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Cornell University

Entry details

Entry Name:	INDIGO Kitchen
Institution Name:	Cornell University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Michelle Nardi, Nutrition Program Manager

One of Cornell Dining’s biggest privileges and responsibilities is providing safe meals for students registered with Student Disability Services for food allergies and other medical dietary needs. For these students, access to meals they can trust is critical to their academic and social success.

The Challenge

The number of students requiring separately prepared meals has quadrupled as more manage complex, changing dietary restrictions, including multiple medical conditions and food allergies. This growing demand placed a significant burden on operations and increased the risk of error, particularly when meals were prepared in shared kitchen spaces. Preparing a single safe meal could take up to 1.5 hours. To best support students and culinarians, a more sustainable, scalable solution was needed.

Goals and Objectives

With the goal of creating a safe, inclusive experience that empowers students to confidently manage their dietary needs, key objectives included:

A safe, reliable, and transparent operation that builds student trust through a dedicated kitchen space, a specialized culinary team, and clear ingredient information.

A positive and flexible student experience supported by online ordering, convenient pickup locations and times, and opportunities for menu input.

The Solution

INDIGO Kitchen is a centralized, commissary-based program with custom-developed ordering and labeling tools supported by guided menu building and direct support from the dedicated INDIGO Kitchen team.

To address increasing dietary complexity, the program begins with an onboarding consultation, where students learn how to navigate the menu and order safely based on their individual needs. This personalized guidance translates complex medical requirements into a clear ordering approach and streamlines communication for both the students and INDIGO team.

The menu features simple, whole foods suitable for a wide range of medical dietary needs. Students order meals in advance by selecting proteins, vegetables, starches, and sauces, creating personalized combinations that are labeled and verified for safety. Full ingredient transparency supports informed decision-making and confident self-management. Flexible pickup options allow students to dine with their friends, reinforcing inclusion and reducing the social isolation often associated with dietary restrictions.

This end-to-end approach—combining consultation, custom ordering and labeling tools, and guided menu building—creates a cohesive system that supports both safety and efficiency. The centralized production model allows for a dedicated team, streamlines operations, increases control over safety variables, and improves accuracy.

INDIGO Kitchen represents an innovative approach to dietary accommodations that balances safety, flexibility, and dignity. In Fall 2025, 32 students were enrolled, and the program achieved 100% safe and accurate meal service, demonstrating its reliability and effectiveness. Feedback from students and culinarians reflects a positive experience and highlights the meaningful impact of the program. As one parent shared, “The program has been a lifesaver for my son and has made it possible for him to go to college with minimal worries about his allergies.”

By centralizing expertise and empowering students, Cornell Dining has created a model that not only meets complex dietary needs but also enables students with dietary restrictions to fully and confidently participate in the shared dining experience.

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Cornell Universi...2.7 MiB	INDIGO Kitchen...768 KiB	INDIGO Kitchen...132 KiB

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Fall 2025 INDIG... 690 KiB

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INDIGO Kitchen... 2.9 MiB

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