

NACUFS (2025)

Residential Dining Facility of the Year

The Burton Dining Hall

University of Lynchburg

Introduction:

Our marketing efforts are also led by student interns, who are always directly in touch with the campus milieu. Flyers, email blasts, digital signage, QR codes, and social media are the primary ways that we communicate with the campus community. Marketing through social media allows us to reach the vast majority of our students where they already are (on their smartphones) in an instant. Utilizing Instagram and TikTok also allows us to interact with our target audience and learn what their wants and needs are. Advertising through our social media accounts is also incredibly cost effective.

Essay:

Every Thursday, Executive Chef Michial Neal posts his responses to the last week's Suggestion Box submissions. Through his responses, Chef Mike shares both his sense of humor and information about the feasibility of each request. We also encourage every member of our team to engage in direct conversation with our guests. Not only does that build connections between individual students and our team, but with the size of our campus community, word of mouth communication is remarkably effective.

The annual NACUFS Customer Satisfaction Benchmark Survey is also a useful tool for our department as it gives us insight into the way that our operations are perceived by our guests. We focus on the Priority Matrices that compare the importance of specific aspects of our operations to the satisfaction levels of our guests and graph them on a scatter plot.

That scatter plot is divided into four quadrants: High Importance+Low Satisfaction (HILS), Low Importance+Low Satisfaction (LILS), Low Importance, High Satisfaction (LIHS), and High Importance, High Satisfaction (HIHS). Our operation had more aspects fall into the HIHS quadrant than any other. This is a good indicator that we are executing well in the areas that our guests value most.

Introduction:

The Dining Hall menu is available on the University's website and includes menus for the following seven days to allow guests to plan their meals ahead of time. We also have each day's menu posted to a monitor outside the main entrance. In order to provide our guests with balanced options, each menu includes at least two vegetables, two starches, and three proteins with one of those proteins meeting our "light and lean" criteria. An on-campus nutritionist reviews our menus prior to each academic year and is available for students for dietary consultation.

Essay:

As a buffet-style dining operation we make sure to include menu items that make our Dining Hall accessible to those with special dietary needs. The Café Verde section of our Dining Hall servery is limited to vegetarian items and we make sure to consistently offer items that are entirely vegan. We also make sure to offer items that allow our guests with food allergies to safely dine with us. Any items in our servery that does not include dairy or gluten are identified as such, but more importantly we maintain a StingFree Bites section of our Servery that only includes items that are devoid of the nine major food allergens. This section is protected by crowd-control stanchions and signs informing guests that they are not to bring food from other sections of the Servery into this section to prevent cross-contamination. If we happen to have lots of new faces on campus, we make sure to station a manager or Servery Attendant at this section in order to make sure all guests use clean, empty plates to serve themselves there and to explain the importance of avoiding cross-contamination in the StingFree Bites section.

Introduction:

Our daily Dining Hall menus maintain a different variety of items each day and at the end of each week we rotate to a new menu. There are three week-long menus in total, but we make additions and adjustments throughout the year to respond to requests and maintain menu diversity. We keep in mind that many of these students may not have access to other food options and we must find a balance between providing both the familiar and the exotic.

Essay:

In order to provide our students with value for their meal plans, we have to be able to not only to feature favorites like chicken tenders (gluten-free, seared, or breaded), soft-serve ice cream (lactose-free and traditional) and pepperoni pizza (cauliflower crust available upon request), we also have make sure to always feature new items both in response to and in anticipation of the wants and needs of those students. Our Global Inspirations menu program features a variety of options that far exceed the label of standard cafeteria food.

Our Servery staff check temperatures throughout each meal. Food safety has to be a top priority for any food service establishment, but that is especially true in a setting like ours where we are mostly cooking batches that may total in hundreds of individual servings. It is critical to maintain proper time and temperature control of all of the food items we serve each day. Our management team is required to maintain ServSafe certification and all of our staff goes through ServSafe training. We also utilize various web-based training services to provide our staff with regular training and reminders about food safety throughout each year.

Introduction:

Our Servery features seven sections for food service. On the Classics buffet, we serve traditional American fare including at least one vegetable, at least one starch, and two proteins. Café Verde is our vegetarian and vegan section. StingFree Bites is our Allergen-Free section. Our Grill section features a rotation of proteins including marinated flank steak, tandoori-style chicken thighs and seasoned pork tenderloin. Beyond the Global Inspirations menu, we schedule decorated specialty meals

including transforming our Dining Hall into Hogwarts' Great Hall, throwing the ultimate tailgate for the Super Bowl, and our exam week tradition of Late-Night Breakfast.

Essay:

Our Servery features 22 wells that can maintain both hot and cold foods, allowing us the flexibility to adjust our menus to best accommodate our guests. We quickly respond to requests whether it be preparing a single serving of vegetable dish to meet the dietary needs of a Latin Professor or getting a Brazilian dessert on next week's menu because South American students stuffed our Suggestion Box. The StingFree Bites section excludes foods that contain any of the nine major allergens: soy, dairy, egg, sesame, wheat, peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish guaranteeing that guests with food allergies and intolerances will always have options.

Much of the diversity of our offerings can be found in our Global Inspirations menus. Inspiration can come from our backyard as it does with the Peel-n-Eat Shrimp and Drunken Clams from our "East Coast Seafood Bar." Our burgeoning Nepali student population inspired our "Road to Kathmandu" menu with Curry Goat and Patek Paneer. Some other favorites are "Tijuana Market Tacos" featuring Birria Beef, "Bring the Heat" with Fiery Cauliflower Bites, "Hanoi Street Pho" with Steamed Shrimp and Sesame Toasted Tofu, and our "Beach Shack Poke Bowls" with cubed tuna and salmon and seaweed salad.

Introduction:

With classes at the University of Lynchburg beginning at 8:00am, the Dining Hall opens at 7:00am Monday through Friday in order to provide students with enough time to eat before their first class. Most of our athletics programs and extracurricular groups meet in the evening so the Dining Hall remains open until 10:00pm Monday through Thursday in order to provide an all-you-care-to-eat option to all students. With over 165 labor hours worked daily by our team, we rely on our student employees to help us provide excellent customer service throughout each meal.

Essay:

Award-winning Sous Chef John Barker relishes the opportunity his job provides him to impart his knowledge and passion on the students we get to work with, "we get to teach our students valuable life skills, like learning how to cook, that they will be able to take with them wherever they go." Our department's student employment liaison, Will Hounsell, helps us embrace the silver linings of the turnover that is inherent to employing students adding, "they also help to keep our full-time staff fresh with constant training."

In our operation, sustainability is a priority both ethically and financially. Through recycling, composting, and avoiding unsustainable materials like polystyrene foam we were able to secure a 3-star certification through the Green Restaurant Association in 2024. The aim for 2025 is to improve our Green Points totals in the Waste, Information, and Transparency categories and add a 4th star to that certification.

Whether we are sourcing locally-raised beef, working with rehabilitative vocational placement organizations, or asking a student about their day, we are constantly pursuing meaningful connections and contributions to our community. Everyday our team has the privilege of serving over 1000 meals to people we care about.

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

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