

Inclusive Dining by Design: **SUPPORTING ALLERGENS, CULTURE, AND CHOICE**

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Welcome & Introductions



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Overview

- Why inclusive dining matters
- Case study: Michigan Dining
- Culturally authentic programming
- Allergen awareness & dietary inclusion
- Consistent, inclusive menu design
- Balancing competing priorities
- Replicable strategies

Key Takeaway: Move from reactive accommodation → proactive inclusion

Why Inclusive Dining Matters

- Dining is a daily student experience
- Food = identity, culture, comfort
- There is a connection between dining, belonging, and student success
 - “Belonging is not optional but fundamental to learning, motivation, and retention” (Strayhorn, 2012)
- Equity and well-being in campus food systems
- “Food is a central expression of cultural identity and social belonging” (Bisogni et al., 2002)



The Problem with “Accommodation”

Traditional model

- Reactive
- Separate processes or “special” meals
- Inconsistent student experience or inconsistent availability

Impact

- Stigma
- Barriers to access
- Staff strain

Repeatedly having to disclose a food allergy can invite unwanted questions, negative attention, social pressures, and bullying, leading to “disclosure fatigue” or students choosing to remain silent to avoid certain social situations (Yuan et al., 2024)





A Shift in Approach

From Accommodation → Embedded Inclusion

- Design menus with diversity in mind from the start
- Normalize dietary needs rather than treating them as exceptions
- Represent a wide range of dietary preferences and restrictions
- Make inclusion visible and consistent across menus

Michigan Dining

- Large, decentralized system:
 - 10 residential dining halls
 - 4 catering kitchens
 - 18 retail operations
- Highly diverse student population
- Operational philosophy: consistency, accessibility, & authenticity

Meal plan holders: 13,557

Average meals per day:

•Breakfast - 23,109

meals

•Lunch - 57,960 meals



Cultural Programming

The Black College Association defines cultural programming as a continuous celebration of the diverse cultures on campus.

- Integrated cultural experiences
- Ongoing - not a one-time event
- Student-informed menus

Do's:

- Partner with cultural experts
- Use authentic ingredients and recipes
- Tell the story behind the food

Don'ts:

- One-off events without continuity
- Oversimplification

Limited cultural food access is a structural barrier that contributes to food insecurity and reduced student well-being (a core component of belonging)

(Zuo et al., 2026)





Cultural Programming

gIESA calendar heritage months

- Ex: Arab American Heritage Month, Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Latinx Heritage Month

- **Global chef collaborations**

- Ex: Chef Hoss, Chef Iliana de la Vega

- **Campus-wide commemorative meals**

- Ex: MLK Symposium



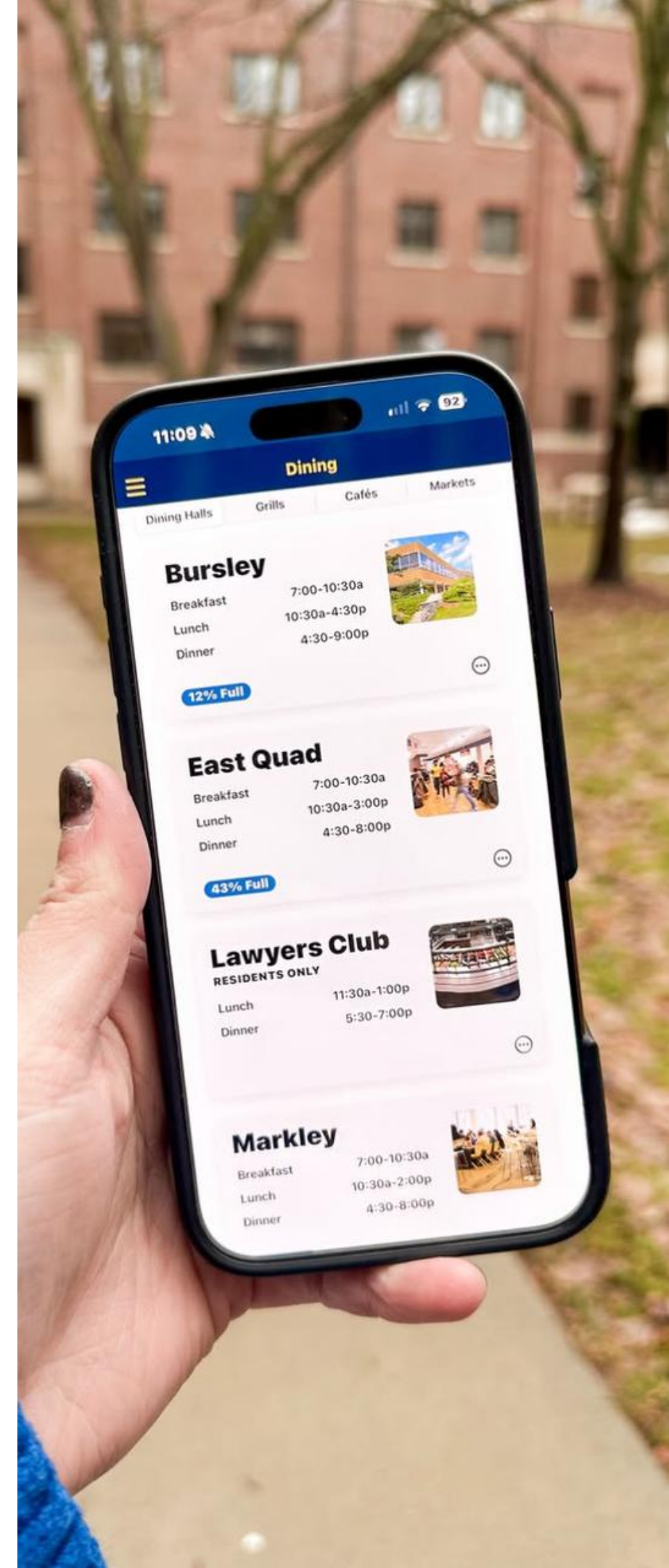
EVERYBODY EATS & MLK SYMPOSIUM



Allergen Awareness

The objective: Safe dining without drawing attention to difference.

- Transparent menu labeling
- Staff training
- Cross-contact prevention
- Everyday availability of diverse options
- Balancing nutrition standards with inclusivity
- Make students aware of your nutrition services from the start



Allergen Awareness

- Built-in menu requirements: vegan, halal, top 9 allergen-free
- Gluten-free pantries
- Wolverine Village T9 station
- Stocked epinephrine program
- Disclosure form on Room & Board application
- Campus day and orientation tabling events
- Campus partnerships (Housing accommodations, SSD, UHS, Rec Sports, Wolverine Wellness)





Balancing Competing Priorities

- Cultural authenticity vs. operational feasibility
- Cost, staffing and training, and supply chain limitations
- Student feedback and satisfaction metrics
 - Student satisfaction surveys
 - Participation rates
 - Allergen incident reduction

Replicable Strategies

- Improve labeling system
- Add 1-2 consistent inclusive stations
- Pilot a cultural program - involve student groups!
- Multiple touchpoints (regular newsletters/emails, orientation/campus day events, etc.)
- **Longer-term:**
 - Build partnerships (Housing accommodations/SSD, student groups, chefs, vendors)
 - Integrate into menu planning cycles
 - Invest in staff training



Key Takeaways

- Consistency matters more than one-time events
- Authenticity builds trust
- Operational alignment is essential





**Thank You
& Questions**

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