



THE PROTEIN FLIP

Integrating Operations and Research

PARTNERS

- With support from Peter Angelis, Director of Housing & Hospitality Services (HHS), UCLA Dining took the lead in designing and implementing the Flex Bar.
- Al Ferrone, Senior Dining Director, Charles Wilcots, Associate Dining Director, and Roger Pigozzi, Executive Chef, were passionate about creating a new experience for students that delivered tasty, hearty, healthy food all in one place.
- Peter Angelis approached the ResearchWell Pod to discuss an evaluation plan for the Flex Bar. Public Health faculty Burt Cowgill and May Wang developed a strategy to assess the impacts of the Flex Bar. With support from EatWell, doctoral student Shelley Jung is now leading the research effort with Drs. Cowgill and Wang.
- Additional HHS partners include: Karen Hedges, Dolores Hernandez, Alex Macias, Michelle Wellington, and Chris Wible.

OVERVIEW

In January 2017, UCLA Dining launched a state-of-the-art “Flex Bar” at the De Neve dining hall. The Flex Bar integrates optimal nutrition, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility within the campus foodservice sector by re-framing the role of plant-based ingredients so they become the primary source of protein, and animal-based proteins become condiments and



This strategy has been referred to as the “protein flip” approach and is being used at other institutions working on serving students healthier and more environmentally sustainable food. At the same time, EatWell facilitated collaboration between Dining and campus researchers to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the Flex Bar’s impact on 1) individual undergraduate student consumption patterns, and 2) aggregate changes in plant- and animal-based protein consumption. Data is currently being analyzed.

PROJECT DETAILS

1. **Getting Started:** The original motivation for the Flex Bar came from Dining’s need to shift some of the demand from Bruin Plate (UCLA’s holistic health-themed dining hall) to De Neve, a dining hall themed around street foods of America. In an effort to stay consistent with the theme of De Neve, Dining gleaned inspiration from plant-forward comfort foods and restaurants like Lemonade. The Menus of Change principles also helped guide the recipe development; Menus of Change is a national initiative that engages the foodservice industry around the business of healthy, sustainable, delicious food.
2. **Building the Bar:** The Flex Bar is designed in a triangular shape to encourage a complete meal experience. It consists of 15 composed salads as well as an entree station with hot dishes such as soups and small portions of meat. In total, the volume of animal protein on the Flex Bar is less than 25%.





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RESOURCES

- The Flex Bar Menu: menu.dining.ucla.edu/Menu/DeNeve
- Menus of Change Principles and Resources: www.menusofchange.org/principles-resources/
- A Daily Bruin article on the Flex Bar: <http://dailybruin.com/2016/10/31/de-neve-to-introduce-flexitarian-bar-offer-plant-based-protein-options/>
- An HCI blog post on the Flex Bar: <https://healthycampusinitiative.wordpress.com/2017/05/10/the-de-neve-flex-bar-shifting-from-animal-based-to-plant-based-protein/>

CONTACT

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3. **What's on the Menu:** Example menu items include: Grilled Nopales, Tri-Colored Carrots with Peruvian Salsa, Braised Cabbage with Chorizo, Boston Baked Lentils, and Black-Eyed Peas with Smoked Turkey. As Dining directors and chefs develop menu items for the Flex Bar, dietitian Dolores Hernandez conducts nutritional analyses to determine the proportion of animal-based protein and ensure the entire menu stays within the bounds of 25%.
4. **Research Efforts:** As part of her graduate-level public health nutrition assessment course, Dr. Wang engaged her students in developing the questionnaire about undergraduate student consumption patterns. Once finalized, doctoral student Shelley Jung oversaw a group of student volunteers to administer the questionnaire and collect the data. UCLA Dining also provided the research team with service records and food purchase data to measure aggregate changes in consumption.

DATA SNAPSHOT

- Individual-level data was collected using the online study questionnaire about self-reported height and weight, food preferences, eating patterns, and nutrition and health-related behaviors. The questionnaire was sent out to randomly selected residential undergraduate students (living on campus with a meal plan) pre-implementation (2015-16) and post-implementation of the Flex Bar (2016-17).
- Existing service records and food purchase data that is logged into the Food Pro software provided the aggregate-level data. Researchers are comparing post-implementation data to data collected during the same period in the previous year. The other four dining halls (Covel Commons, Reiber, Sproul, and Bruin Plate) will serve as comparison sites.

PROCESS INSIGHT

- Support and buy-in from directors in Housing & Hospitality Services is critical to getting a project like this one off the ground. Success at the innovative Bruin Plate dining hall instilled confidence that students would be receptive to the Flex Bar concept.
- Flavor and presentation are key! Dining Director Al Ferrone suggests the primary selling points should be focused on deliciousness and choice.
- Complementary signage and education is also valuable in helping students (and staff!) think about where their food is coming from and encouraging mindful eating.



