

## **NACUFS (2025)**

### Employee Development Program of the Year

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Montclair State University - Sam's 'Service Stars Showcase'

Montclair State University

#### Introduction:

"Vince Lombardi wisely stated, 'The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.'

The Service Stars Showcase is designed to elevate both individual performance and team excellence, it fosters a culture of excellence. Recognizing adherence to operational standards and celebrating outstanding performance, we've cultivated a vibrant and customer-centric environment. This initiative transcends simple compliance, promoting skill development and a shared commitment to delivering exceptional dining experiences. Through clear criteria, measurable outcomes, and meaningful rewards, the program has become a powerful driver of engagement and continuous improvement.

#### Essay:

The Service Stars Showcase was developed to enhance associate engagement and elevate customer satisfaction within our university dining hall, directly addressing feedback that led to significant dining program upgrades. To ensure the implementation and maintenance of these enhancements, alongside adherence to crucial operational standards, a comprehensive and motivating competition was established. The program features two distinct tiers: Associate of the Month, recognizing individual excellence, and Station of the Month, celebrating team performance. A points-based system evaluates key performance indicators, including punch compliance, attendance, safety protocol adherence, uniform standards, and responsible phone usage.

The dining hall management team provides essential leadership, defining criteria, tracking performance metrics, administering the point system, evaluating station effectiveness in upholding upgraded procedures and achieving customer satisfaction, and ultimately awarding recognition. Participation is inclusive for all dining hall associates across various stations and roles. The goal is to cultivate a culture of excellence and ownership, ultimately enriching the student dining experience. Success is measured through point deductions, station performance evaluations, associate morale indicators, and operational efficiency metrics. Furthermore, development opportunities through NACUFS contribute significantly by fostering continuous improvement, integrating industry best practices, and reinforcing a student-centric approach, aligning with the program's core objectives.

#### Introduction:

Employee retention is paramount to our dynamic dining environment. Our Service Stars Showcase has emerged as a key strategy in fostering a stable and engaged workforce. By recognizing individual and team achievements, we've cultivated a sense of belonging and purpose. This initiative transcends mere job satisfaction; it fosters a culture where associates feel valued and invested. Tangible rewards and opportunities for growth, strengthen employee loyalty. While pre-existing long-term employees made immediate statistical changes difficult to see, we have created a foundation that will enhance future retention.

#### Essay:

The Service Stars Showcase program has been instrumental in enhancing employee retention through a deliberate strategy centered on appreciation, professional growth, and fostering a strong sense of community. Associates experience tangible and visible recognition via the prestigious "Associate of the Month" award and meaningful incentives, effectively cultivating a profound sense of value and personal accomplishment. Simultaneously, the program provides substantial growth opportunities through targeted training on newly implemented dining procedures and a strong emphasis on achieving excellence within their stations, thereby enabling associates to cultivate valuable skills and envision clear pathways for career progression within our organization.

The station-based competition cultivates teamwork and a strong sense of camaraderie among colleagues, effectively transforming the dining hall into a supportive and highly engaging work environment where collaboration truly flourishes. By establishing transparent and clearly defined performance expectations and consistently celebrating both individual and team achievements, the program successfully instills a deep sense of pride in their daily contributions and a strong commitment to maintaining consistently high standards. Moreover, by effectively connecting their routine tasks to the overarching and meaningful goal of consistently enhancing the overall student dining experience, the program instills a powerful sense of purpose and collective responsibility.

#### Introduction:

In the competitive landscape of food service, attracting top talent is crucial. Our Service Stars Showcase, while initially an internal initiative, became a compelling recruitment tool. By showcasing a culture of excellence and growth, we attract candidates seeking more than just a job, highlighting our commitment to employee development and recognition. This narrative resonates with students and full-time professionals alike, who value a supportive and rewarding work environment. The program's success now shapes our recruiting strategy, turning it into a powerful asset.

#### Essay:

While initially not a formal component of our recruitment strategy, the success of the Service Stars Showcase has highlighted a valuable opportunity to enhance our hiring process. The positive impact on employee morale, retention rates, and the overall quality of the dining experience now forms a compelling narrative for prospective employees. We can confidently showcase our dining hall as an environment where hard work is recognized, valuable skills are developed, and collaborative teamwork is genuinely celebrated. The program's inherent emphasis on training initiatives and the pursuit of station excellence clearly illustrates our deep commitment to the professional growth and advancement of our team members. This focus on development resonates strongly with ambitious candidates who are actively seeking supportive and rewarding work environments where they can learn, contribute meaningfully, and build a successful career.

Furthermore, the implementation of these recognition programs has directly addressed previous staffing challenges. Prior to their introduction, persistent unfilled openings created operational strain. However, the program's positive influence on associate engagement and retention has led to a significant decrease in vacancies. This increased team stability has fostered more proactive staffing strategies, reducing the need for reactive hiring and cultivating a more consistently staffed and efficient workforce.

#### Introduction:

Employee satisfaction is the lifeline of our dining hall's success. Our Service Stars Showcase program directly addresses this by fostering a sense of accomplishment and belonging and cultivating a positive and motivating work environment. This initiative transcends mere compliance; it empowers associates to take ownership of their roles and strive for excellence. Through tangible rewards and public recognition, we've strengthened employee morale and created a culture where associates feel valued and appreciated. The program's impact is shown by the increased teamwork, enthusiasm, and pride evident throughout the dining hall.

#### Essay:

Employee satisfaction is crucial to our dining hall's success, and our Service Stars Showcase program directly fosters a positive and motivating environment, cultivating accomplishment and belonging. This initiative empowers associates to take ownership and strive for excellence. Tangible rewards and public recognition have strengthened morale, creating a culture where associates feel valued. Increased teamwork, enthusiasm, and pride are evident throughout the dining hall. Associates' feedback highlights the program's impact. Rose Florestin is motivated to do her best, feeling part of something important. Joseph Emile appreciates clear guidelines and management recognition, fostering teamwork. Clarythe Barcus values skill development and feels proud of team achievements and positive feedback. Twanna Thomas enjoys the team feeling and knowing her work matters. While the program's immediate statistical impact on average tenure isn't quantifiable due to existing long-term staff, it has laid a strong foundation for future stability. By providing recognition and growth opportunities, it reinforces loyalty. By fostering a positive culture of recognition, development, and community, it is poised to enhance future retention rates. Although immediate shifts in average tenure aren't apparent, the program is cultivating a more stable and loyal workforce long-term.

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