

*From the 2015 Menus of Change Annual Report
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STANFORD UNIVERSITY Residential and Dining Enterprises

Stanford University is known for many things: academic rigor, an idyllic campus dubbed “the Farm,” and a pipeline of innovation to neighboring Silicon Valley. It is also an athletic powerhouse. NCAA student-athletes are provided a specific meal each day through the university’s Training Table program, which is designed to maximize athletic performance through proper nutrition. As Stanford’s culinary team plans its menus and messages to students, using nutrition to help students perform at both their mental and physical peak.



Eric Montell, executive director, and Shirley Everett, Senior Associate Vice Provost of Stanford University’s Residential and Dining Enterprises

Toward this end, Residential & Dining Enterprises (R&DE) Stanford Dining developed the Performance Dining @ Stanford initiative in 2011, as it was gearing up to build the school’s first new dining hall in 20 years.

Working in partnership with Stanford Athletics, Stanford School of Medicine, and The Culinary Institute of America—groups that had never worked together prior—R&DE

Stanford Dining used the opportunity of this new facility, the Arrillaga Family Dining Commons, to create a one-of-a-kind college foodservice concept. Together they created six categories for foods shown to boost everything from brain power to the immune system: Enhanced Immunity; Anti-Inflammatory Components; Food Synergy; Brain Performance; Sports Performance; and Antioxidants. Each category was given a distinct icon, and icons were displayed on signage throughout the dining hall, telling the benefits of the dishes offered at the salad bar and various serving stations.

“My vision for the Arrillaga Family Dining Commons was to create a design that focuses on academic enrichment by enhancing the student living-and-learning experience with an equally unique, innovative, educational and sustainable dining experience,” said R&DE

Senior Associate Vice Provost Shirley Everett, who introduced and championed the Performance Dining initiative.

Under the Stanford performance criteria, it's not about counting calories or tracking nutrients. It's about how students feel, and how they perform both in and outside of the classroom when they eat different food combinations. The menus with better outcomes include mostly plants, and foods that are less processed. "We think Performance Dining is a better way to message about healthy eating and support the academic mission of the university," says Eric Montell, executive director of R&DE Stanford Dining, who led the program design along with Elaine Magee, Stanford's wellness and performance nutritionist. "We made healthy eating relatable to students' lifestyles."

The state-of-the-art, two-story Arrillaga Family Dining Commons approaches well-being and food education in a holistic way: The upstairs dining hall leads into a large, open seating area with live piano music. There is an expansive servery with a custom induction display cooking station, a "Wall of Fire," which includes an expansive chargrill for all types of meats, and a gas-fired deck oven. Additionally, the upstairs includes a culinary studio where students can watch the action as food is prepared and cooked. The first floor includes a study lounge, a "De-Stress Zone," a wellness room for dance and yoga classes, and a teaching kitchen, which R&DE Stanford Dining uses to host cooking classes, demonstrations, and events featuring celebrity chefs.

Alongside the displayed Performance Dining icons is an important visual communication technique: the placement and display of food. In the dining hall, the Performance Bar, with a variety of healthy options that fall into one or more of the Performance Dining categories, is front and center; it's intentionally the first thing students pass when entering.

Along with events and a biweekly newsletter, R&DE Stanford Dining supplements the student dining experience with educational materials provided in the dining environment itself: on display screens and menu cards, and in sample food items attached to flyers sharing tips and facts for developing healthy, sustainable eating habits. For instance, the team has handed out small squares of chocolate with mindful eating tips to convey the importance of mindful eating and simple pleasures.

One of the most concrete outcomes to emerge from the way the performance icons and sustainable sourcing message have resonated with the Stanford community is how they are affecting future dining hall design on Stanford's campus. At the recently remodeled Florence Moore Hall, the R&DE Stanford Dining team decided on an open kitchen layout with a centrally located Performance Bar. Chefs are always visible to students, and vice versa, and students can develop relationships with the people cooking and serving their food and ask about what they're eating, what's in it, and where it came from. These stations, which include a hearth oven for pizzas and flatbreads and several made-to-order stations, also encourage students to try new foods, namely global cuisines with which they

may be unfamiliar and that often emphasize more fruits, vegetables, and plant-based proteins than traditional American college fare of comfort foods.

“The facility is breathtakingly gorgeous,” says Christopher Gardner, professor of medicine at the Stanford Prevention Research Center in the School of Medicine, who ought to know: Last spring, he and several other faculty members started using it as a teaching space, cooking quarterly meals with small groups of students. Hosting the educational dinners began as an academic idea, with each meal to be themed from a different department such as anthropology or earth sciences, but the timing couldn’t have been better, Gardner said: “There was Eric, and he said, ‘By the way, here’s a dining hall, completely remodeled, for you to go cook in.’”

As an outgrowth of the Stanford Food Summit, Gardner and some of his fellow health promotion researchersⁱ conducted a cluster-randomized study before and after a healthy eating marketing campaign that used the Performance Dining icons. They introduced the signage at two dining halls, while two other dining halls served as controls, and they did so during the week of final exams—a period of high-stress for students, often associated with an increase in unhealthy eating habits. The results, which were published in 2013 in the *Journal of American College Health*, showed that students in the dining halls that received the performance dining messages maintained healthy eating levels, whereas students in the control group ate more poorly during finals week.

The Performance Dining messaging campaign was first piloted at Arrillaga Family Dining Commons, but the response from the Stanford community was so overwhelmingly positive it has since been rolled out across campus.

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For more information about Stanford University’s Residential and Dining Enterprises, visit <https://rde.stanford.edu/>

ⁱ Matt Rothe and Debra Dunn, as part of their Sustainable Abundance class. The paper was written by Arianna McClain.