

NACUFS (2025)

Retail Sales: Single Concept of the Year

It's Thyme

Duke University

Introduction:

It's Thyme is dedicated to allergy-conscious dining and has carefully crafted the menu to exclude the top 9 allergens and gluten, ensuring a safe and worry-free dining experience. Created for all, It's Thyme's menu is made with simple, fresh, and whole ingredients showcasing the natural goodness of real food. With a strong focus on community and inclusivity, the menu offers thoughtfully curated dishes that cater to a variety of dietary preferences. Chefs embrace a minimalistic yet bold approach to flavor, allowing students to savor every bite with confidence, knowing that It's Thyme prioritizes their health and well-being.

Essay:

At It's Thyme, every meal is more than just food—it's a story, a connection, and a shared experience. Our mission is to create a welcoming space where guests feel like family while enjoying a top 9 allergen-free and gluten-free menu. The menu is divided into three sections: Our Thyme, Your Thyme, and It's Thyme, each celebrating diverse flavors, personal stories, and student creativity.

"Our Thyme" features bowls inspired by our very own team, bringing flavors from around the world. Whether it's Charbel's "Bowl Beirut", made from his Lebanese family recipes, or Kanis' Thai Thyme, featuring her scratch-made spicy tofu, these dishes reflect the cultures, traditions, and passion of our team.

“Your Thyme” spotlights student-created bowls, developed in collaboration with our chefs. We welcome all culinary inspirations and every student’s dish is named once their exclusive taste test has taken place.

“It’s Thyme” is for build-your-own bowls, offering fresh, local ingredients with stories behind them—like lavender from the local Sunshine Lavender Farm.

The menu presents a variety of visually appealing dishes that balance color, texture, temperature and flavor, featuring specialty student favorites, acai bowls, and rotating Dole® whip dessert.

Introduction:

The concept for It’s Thyme originated from focus groups with students and collaboration among various campus departments, students, and parents. The space is carefully designed for efficient customer flow, facilitating effortless ordering and interaction while creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. It features a modern open-kitchen concept with ¾ length windows to allow in natural light and enhance the dining experience. Merchandising adds to the soft, earthy color palette of the space, and the convenience of ordering in person, online, or via on-site kiosks makes dining at It’s Thyme both easy and memorable.

Essay:

It’s Thyme is a top 9 allergen-free dining concept designed for efficiency, safety, and accessibility. Located near the campus center, it features a dedicated guest entrance and a separate staff entrance to prevent cross-contamination. Without indoor seating, the design eliminates allergen exposure risks. Separate prep sinks for poultry, produce, raw meat, and vegetables ensure food safety, while a walk-in cooler maintains fresh storage.

The kitchen is equipped with state-of-the-art appliances and an açai prep station for smoothie bowls. Mobile and tablet-based ordering systems streamline operations and enhance safety.

Originally planned as a market-style venue, student feedback transformed It’s Thyme into a transparent kitchen, showcasing fresh, colorful, scratch-made meals. The space reflects modern industry trends, incorporating green terracotta tiles, bleached walnut wood cabinetry, and an imported Italian tile feature wall to create a clean, inviting atmosphere.

Merchandising follows a soft, earthy color palette, with eye-catching displays that use lighting, color, and signage to highlight menu offerings. Natural wood shelving, minimalist signage, and warm lighting enhance visibility, while fresh ingredients are showcased to reinforce the commitment to quality. It’s Thyme ensures a controlled dining environment, offering fresh, diverse, and safe meal options.

Introduction:

It’s Thyme marketing focuses on clear communication and creative presentation to ensure guests are well-informed, valued, and engaged. Targeted promotional efforts highlight Duke Dining’s commitment to food allergen safety through content marketing emphasizing transparency and trust. Marketing channels including digital and print signage, social media campaigns, and special events, creating multiple touchpoints to reach the campus community. Informative signage provides essential details about ingredients and daily specials, helping guests make confident choices. This multi-faceted approach ensures that students are consistently aware of offerings, promotions, and events, fostering a supportive community where everyone can enjoy fresh, worry-free meals.

Essay:

Promoting a top 9 allergen-free dining location is crucial to ensure the community recognizes it as a safe, welcoming space for everyone, not just those with food allergies. Marketing efforts emphasize inclusivity, positioning the venue as a destination for fresh, flavorful meals. A published menu with clear, descriptive signage communicates ingredients and allergen safety while reflecting the venue’s cohesive, earthy aesthetic. Rotating employee and student-favorite dishes, are promoted on the menu and with framed photos, making offerings relatable and appealing.

Promotional methods target Duke students with food allergies and the broader campus community through social media campaigns, digital screens, static signage, website updates, and tasting events and collaborations with students further enhance engagement. Media outreach includes campus publications and national platforms to broaden visibility.

Digital screens and signage throughout the venue provide continuous updates on daily offerings and promotions. Customer feedback is gathered through surveys, shaping future menus and marketing strategies. By combining clear communication, engaging visuals, and continuous feedback, the venue fosters an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome. These efforts build a loyal community, reinforcing the message that this top 9 allergen-free dining location offers safe, creative, and delicious meals for all.

Introduction:

It's Thyme emphasizes nutrition and wellness by offering balanced, wholesome meals designed to support a healthy lifestyle. With a focus on fresh, high-quality ingredients, the menu caters to a variety of dietary needs, ensuring that everyone can enjoy flavorful, nutritious meals. Information on dietary options and nutritional content is readily available, helping guests make informed choices that align with their wellness goals. Through thoughtful menu design and transparent communication, It's Thyme creates a dining experience where health and wellness are prioritized, making it a trusted destination for nourishing meals in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Essay:

It's Thyme, promotes nutrition and wellness by offering a diverse menu inspired by The Blue Zone philosophy, which emphasizes wholesome foods that nourish both body and mind. Free from the top 9 allergens and gluten, It's Thyme caters to a variety of dietary preferences, including high protein, low-fat, vegan, and vegetarian, all free from the top 9 allergens and gluten. Product identification tags identify vegan and vegetarian items and the menus designate that all options can be made with or without a meat protein. The menu features vibrant, seasonal ingredients designed to boost energy and well-being while aligning with balanced dietary choices. To empower guests further, students have access to all nutritional content through NetNutrition, an innovative online tool that allows them to easily track their intake and meet their nutritional goals when dining at Duke Dining locations. Guests can access NetNutrition through the Duke Dining website where they can build their meal based on nutritional preferences. Whether diners are seeking nutrient-dense meals or simply a flavorful dish, It's Thyme ensures that their dining experience is both enjoyable and aligned with a healthy lifestyle, making it the perfect choice for anyone looking to fuel their body mindfully.

Introduction:

It's Thyme has garnered national recognition, earning FARECheck (Food Allergy Research Education) Gold status. This prestigious award reflects the program's commitment to food allergy safety and inclusivity and is the highest level of recognition awarded by Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) to food establishments that demonstrate exceptional commitment to food allergen safety. Duke Dining has surpassed predicted financial goals and exceeds customer satisfaction expectations. The primary challenge was emphasizing that It's Thyme is not exclusively for those with food allergies but a welcoming space for all. Sustainability objectives have been met and continue to thrive, evident in the sustainability report.

Essay:

Overall Wow Factor: It's Thyme received national recognition as the first university dining location to receive FARECheck Gold status for being entirely free of the top nine allergens. This notable achievement has been highlighted in national publications and organizations and is instrumental in students with food allergies decision to attend Duke University.




The financial objectives for It's Thyme aimed to achieve 3% of the total daily meals sold across all quick-service retail operations. Through continuous strategic marketing and promotional efforts, It's Thyme surpassed expectations, attaining 4.5% of daily meals sold after one year, exceeding the original goal by 1.5%.

As an allergen-free dining location, customer satisfaction is paramount to its success, with a mission to emphasize inclusivity for all guests. Feedback is collected through the Duke Dining website and Mystery Shopper reports, both of which reflect

highly positive reviews for It's Thyme.

Sustainability remains a core focus, with the objective of achieving a 90% score on the Duke Dining Sustainability Audit. It's Thyme exceeded this target, scoring 96% and 105%. The audit evaluates criteria including recycling, composting, vegetarian and vegan meal offerings, use of compostable materials, and sourcing local and organic ingredients.

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<div>DOCX</div> <div>FARE-Press Rele... 50 KiB</div>	<div>PDF</div> <div>Its Thyme - HAC... 238 KiB</div>	
<div></div> <div>Attachment name It's Thyme-Detailed slide...</div> <div>https://www.canva.com/...</div>	<div></div> <div>Attachment name It's Thyme FARECheck G...</div> <div>https://duke.box.com/s/...</div>	<div></div> <div>Attachment name It's Thyme-Duke Dining ...</div> <div>https://students.duke.ed...</div>