NACUFS (2025)
Special Diet Recipe of the Year

Made Without Gluten Fried Catfish

Elon University

Essay:

Elon Dining embraces a food-first philosophy focusing on authentic, personalized, and collaborative food experiences. We want our food to taste great, but to also tell a story. This made without gluten fried catfish recipe embodies that story.

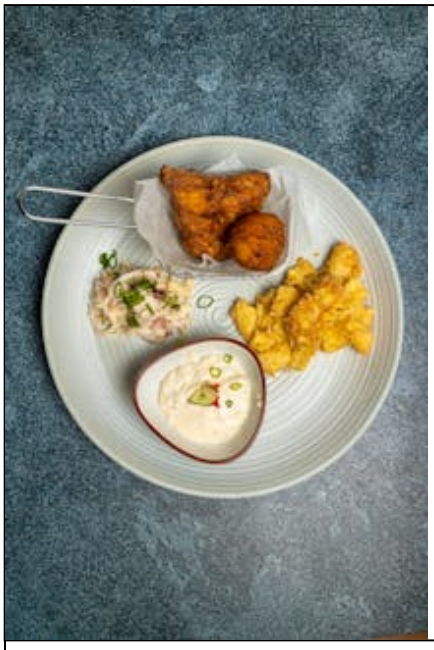
Our story began with a partnership with Captain John, a local North Carolina Fisherman, to source fresh and sustainable seafood. Located in the coastal plains of NC, Captain John's farm raises catfish in freshwater ponds, feeding them natural grains and fish. We recognized an opportunity to bring our community to campus in a collaborative way. In November, our chefs, sustainability coordinator, and dietitian came together to create a menu concept using Captain John's seafood. We focused on recipe development, ingredient quality, sustainability, and inclusivity. While working through this development, we recognized an opportunity to make our recipes gluten-friendly. Wheat allergies and celiac disease are one of our most prevalent dietary requirements on campus, with a recent survey showing 5% of reported allergies at Elon are wheat. This inspired the creation of the gluten-friendly fried catfish recipe, featuring locally sourced catfish and a rice flour-based dredge created by Captain John's seafood company in conjunction with one of our existing local partners, Tidewater Grains. This healthier, inclusive dish brings together locality, sustainability, and inclusivity.

A healthy lifestyle, even with dietary allergies, shouldn't mean having to give up on the foods that provide comfort. This fried catfish is a staple that offers more nutrients than traditional versions. Rice flour makes it gluten-friendly, reduces calories, and absorbs less oil cutting saturated fat by half without compromising nutrition. Preparing spice blends from scratch reduces the sodium content of the recipe. Farm-raised catfish that are fed a nutrient-rich diet provide 25g of lean protein per

5.5oz and are a great source of omega-3 fatty acids. Our commitment to local, quality ingredients supports not only nutrition and culinary standards but cost-effectiveness, with this catfish priced $2 less per pound compared to traditional vendors.

We showcased the new recipe in a dining hall takeover highlighting sustainable seafood. Guests entered the dining hall, and their attention was drawn to Captain John breaking down whole tuna alongside our chefs preparing fresh ingredients. Guests enjoyed local flavors in a variety of cuisines from fresh poke bowls to Southern favorites. The fried catfish was served accompanied by gluten-friendly hushpuppies, mac and cheese, and scratch-made sauces. Guests were invited to provide feedback via a QR code. One student commented, "The food...was INCREDIBLE! Everything was so delicious, and the meals were so creative. I love these types of events because I get to branch out and try foods I've never had before." The positive feedback led to the catfish recipe becoming a dining hall staple and the launch of "Fish Fry Friday," where the recipe is highlighted weekly. Guests can recognize this recipe on digital menu screens and chalkboard signage. This allergen-friendly option reflects our commitment to inclusive dining, sustainability, and community partnerships.

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



Recipe Pictures.j... 4.7 MiB

Recipe.jpg 4.8 MiB

Culinary 2.jpg 4.6 MiB

Recipe Develop... 4.7 MiB

Recipe Develop... 4.6 MiB

Fish Breakdown.... 4.1 MiB

Captain John.jpg 4.8 MiB

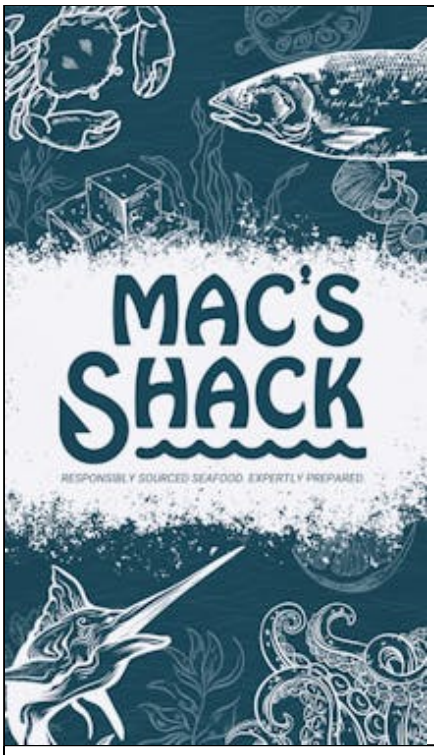
Marketing.jpg 4.7 MiB

Guests.jpg 4.7 MiB

Allergy Prevalen... 209 KiB

PDF

Mini Poster_8.5x... 1.0 MiB



1.png 618 KiB

Nutrition Label.... 294 KiB

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Fried Catfish Rec... 28 KiB

2.png	410 KiB

Attachment name
Carolina Catfish- About U...

https://cccatfish.com/pa...

Attachment name
Tidewater Grains + South...

https://www.tidewatergr...

Attachment name
Tidewater Grains About Us

https://www.tidewatergr...