



College Dining Habits, Defined

Sept. 7, 2014 — Understanding what students want is the first step to running a successful college and university foodservice program. Across the country, college and university foodservice directors are revamping their dining programs to reflect recent food trends and preferences of the Millennial generation. Students have strong opinions when it comes to their dining options and foodservice directors are doing everything they can to satisfy them. Today's students expect their on-campus menus to offer an array of healthy options, authentic ethnic offerings and customization opportunities, as well as convenient on-the-go meals and snacks.



College-age consumers are paying attention to diet and nutrition. According to Mintel, 54% of students want healthier and better tasting food options¹, which is evident as more students limit their meat consumption in favor of vegetarian and flexitarian diets². There is an increased desire for nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables as well as protein alternatives like yogurt, eggs and beans. Foodservice directors are updating menus to feature better-for-you choices for all day parts, providing low-fat alternatives to traditional breakfast staples, and increasing vegetarian dishes during lunch and dinner service. Favorite comfort food dishes are evolving to include more fresh ingredients like avocado, sour cream, cream cheese and mayonnaise. Students are also looking for indulgent treats like decadent parfaits and calories.

About 83% of Millennials say healthfulness is an important factor when choosing snack foods; they want high-quality convenient options with a homemade taste. And it's not just limited to food – smoothies and protein shakes are easy, satisfying options.

As today and tomorrow's generation becomes greater than ever, the demand for authenticity has become greater than ever. According to a Pulse study, Millennials are more likely than any other generation to be prepared to offer an array of authentic ethnic dishes. For example, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania presents a monthly meal featuring the cuisine of a single country or region, like Peru, Canada, and "On the Bayou," as part of its International Dining Series.

Millennials demand authentic and spicier offerings in everything from ingredients and preparation to presentation. They consider food an adventure, and seek out different, ethnic and artisan foods. The Hartman Group recently reported that 40% like to try new kinds of ethnic cuisines.⁵ Ingredients like yogurt are versatile and universal and can be used in just about every type of cuisine. Mediterranean- and Middle Eastern- inspired chefs have been using yogurt as a key ingredient for generations. For example, ethnic-inspired favorites like gyros with tzatziki sauce, fruit-flavored lassis and spicy Thai curry dishes all can be made with yogurt.