



Serving Up Gluten-Free at Colleges & Universities

Q&A with Chef Robert Landolphi and Amy Dunham, MA, RD, CSSD

QUESTION: We operate out of several small kitchens on campus. Would it be more worthwhile to convert one kitchen to a dedicated gluten-free site rather than try to produce gluten-free food in every kitchen?

ANSWER: It really depends on the size of your College or University and the type of meal plan you offer. Our students live all over campus and are allowed to eat in any of our residential board plan facilities. We felt it would be unfair to some students to make them walk across campus 25-30 minutes to eat in a specified GF facility when they have dining halls next to their residential halls. So we offer GF in all of our facilities on campus. If we were a smaller campus, a single kitchen would be an easier approach to meeting the needs of your GF students.

QUESTION: We serve thousands of students each day, and we need to make meals fresh. How can we be expected to shut down operations and create a gluten-free environment just for a few students?

ANSWER: There is no reason to shut down your establishments, to create GF dishes. But it is very important to implement procedures / training with the kitchen staff to create an environment that knows what ingredients are GF and how to avoid cross contamination. When we first looked at our recipe data base, we were pleasantly surprised at how many dishes we served that were in fact already GF. We then looked at changing some major ingredients (soy sauce, chicken /beef and vegetable stocks / salad dressings, etc) to create a larger variety of GF offerings. We also have chosen not to do any GF baking in any of our facilities, but to bring in pre-packaged products such as brownies, cookies and cakes that students can have as dessert.

QUESTION: What are some easy dishes to make that are gluten-free and can be mass-produced for a large student body?

ANSWER: We offer:

- Gluten-free pasta, (brown rice, corn, quinoa, etc)
- Hamburgers and Hot Dogs (gluten-free rolls)
- Gluten-free cold cuts (turkey, ham, roast beef, salami, pepperoni, etc)
- Gluten-free wraps, bagels, breads
- Gluten-free muffins, cookies, brownies
- Naturally gluten-free fish dishes (salmon, tilapia, grouper, cod)
- Rice and Quinoa dishes
- Carved Turkey, ham, roast beef, and pork
- Breakfast: Bacon, sausage, gluten-free pancakes, gluten-free waffles

- Mexican lasagna made with corn tortillas or brown rice tortillas.
- Full salad bars with gluten-free dressings.

QUESTION: How do you designate gluten-free items in dining halls?

ANSWER: Our menus for all facilities are listed online, and have a “GF” symbol next to all the items that are available gluten-free. We also have labels over all our food in our dining halls that list all the allergens that are present. We realize that celiac disease is not considered an allergen, but an autoimmune disorder, but it is easier for us to label dishes GF under the allergen tab. We label for wheat and gluten.

QUESTION: How can you get non gluten-free students to respect the segregation? For example, we often have a line for the "normal" toaster. Who's to say impatient students won't try to use the gluten-free toaster for their gluten-containing bread?

ANSWER: We do have separate toasters in all our facilities, and they are used only for gluten-free items. These toasters are kept in the manager’s office in the kitchen. Students who are on GF diets use the toasters in the kitchen and then return them to the manager’s office. This avoids any cross-contamination mistakes.

QUESTION: Do you recommend gluten-free testing?

ANSWER: No, we do not do gluten-free testing here at UConn. We try to ensure the gluten-free products we provide are gluten-free by calling the manufacturers.

QUESTION: Do you recommend that the dietitian meet with the celiac and gluten-free students a few times a year to address nutritional intake and proper adherence?

ANSWER: Yes, I think it is important for students who are gluten-free or with celiac disease meet with the Registered Dietitian a few times a year. Depending on the student, they may need this more frequently (i.e. not compliant with the diet, currently have nutrient deficiencies that are being treated).

QUESTION: How do you market and promote your college as offering gluten-free? What are appropriate channels to reach parents and potential students?

ANSWER: We have information on our website and Facebook page. We also mention at freshman orientation to all parents, families and students, that if they have any type of dietary issue or concern, that they should call the main office and set up an appointment. Throughout the academic year students also find out this information at Health and Wellness Fairs and other events.