NACUFS (2026)
Residential Special Event of the Year

Elon University

engpEkVr

Entry details

Entry Name:	Elon Dining Mardi Gras
Institution Name:	Elon University
Entry Completed By *(name and position)*:	Christian Wallace - Guest Experience Manager

> The Mardi Gras menu was designed to reflect the bold flavors and culinary traditions of Louisiana while offering students a wide variety of choices throughout the evening. Stations across both floors of McEwen Dining Hall featured seafood, Cajun classics, small plates, desserts, and specialty beverages. The menu balanced rich Southern flavors with lighter options, vegetarian choices, and allergen conscious selections, ensuring that all students could participate in the celebration while experiencing the diverse textures, colors, and cooking styles associated with Mardi Gras cuisine.

Essay:

> McEwen stations were converted from their typical menu concepts to reflect the flavors of Mardi Gras, creating a progressive dining experience as students moved through the building. Students first entered upstairs where they were greeted by a mocktail bar serving two specialty mocktails alongside a Bloody Mary bar with toppings like fried oysters and charred okra. An oyster station offered freshly shucked oysters with serrano chili mignonette and Crystal cocktail sauce. Passed appetizers such as crawfish hushpuppies, mini alligator corn dogs, and black eyed pea fritters added crisp textures and bold Cajun flavors.
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> Students then moved downstairs for the main feast and President Connie Book's crawfish peel and eat demonstration. Her seafood boil featured crawfish, peel and eat shrimp, and marinated crab claws served with corn

cobs, smoked sausage, red potatoes, pickled okra, lemons, drawn butter, and Crystal hot sauce. Additional stations highlighted Louisiana classics including shrimp etouffee, jambalaya, gumbo, bourbon glazed boudin balls, and blackened North Carolina catfish. Desserts continued the celebration with king cake, Mardi Gras cupcakes, and vegan chocolate coffee cookies.

To ensure inclusivity, a dedicated top nine allergen free station was created for the event featuring smoked Poulet Rouge, dirty rice, and Cajun succotash.

Introduction:

Mardi Gras at Elon transforms McEwen Dining Hall into a celebration of New Orleans culture and cuisine. Inspired by the hometown traditions of Elon University President Connie Book, the event brings Cajun and Creole food, music, and décor together in a full dining hall takeover. Through themed lighting, interactive culinary stations, and collaborative planning with Student Government and the President's Office, the event recreates the energy and hospitality of a New Orleans celebration for the Elon community.

Essay:

McEwen Dining Hall was fully transformed to execute the Mardi Gras theme. Purple, green, and gold uplighting illuminated both the interior and exterior of the building, while removable hanging lights were installed throughout the space to enhance the atmosphere. Pipe and drape reshaped areas of the dining hall, including the hydroponic farm area which was converted into a stage for the crawfish boil demonstration. Stage lighting and microphones allowed President Connie Book to demonstrate how to peel crawfish while teaching students throughout the event.

Eleven service points used multiple service styles. Reception style service upstairs included mocktail stations, oyster shucking, passed appetizers, and self serve desserts. Downstairs stations featured staff served Louisiana classics such as shrimp etouffee, gumbo, and jambalaya. The signature action station was the seafood boil demonstration where crawfish, shrimp, were served with traditional accompaniments while students learned directly from the university president.

Décor and visual elements enhanced the celebration. Food was presented using risers, cast iron cookware, and bakery display cases. A large illuminated "MARDI GRAS" marquee installation with balloon décor served as a student photo opportunity while a live band performed upstairs.

The event welcomed 1,062 students, approximately 17% of Elon's undergraduate population.

Introduction:

Mardi Gras at Elon was promoted through a cohesive, multi channel marketing strategy designed to build anticipation and drive attendance. Branded graphics, video content, and interactive outreach reflected the energy of the event while ensuring students encountered the promotion across dining spaces and campus. The campaign combined digital, print, and in person engagement to create a consistent and highly visible presence leading up to the event.

Essay:

Marketing efforts for Mardi Gras focused on creating a consistent visual identity and reaching students through multiple touchpoints. Custom designed posters, digital screens, and website graphics featured bold Mardi Gras colors and imagery, reinforcing the theme across all dining locations. Video content played a key role, including a crawfish demonstration with President Connie Book and a king cake teaching kitchen video feature with campus leadership. These videos were displayed alongside menus and on screens throughout dining halls to maintain visibility.

Physical marketing extended beyond dining spaces. The main entrance to McEwen was wrapped with custom perforated window graphics promoting the event, while student interns conducted in person outreach by tabling across campus to pre sell wristbands. A decorated golf cart distributed candy and printed invitations, creating a memorable and unexpected interaction with students.

> This layered approach ensured consistent exposure while building excitement. Pre sales and strong attendance demonstrated the effectiveness of the campaign, while post event feedback collected through dining surveys continues to inform future programming and improvements.

Introduction:

> Mardi Gras at Elon achieved its goals through strong attendance, meaningful student involvement, and intentional operational planning. The event demonstrated the impact of collaborative programming while incorporating sustainable practices and creating a high energy dining experience that resonated with the campus community.

Essay:

> The success of Mardi Gras was demonstrated through strong attendance, with 1,062 students participating in the event, representing approximately 17 percent of the undergraduate population. This turnout reflected effective planning, promotion, and student interest in large scale dining experiences.
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> Student involvement played a direct role in the event's success. The event was planned in collaboration with the Sophomore Class, including menu review and walkthroughs of the dining space to align on event flow and engagement points. On the day of the event, student leaders supported distribution of themed t shirts, engaged guests outside the dining hall, and helped build energy leading into the experience. Student marketing interns also contributed by promoting the event, managing pre sales, and assisting with entry by scanning students and distributing wristbands.
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> Sustainability was considered in event execution by utilizing compostable service ware in place of traditional dishware and implementing compost collection at dish return to divert waste.
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> The overall experience created a strong "wow" factor through the transformation of the dining hall, interactive culinary moments, and high energy atmosphere, leaving a lasting impression on students.

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.

Mardi Gras 202... 1.5 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 2.3 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 1.8 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 2.0 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 1.8 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 1.8 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 1.7 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 1.9 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 2.0 MiB

Mardi Gras 202... 1.6 MiB

Mardi Gras Men...3.5 MiB

PDF

Mardi Gras Pro... 501 KiB

PDF

Production She... 113 KiB

Attachment name
Mardi Gras Promotional...

https://www.instagram....