

March Madness

University of Maryland

Introduction:

At the University of Maryland, celebrating March Madness gave the dining halls an opportunity to present a culinary experience reflecting the popularity and excitement of the tournament. March Madness specials run in all three dining halls with South Campus Dining Hall turning the event into a major special. The dedicated Dining team designed a creative and dynamic menu to complement the basketball theme while offering a diverse selection of flavors, textures and temperatures. With a focus on variety, inclusivity and presentation, the menu ensures that every student - regardless of dietary needs - would enjoy a memorable and satisfying meal.

Essay:

The March Madness menu was designed to introduce elevated flavors of classic game-day favorites to the Maryland dining experience. Featured items included four distinct hot dogs , Coney Island Dog, Barbecue Hot Dog, Mac and Cheese Dog, and Greek Hot Dog - with Feta Cheese, Olives, and Dressing, paired with gourmet offerings like Eight Ounce Burgers topped with Cheddar Cheese, Caramelized Onions, and Bacon Jam. A variety of handcrafted snacks such as Popcorn, Smoked Brisket Sliders, and Saucy Wings with three flavors- Old Bay, Honey Barbecue, and Lemon Pepper added to the excitement of the event. Each dish was meticulously prepared using a range of cooking methods -- grilling, roasting, frying, and steaming -- to create a balanced selection of fresh hot, cold, and crispy options. The self-serve snack bars encouraged creativity and accounted for personal preference, allowing students to assemble their own plates with their preferred flavors and textures.

Dietary inclusivity was a priority, with vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, and allergen-friendly choices clearly labeled and available at every dining hall.

Introduction:

March Madness is more than “just” a basketball tournament - it brings communities together in a spirit of excitement and competition. Our March Madness event captured that same energy, engaging our resident community in game-day atmosphere. South Campus Dining Hall transformed into a dynamic arena. Signs with QR codes accessed bracket contest (prizes awarded after the finale). Menu cards, table tents and prize banners matched basketball colors and artwork, video screens showed highlights of the games. From stadium-style eats to a design that felt like a championship venue, every detail was planned to enhance the experience and fuel excitement.

Essay:

For the March Madness dinner, we turned South Campus Dining Hall into a high-energy arena, complete with themed décor, basketball shooting contests, tournament highlights on video screens, interactive stations and creative presentations inspired by game-day favorites. The serving area featured basketball hoops, prize tables and a display tower. We covered round tables in the center of the dining room with basketball tablecloths. Action stations showed off the preparation of gourmet stadium-style eats, including four delicious hot dogs: Coney Island Dog, Barbecue Hot Dog, Mac and Cheese Topped Dog, and Greek Hot Dog with Feta Cheese, Olives and Dressing. The carve-to-order station served up supercharged game-day classics like an Eight Ounce Burger with Cheddar Cheese, Caramelized Onions, and Bacon Jam - a twist on the concessions stand burger. If you were seeking plant protein, we offered Miso Glazed Japanese Eggplant with Sesame Seeds and Scallions. Self-serve snack bars offered Popcorn, Smoked Brisket Sliders and three varieties of Saucy Wings: Old Bay, Honey Barbecue and Lemon Pepper. From our vibrant décor to our engaging service style, every element of the event was designed to make guests feel like they were courtside for the championship NCAA tournament.

Introduction:

Effective marketing was essential to building anticipation for March Madness, ensuring the event resonated with students and created a vibrant atmosphere from start to finish. A multi-platform promotional campaign engaged the campus community, using eye-catching graphics, themed messaging and social media. From bold digital designs to creative on-site activities, every marketing effort reinforced the high-energy spirit of the tournament. The event was designed not just as a meal, but as an experience - complete with engaging activities, physical activities and fabulous prizes. The result was a well-executed, highly attended celebration of basketball and University spirit!

Essay:

To generate excitement for March Madness, marketing efforts included a mix of digital, print and interactive promotions. Visually striking graphics - featuring bold typography, basketball motifs and team colors - were used across social media platforms and dining hall signage, ensuring brand consistency and maximum visibility. QR codes on posters and table tents linked directly to event details and teaser content, building anticipation leading up to game day. A social media campaign invited students to participate in bracket challenges, promoting engagement. Live-action videos, filmed in the dining hall and featured students and staff, brought an authentic and personal touch to marketing efforts on Instagram, Facebook and X. Feedback was gathered using digital comment cards, allowing students to share their thoughts and vote on elements they'd like to see in future themed events. This data helps us shape upcoming programming, ensuring continued student engagement and enthusiasm.

Introduction:

Our March Madness event exceeded expectations, all three dining halls reported an increase in attendance, South Campus Dining Hall served more than 25% more guests than on a typical Wednesday evening. The total guest count for March Madness 2025 was just over 9,300 guests. Strong attendance numbers and enthusiastic participation confirmed its success, while direct involvement from students and staff contributed to its seamless execution. Sustainability was also an important

consideration, with waste reduction initiatives playing a role in each dining hall at the end of each night. Every detail of the event worked together to create an unforgettable experience.

Essay:

March Madness was one of the most well-attended themed dining events of the year, with a noticeable increase in student participation compared to regular dining days. Attendance numbers reflected strong engagement, while real-time feedback - collected through comment cards and digital surveys - showed overwhelmingly positive responses. Students praised the immersive atmosphere, creative food stations and interactive elements, with many expressing excitement for similar future events. Students and staff played an essential role in the event's success. Bracket contest prizes will be awarded at the end of the tournament and include game worn gear from the Athletics Department. Student employees greeted guests and encouraged participation in the bracket challenge plus shooting matches and other activities. Sustainability efforts included the use of locally sourced ingredients where possible and a strategic food waste reduction plan focusing on the limited use of paper products. Additionally, unserved food was donated to the Food Recovery Network, further giving back to the College Park community. Ultimately, our March Madness event is more than just a themed meal - it's a full-scale, immersive experience that captures the energy of the tournament. The dynamic combination of participation, sustainability and high-impact execution made it a slam dunk!

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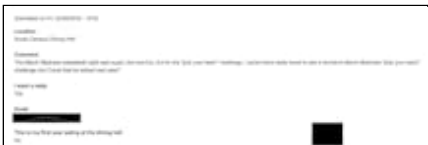
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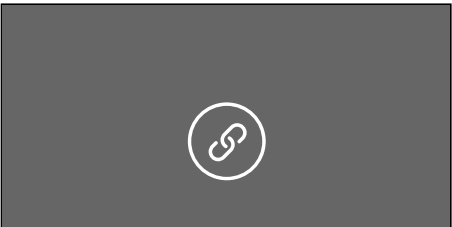
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