

Alexcis Mendoza



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Entry details

Entry Name: NACUFS: Celebrating Go Green

Institution Name: University of Houston

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Introduction:

Go Green: An Earth Day Celebration transformed clean eating into an immersive educational experience celebrating sustainability and nutrition. Evolving from a plate waste audit, this event brought back-of-house practices front-and-center as students scraped plates into a monitored compost drum, confronting food waste. The specially curated menu showcased green cuisine across eight stations — from World Table’s coconut curry shrimp to Garden Bar’s dinosaur kale salad. Minority female farmer Karena Poke of Lettuce Live contributed 300 ounces of fresh microgreens, elevating the dining experience with locally sourced ingredients. This commitment to culinary excellence, sustainability, and education engaged students in meaningful environmental discussions.

Essay:

The Go Green menu perfectly complemented the Earth Day theme, transforming every station into a verdant celebration of green cuisine. From bold pesto pizzas to delicate matcha shortbread cookies, each offering reinforced the environmental message with exceptional flavor.

Colors, textures, flavors, and temperatures created dynamic variety. Cool, creamy cucumber edamame poke and crisp dinosaur kale salad contrasted against warm grilled beef meatballs with chimichurri and flame-kissed vegetables. Textures ranged from crunchy fried green tomato BLTs to smooth Green Goddess dressing with avocado. Temperatures spanned chilled mini vegan Key lime pies to hot sautéed greens and pasta with andouille.

Eight distinct stations — World Table, Sugar Rush, La Mesa, Garden Bar, Bold Bistro, Ciao Chow, Delicious Without, and Pit Stop — provided extensive menu choices. Preparation methods showcased culinary diversity: roasting broccoli, grilling Brussels sprouts, sautéing zucchini, baking pesto pasta, and salad assembly.

Dietary inclusivity was paramount. The dedicated Delicious Without station eliminated cross-contamination concerns with deconstructed green herb marinated chicken kebab and cilantro lime quinoa. Vegan options included chipotle black bean patties and coconut oil-based desserts, while vegetarian choices like spinach cheese quesadillas and pesto pizza ensured universal accessibility. Educational quizzes empowered students to make informed, sustainable, health-conscious choices beyond the event.

Introduction:

Go Green: An Earth Day Celebration fed the University of Houston as it prepared for a week's worth of sustainability events. The dining event revolutionized plate waste awareness bringing back-of-house composting front-and-center, allowing students to scrape plates into a monitored 55-gallon drum while associates gathered real-time feedback. The next day would see Butler Plaza transformed into a vibrant gathering space where campus and community partners demonstrated planetary-positive practices while students engaged in scavenger hunts, DIY activities, yard games, and a petting zoo. These complementary experiences created an immersive educational journey celebrating environmental stewardship through culinary excellence and tangible sustainability action.

Essay:

The Earth Week theme was innovatively executed through multi-sensory, interactive experiences across two locations over two days. Inside the dining hall, décor included custom Go Green menu graphics featuring fun green facts, educational table toppers with food puns and web-based games, and a community mural where students added leaves to a collaborative tree. The dining experience showcased multiple service methods: action stations at World Table and Pit Stop, self-service at Garden Bar, and the interactive composting station.

Educational enhancements included interactive games like "How Long 'Til Gone" decomposition matching, waste sorting activities, and "Trash Tag" prediction contests. Minority female farmer Karena Poke of Lettuce Live provided microgreens to top student plates.

A carnival-like atmosphere was created beneath live oak trees the next day. Community vendors showcased sustainable practices and planetary-driven promotions.

The presentation was creative and attractive throughout. The outdoor plaza featured 30 vendors offering fresh produce, handcrafted goods, and specialty foods, while students exchanged Cougar Cash for tokens — creating a "retail therapy" experience. Campus partners — Office of Sustainability, Cougar Cupboard, Campus Recreation — alongside community organizations like Best Friends Animal Society and Air Alliance Houston, created comprehensive programming. Themed giveaways, swag bags, and a DJ completed the festive, educational atmosphere.

Introduction:

UH Dining's Go Green celebration employed comprehensive, multi-channel marketing that transformed sustainability education into engaging entertainment. Original promotional materials — including custom Go Green menu graphics, A-frame boards announcing the Earth Week festival, social media campaigns, and educational flyers — created cohesive messaging across campus. The "What Green Am I?" personality quiz and decomposition matching games made learning playful and shareable. Marketing extended beyond traditional channels through campus partner collaborations, live entertainment, themed swag bags, and community experiences including a collaborative mural. Real-time feedback collection via iPad surveys provided immediate insights, while contests like Trash Tag prediction and scavenger hunts engaged students.

Essay:

Promotional materials demonstrated originality with polished, cohesive design. Custom Go Green menu boards featured eye-catching graphics highlighting nutritional benefits of greens, while educational table toppers incorporated food puns and web-based games. Two specialty flyers — “What Green Am I?” personality quiz and “Ways to Add More Greens” — provided imaginative, take-home resources. Prominent A-frame boards placed outside dining halls invited students to participate in the outdoor plaza experience, driving cross-campus foot traffic.

Multimedia marketing reached students through social media, email campaigns, campus partner networks, and physical signage. The Trash Tag contest winner announcement on social media extended engagement beyond the event itself.

Activities deeply engaged customers while supporting sustainability themes. Interactive experiences included “How Long ‘Til Gone” decomposition matching, waste sorting challenges, DIY crafts, yard games, and a petting zoo. The front-of-house composting drum created visceral awareness of food waste, while vendor interactions — like purchasing handcrafted paletas from 1999 alumna Audrey Hu-Gonzalez — fostered meaningful community connections.

Feedback mechanisms were comprehensive. Associates equipped with iPads gathered data on menu enjoyment via star ratings, reasons for uneaten food, and whether students surveyed all options. This real-time collection provided actionable insights for future programming while demonstrating UH Dining’s commitment to continuous improvement and student-centered experiences.

Introduction:

Go Green is a legacy event that allowed UH Dining to weave together Earth Week programming, the annual Go Green dining experience, and an outdoor community marketplace to create a much richer, more resonant celebration. The resulting sustainability festivities engaged multiple sectors of the campus community. The Go Green dining experience revived plate waste awareness through interactive composting, educational activities, and a specially curated menu highlighting green cuisine. These complementary experiences created an immersive journey for participants and attendees. It celebrated environmental stewardship, community connections, and culinary excellence while delivering measurable impact through student engagement, vendor participation, and actionable outcomes.

Essay:

Goals were demonstrably achieved through quantifiable participation and engagement. Students actively scraped plates into the monitored 55-gallon composting drum, providing real-time food waste data while associates collected feedback via iPad surveys on menu satisfaction, portion sizing, and dining behaviors. The plaza marketplace generated foot traffic from students who had specifically planned to attend the Earth Week festivities.

Students and staff played direct, essential roles. Four student vendors and five alumni vendors participated, including 1999 alumna Audrey Hu-Gonzalez of Popsibilities. Campus partners — including the Office of Sustainability, Cougar Cupboard, Campus Recreation, American Conservation Coalition, and Engineers Without Borders — provided programming and expertise. Associates facilitated feedback collection while culinary teams executed the ambitious Go Green menu across eight stations.

Sustainability efforts were comprehensive and authentic. Front-of-house composting created immediate behavioral change, while vendors showcased planetary-driven practices and promotions encouraging the use of reusable bags. Swag bags featured reusable cutlery and recycled materials, extending the sustainability message beyond the dining hall.

The “wow” factor emerged through multi-sensory experiences: minority female farmer Karena Poke providing microgreens tableside, DJ entertainment, a petting zoo, interactive games, and the visual spectacle of students

collectively witnessing their food waste accumulate — transforming abstract sustainability concepts into tangible, communal action.

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

