

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY FOOD SERVICES

# CAMPUS DINING

*Today*

FALL 2023

guest  
experience

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# IOWA COLLEGE



**Raine Terrill**  
senior manager of board  
plan dining and production,  
Wartburg College

In the ever-changing, global environment of collegiate dining, colleges and universities are always challenged to seek new and creative ways to enhance the guest experience and provide international flavors in residential dining halls. For many, this isn't easy.

Devising a simple, yet inventive solution, Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa introduced a station featuring an array of international sauces and seasonings in its Mensa Dining Hall to address this student need. The result has been an overwhelmingly positive reception. By catering to the evolving palates and preferences of its guests, the team at Wartburg Dining aimed to create a positive and enriching dining experience that went beyond food as merely fuel.

Marty Johnson, Wartburg's director of dining services, said the college includes students representing 38 states and 55 countries. The total undergraduate enrollment of the college in 2021 was about 1,500 students.

"With such a diverse student body, it is important for us to offer as much variety of food choices as possible," Johnson said. "We have found that enhancing the base menu with sauces, condiments, and seasonings from around the world has simplified the operation while at the same time improving student satisfaction."

Introduced in May 2023, the international station was the passion project of Raine Terrill, senior manager at Mensa Dining Hall, who envisioned creating more variety and inclusivity in the dining hall, adding not only flavor and variety, but also providing the opportunity to enjoy and explore different culinary traditions from around the globe.

"We have a large international student base," Terrill said. "Many of them are very far from home with little opportunity to make it home to visit. So, I wanted to bring the flavors of home to them—to help them when they're homesick, to showcase flavors of their countries, and show a bit about themselves through food."

Food has a way of bringing people together, and the introduction of the station has helped increase a sense of community and friendship among students. As they recognize their favorite flavors and recipes, a sense of belonging emerges. This communal aspect of collegiate dining not only enhances the overall experience but also promotes mental well-being. Eating together creates a support system and a sense of connectedness, particularly for students who are away from home.

Tsering Tashi, a Wartburg 2023 graduate, confirmed that sentiment, saying the international station is a great improvement.

“It makes me feel like I am home,” Tashi said. “It’s great progress in that area.”

Students can sample sauces like zesty chimichurri from Argentina, savory ssamjang from South Korea, or spicy shatta from the Middle East, allowing them to get creative and personalize their meals. International seasonings at the station include aromatic baharat from the Middle East, spicy Jamaican jerk, and delicious furikake from Japan. The seasonings add depth and complexity to dishes, allowing students to experiment and expand their

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**LIKE I  
AM HOME.**”

flavor horizons. By incorporating these diverse options into their meals, students can experience a world of flavors without leaving campus.

Johnson said it also provides students with an opportunity to learn about and taste several different options to decide which they like best.

“Descriptions of each option are posted, so students can read an overview before trying any of them,” Johnson explained. “They can also try a sample rather than choosing an entire pre-seasoned entrée that they may end up not liking and would end up going to waste.”

The station goes beyond just enhancing meals, becoming a vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue. As a mode of cultural exploration, it allows students to connect with different traditions and broaden their understanding of global cuisines. Students





can also learn about the diverse backgrounds of their peers, sparking conversations and friendships.

Tal Leizer, a Wartburg student from the class of 2024, said they have experienced many different options from different regions around the world at the new station.

“The condiment station that has been added to our dining hall has made a big difference to how I have been able to enjoy the meals we have been served,” Leizer said. “It gives the feeling through food that there is more inclusivity going on, and that the international community is thought about.”

Delivering global flavors and variety has typically been a challenge in the dining hall, Terrill said, so the station allows customers to modify or upgrade their food without changing the base recipe.

“It allows people the chance to play and enhance their food on their terms, using flavors they may or may not be familiar with,” Terrill explained.

He said they haven’t had a lot of challenges sourcing ingredients, between a few local Asian markets, the internet, and typical commercial kitchen ingredients, with some substitutions needed at times.

“It sometimes takes a bit of searching, but we have had some solid luck so far,” Terrill said. “Really the only challenges have been having enough space to bring in all the things we want to offer. Otherwise, a challenge is just keeping things stocked well enough, as they go through the items extremely quickly.”

Chef Jami Dare of Wartburg Dining agreed, noting that international students had previously been discontented with food and condiment selections.

“The sauces were a relatively cheap and easy addition that immediately improved student satisfaction, especially with our international population,” Dare said.

By offering students a range of flavors inspired by different cultures, Wartburg Dining has been able to promote cultural exploration, diversity, and open-mindedness while fostering a sense of belonging and connection among students. This initiative exemplifies the commitment of educational institutions to go beyond traditional dining options and create a vibrant and inclusive campus environment where culinary adventures are possible at every meal. §

