



Photos: Carnegie Mellon University

A specially trained chef prepares an allergen-free salad in Carnegie Mellon's Nourish commissary kitchen.

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Dining changes at Carnegie Mellon stress healthy eating

New this year are an allergen-friendly commissary kitchen, a vegan concept, a ramen bowl concept, and superfood- lled smoothies and breakfast bowls.

Mike Buzalka | Oct 03, 2017

Change is coming to the dining environment at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh, change that not only promises to make eating on campus more pleasurable but also healthier—and safer for those with food allergy issues. That's

because the dining program has committed to an upgrade in the nutritious aspects of its offerings and has already rolled out the first set of changes this fall.

Among the additions and alterations to the dining program are an allergen-friendly commissary kitchen called Nourish that produces dishes made without wheat, milk, egg, soy, fish, shellfish, peanuts or most tree nuts (except coconut); a completely vegan concept called Garden Bistro; a ramen bowl concept featuring fresh, healthy ingredients; and a new menu at the Carnegie Mellon Café location that now features superfood-filled smoothies and breakfast bowls. In addition, the campus food truck has changed its menu to feature more healthful offerings by way of Indian specialties like roti wraps.



Two of the new superfood offerings at Carnegie Mellon Café: a chia bowl (chia seeds, coconut milk, bananas, blueberries, strawberries, and honey-nut granola), and a green machine smoothie (fresh banana, mango, kale, dates, almond milk and cinnamon).

Nourish fills a significant role on campus by giving students with food allergies an alternative that they can be sure of while still getting appealing food choices.

“The majority of what we are producing there right now are grab-and-go items that are distributed to select locations across campus,” says Jessica Tones, who serves as registered dietitian, nutrition educator and marketing coordinator for the CMU dining program. “You can also order online using the Get-Food app for pickup, a nice feature for students with allergy issues who can now get food that’s freshly prepared and hot. And then just to make sure those foods are available all day, we have the grab-and-go program as well.”

Nourish operates on a menu cycle but emphasizes dishes that have proven popular on the CMU campus. The grab-and-go selections include not only the standard sandwiches and salads but also a range of entrée-type dishes.

The selections are both developed in house and drawn from the recipe portfolios of CulinArt, the primary campus dining vendor that operates Nourish, and CulinArt parent Compass Group.

Students ordering online can customize their selections, increasing the appeal of Nourish as a meal option.

Currently, Nourish produces about a hundred grab-and-go meals distributed to five on-campus locations daily, as well as serving a handful of daily online customer orders, a number expected to grow as general awareness of that option becomes more prevalent, says Pascal Petter, director of dining services at CMU.

The double pork signature ramen bowl at the new Ramen Bowl station, made with crispy pork, pork belly, a seven-minute egg, bok choy, scallion and house pork broth.

“A lot of universities have dedicated allergen-free stations,” Petter notes, “but [Nourish] is unique in that it truly is a commissary kitchen with a very strict training and cleaning protocol, and the meals get sealed in a container, so it’s very easy for students to take those meals back to their dorm rooms and heat them up, confident that they are secure and uncontaminated.”



Nourish, located in a 375-square-foot space that previously served as a traditional grab-and-go commissary before being completely re-equipped, has a dedicated staff of two who had to undergo extensive online training and pass an exam.

“We actually had to create a new union classification just for this room,” Petter observes. “They have to wear hair covers, shoe covers and lab coats and have to sign off on protocols to follow for what they do on their lunch break.”

The 100-percent plant-based Garden Bistro concept, one of multiple concepts in the Resnik House dining array, has two components: one is a bowl option where diners select from a wide variety of vegetables, proteins, nuts, sauces and grains and get it sautéed to order, and the other a hot sandwich platform featuring animal-free burger, “crab” and “chicken” selections.

The station has been building traffic since its opening earlier this school year. It averages about 50 covers a day currently, says Petter.

Another dining outlet in Resnik House is the Carnegie Mellon Café, which has traditionally offered breakfast all day, plus diner sandwiches, wraps, flatbreads and frozen treats like hand-dipped ice cream, sundaes, malted milkshakes, smoothies and banana splits, plus Starbucks branded beverages.



Garden Bistro is the new all-vegan concept on campus, with a menu offering either customizable sauté bowls or animal-product-free sandwiches.

New this year at the venue is a line of vegetarian and vegan smoothies and breakfast bowls filled with superfoods like strawberries, blueberries, kale and walnuts.

“Last year we had a lot of buzz about adding fresh fruit smoothies to the menu because most people use frozen bases,” explains CulinArt Executive Chef Victor Schmidt. “This year to accommodate those requests we added three fresh fruit smoothies that contain things like cacao nibs and bowls with bases like red quinoa.”

Those items along with the rest of the menu are available all day as that café stays open from 7:30 a.m. most days to 2 a.m. As Resnik House is located near campus

residence halls, it has been a popular late-night spot, with delicious but somewhat unhealthy choices like milkshakes being particularly popular as the clock ticks past midnight.

“What we’ve tried to do, along with CulinArt, is infuse a lot of healthy options into the menu besides the traditional late-night snacks like milkshakes,” Petter observes.

Along those lines, another new concept for the campus is Ramen Bowl, located in the Cohon Center, another venue with multiple dining concepts. It offers diners the choice of housemade vegetarian miso or pork broths that can be customized with various proteins and fresh vegetables, and has been quite a hit with students already, Schmidt says.

“It’s probably been the busiest station that we added,” he notes.

Another change toward more healthy fare is the conversion of the menu on the Tartan Express campus food truck from fairly generic Asian food emphasis to authentic Indian cuisine offered by local restaurant Taste of India, which also operates a station in Resnik House.

The menu centers around roti wraps—roti is an Indian flatbread similar to a tortilla—that can be customized with different proteins—including vegetarian options like garbanzo and tofu—sauces and toppings. The selected ingredients are available either in wraps or in rice bowls.

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