • Campus collaboration • Sourcing and procurement • Technology 	
	How is data utilized to make decisions in the operation?	
Campus Impact	How does the program impact campus life?	30
	Include testimonials and feedback from campus members.	
	Is the program creating unique opportunities for student engagement, such as learning laboratories, meaningful internship opportunities, community building?	
	Is the strategy of the dining operation interwoven with the greater strategy of the campus?	
Menus	Examples of menus are included.	15
	Menus are unique and innovative.	
	Sample menu of program is included.	
	Consideration for special dietary needs, including religious restrictions, allergens, and intolerances is demonstrated.	
Marketing	Promotional materials are original, descriptive, and enhance the program.	15
	Graphic designs are cohesive and reflect an artful and creative flair; the final product is polished in design and appearance.	
	Program is effectively marketed through a variety of media.	
	Where appropriate, activities to engage the customer were planned.	



Innovative Dining Program of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Overall	How does the program stand out from other dining operations?	10
	How does the overall student experience benefit from the dining operations innovation?	
Total Points Possible		100



Employee Development Program of the Year

Description

Written submission should include an overview of the employee development program and how it fits within the broader operation.

Submission should include syllabus and end goals for the development program.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Description of the Program	How was the program created?	40
	How is the program structured and what does it entail?	
	Who leads the program?	
	How is the program marketed and communicated?	
	Who can participate?	
	What is the goal of the program?	
	How is success measured?	
	How does NACUFS professional development impact the program?	
Impact on Retention	How was the program utilized to retain employees?	20
	Did employee retention improve over the year?	
Impact on Recruitment	Was the program mentioned in recruiting new employees (students, full time, etc.)?	20
	Did unfilled openings change during the time period?	
Impact on Employee Satisfaction	Share information on employee job satisfaction, including testimonials from employees.	20
	Has the average length of tenure changed, and can it be correlated to the program?	
Total Points Possible		100



Residential Dining Facility of the Year

Description

Written submission should include a broad overview “day in the life” of the facility. This should include information on areas such as:

- Front-of-house experience
- Back-of-house experience
- Staffing
- Unique elements: branding, unique elements for students/guests
- Menus
- Presentation
- Guest engagement
- Monotony breakers/special events/programming
- Staffing
- Marketing
- Nutrition/wellness
- Dietary accommodations (allergens, religious, preferences)
- Campus engagement
- Sustainability
- Guest education (food waste, etc.)
- Unique and creative elements

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Menu	Actual menus are included.	10
	Menus are reflective of current dining trends and guest dining preferences.	
	A variety of menu choices are available.	
	New items are frequently introduced.	
	Specials and monotony breakers are offered to enhance the menu.	
	Menu options reflect seasonality of produce or locally sourced items.	
	Menu promotes culinary exploration with flavors and/or products unique to the region.	
	Food items are presented to ensure quality and food safety. Explain your food safety practices, including one temperature log (REQUIRED) and other documentation that can support your safety practices.	
Merchandising and Presentation	Food choices are presented effectively and look appealing to customers.	10
	Food presentation reflects a balance of color, texture, flavor, and temperatures.	
	Food presentation is creative and attractive.	
	The layout of the service area enhances flow of service and adds to overall ambiance.	



Residential Dining Facility of the Year

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Marketing	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for marketing are included (maximum of five marketing pieces).	10
	Published menu and materials are descriptive, informative, have a creative flair, and are polished in design and appearance.	
	Informational signage provides customers clear guidance through food stations.	
	Marketing efforts target all segments of operation's clientele.	
	Customers are surveyed on dining preferences and involved in recipe, menu, and product evaluations.	
Nutrition and Wellness	Actual published materials or copies of materials used for nutrition and wellness are included (maximum of five pieces recommended).	10
	Information is available regarding dietary options and nutritional content.	
	Special dietary options (e.g., low-fat, vegetarian, and vegan) are regularly available.	
	Nutritional counseling is provided on a consistent, inviting, and professional basis.	
Additional Considerations <i>Provide evidence as much as possible</i>	Hours of operation offer flexibility.	10
	Student employees have a direct role in the residential dining concept's success.	
	Selected sustainability goals are achieved when applicable.	
	There is an overall "wow" factor in the concept.	
Total Points Possible		50



Outreach & Education Program of the Year

Description

Awarded to outstanding programs who place an emphasis on teaching their guests new skills. These skills could be culinary and based in a teaching kitchen, cultural experiences, or otherwise. Sustainability and nutrition-based programs should be directed toward those award categories.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Space & Design	Photos of the facility are included	30
	Facility or event was designed to create a learning opportunity.	
Campus Impact	How did the program impact the campus experience?	35
	Include testimonials and feedback from participants.	
	Is the program creating unique opportunities for student engagement?	
	Is the program woven into the greater strategy of the dining operation?	
Marketing	Promotional materials are original, descriptive, and enhance the program.	25
	Graphic designs are cohesive and reflect an artful and creative flair; the final product is polished in design and appearance.	
	Program is effectively marketed through a variety of media.	
	Where appropriate, activities to engage the customer were planned.	
Overall	How does the program stand out from other dining operations?	10
	How does the overall student experience benefit from the dining operation's innovative outreach and education program?	
Total Points Possible		100



Dining Awards Classification Matrix

NACUFS will categorize your submission based on our current data using the Dining Awards Classification Matrix. If you'd like to update your data or ensure its accuracy, please contact membership@NACUFS.org.

Total Student Enrollment

	<1000	1001-2000	2001-3000	3001-4000	4001-5000	5001-6000	6001-7000	7001-9000	9001-11000	11001-13000	13001-15000	15001-19000	19001-23000	23001-27000	27001-31000	31001+
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SMALL

MEDIUM

LARGE