

# The Value of Communication and Providing Safe Gluten-Free Campus Dining

## NACUFS members pride themselves on engaging all students

By Beckee Moreland, Director of GREAT Kitchens; Beyond Celiac

Ashley Rohall, a third-year student at Smith College, was having trouble staying completely gluten-free and found herself trying to take care of her meals on her own in her room. Knowing that this was not an ideal or sustainable solution, she and others on campus with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity organized a meeting with dining services personnel to see if they could help her and others with their gluten-free needs on campus.

Ashley and other students had many meetings with Andy Cox, food service director; the president; and board members to find a solution. Together, they devised a plan: Create a totally safe gluten-free dining hall available to students who have special dietary needs because of medical conditions. To eat in Dawes dining hall, students must provide a doctor's note and apply through the college's disability services office. The school paper covered the story, communicating the process and showing the college's support for meeting the students' need.

The demand for safe gluten-free options can help or hinder a school's recruitment for students with medically restricted diets. The Smith College demonstrated a positive, inclusive response; providing ongoing communication to its students as well as education for the staff.

Is providing reliably safe gluten-free options that are healthy and appealing a big deal? Yes. For a person with celiac disease, not only can on-going exposure to gluten cause long-term health problems, including additional autoimmune disorders, certain types of cancer, and even death, but being able to eat at school without stress and inconvenience can do wonders for their morale, their academic and athletic performance, and their overall impression of their school.

Students may take risks when time and convenience are compromised. Young adults in school live in a fast-paced world, balancing classes, activities, social life, and work. They don't want to have to wait and may not make the best decisions if the options are hard to access. And when it is hard, they have difficulty recommending their school to someone else in the same situation.

The demand for gluten-free meals is on the rise. However, 60 percent of the college students who responded to a recent New England Celiac Organization (NECO) survey report that they would not recommend their school to others with celiac disease. The cost and availability of gluten-free foods has never been better. So how can college or university dining services make it work?

Despite the Lesley University Settlement in 2012, Beyond Celiac recently surveyed college students and found that 42 percent of gluten-free students who contacted a university administrator felt the official did not have sufficient knowledge about their gluten-free diet.

Needs of students with gluten-related disorders are the same across the country, but how the needs are met has changed in the last five years. Many foodservice operations have taken steps to become educated and to implement safe gluten-free options.

### Safety First

Thirty percent of Beyond Celiac survey respondents said they had missed class due to gluten exposure. Exposure to gluten can lead to debilitating symptoms that can create challenges to learning and participating in class and other activities. These symptoms may include brain fog, severe fatigue, diarrhea, and more.

But how does this exposure come about, especially in a dining hall with gluten-free options? The primary causes are lack of ingredient sourcing and cross-contact. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and their derivatives. Common foods containing gluten include breads, cereal, pasta, pizza crust, muffins, bagels, pie, and croutons. Other foods that may contain gluten may not be so obvious.

Processed meats, sauces, condiments,

### BRIEF HISTORY

In 2012, the US Department of Justice reached a settlement agreement with Lesley University in response to a complaint surrounding the lack of gluten-free and food allergy-friendly options on campus with no opportunity for meal plan exemption. The agreement stemmed from a complaint that the University was in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), preventing students with special dietary needs from "fully and equally" enjoying services provided by the University. Following an investigation, the Department of Justice and Lesley University entered voluntarily into an agreement that would ensure "reasonable modifications" are made to address the needs of gluten- and allergen-free students. While the settlement only applied to Lesley University, it set a precedent in favor of students with special dietary needs. Some schools across the country have used the agreement guidelines as a template for ways to accommodate special diet students.



*Beckee Moreland, Director of GREAT Kitchens, assists Swarthmore dining staff during GREAT Schools training, Swarthmore College*

French fry coating, and salad dressings can contain gluten. By FDA FALCPA of 2004, wheat, one of the top eight allergens, must be identified on retail packaging of foods regulated by the FDA, but barley and rye do not. The FDA Gluten-Free Labeling regulation is a voluntary claim that basically states that foods can be labeled “gluten-free” if they do not contain wheat, rye, barley, or their derivatives and contain less than 20 parts per million gluten. Being able to identify hidden sources of gluten plus diligent label-reading are skills that will help when sourcing ingredients. Foodservice teams can benefit from having a registered dietitian on staff who can take the lead on this process.

Gluten cross-contact can be direct or indirect. Direct cross-contact happens when one food containing gluten (croutons) comes into contact with another food (salad). Removing the croutons from the salad doesn’t fix the problem and could make a student very ill. Indirect gluten cross-contact occurs when hands, utensils, cooking equipment, etc. that have been used in the preparation of gluten-containing foods come in contact with a gluten-free food. For example, a knife used to slice

bread is then used to cut open a baked potato. Learning ways to prevent cross-contact through training, practice, and using dedicated space and equipment can prevent students from experiencing debilitating consequences and benefit staff by building confidence in their ability to execute these skills.

Foodservice managers can create a successful program with a few key steps:

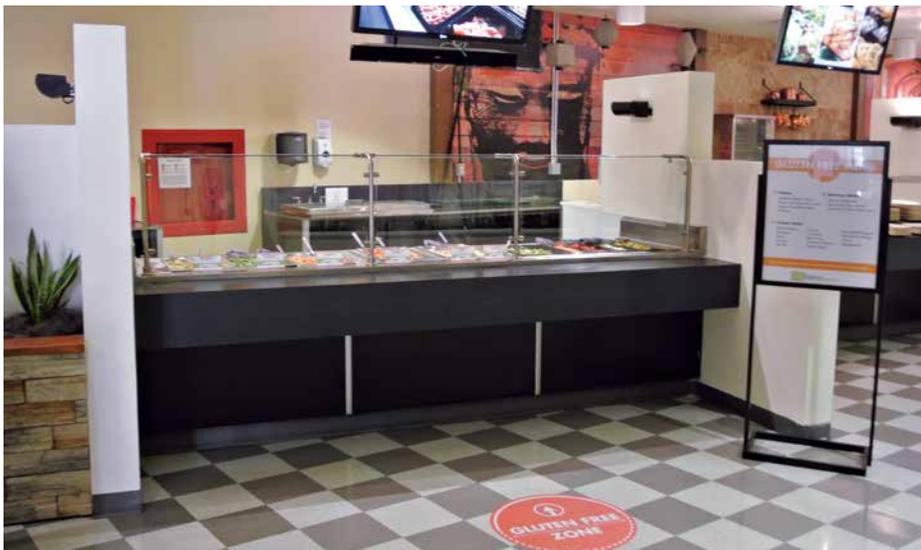
- Implement continuous special diet education and training of staff through a program such as the GREAT Schools, Colleges, and Camps program offered by the non-profit patient advocacy group Beyond Celiac.
- Include allergen and gluten controls in your standard operating procedures and manage their implementation.
- Be transparent about what you offer students. **Communication is key.** Label menu options with icons, identify choices by station, clearly and prominently offer website information, mention accommodations during campus visits, orientation, and residence hall news—printed, digital, and ver-

bal. With a quick search, students and parents should be able to access services and options for what your dining service offers special diet students.

- Help students to help themselves—provide nutrition information on websites and dining apps with ingredient and allergen filters to help students make smart choices.

The fear of food is real. People with celiac disease are all too familiar with the experience of “getting glutened” while dining out. And college students on a meal plan may have very few other options.

A student’s comfort level of eating in the dining hall depends on how seriously the staff take their gluten-free diet requests. Unfortunately, 42.37 percent of college respondents in the Beyond Celiac 2016 survey said they were not comfortable eating in their dining hall. They cite the following reasons: inability to avoid cross-contact, lack of variety of food options, and a lack of training of staff for safe cooking practices. Unfortunately, 30 percent of NECO survey respondents found no solution to their food needs on campus.



### Variety of Menu Options and Convenience

Requiring a gluten-free diet should not reduce their choices to dry chicken, baked potato, steamed vegetables, salad, and cold cereal. Variety and solid nutrition are important when your only meal options are in the dining halls, c-stores, or restaurants. Students with special dietary requirements need and want a wide selection to include nutritious options at every meal, on every day, for four years. They want to be included when they see what other students have available at food stations that include stir-fry, pasta, panini sandwiches, wraps, sushi, grain bowls, burgers, soups, and more.

For those who did report feeling comfortable, their top 3 reasons included: Clearly labeled gluten-free options; approachable and responsive staff; and availability of healthy gluten-free options.

### Real world solutions that build variety and convenience

Foodservice operators may find that creating appetizing and convenient options for their students with dietary restrictions are not as daunting as they seem. More college and university operators are creating stations that include safe options for special diet students but don't exclude other students from trying these choices as well. This can make the special diet station less stigmatizing and more inclusive.

Here are some examples of dining solutions from schools that have staff trained by the Beyond Celiac GREAT Schools, Colleges, and Camps program:

#### G8 Station Valparaiso U; Valparaiso, IN

Gluten 8 (G8) is Valparaiso University's allergen-friendly station, located in the Founder Table restaurant in the Harre Student Union. The menu options at this station are void of the top eight food allergens and gluten. The G8 menu specialist ensures that no cross-contact occurs while cooking and preparing foods at a specialized G8 area in the kitchen, complete with purple utensils. "The G8 station has grown in popularity among students, serving 1200 meals a month to not only students, faculty, and staff with diagnosed food allergies; but also, with people who avoid specific food allergens by preference. Many of the foods served at G8 have undergone very little processing, and are great options for anyone looking to eat 'cleaner' and healthier," says Nicole Bianco, RD.

#### The Free Zone Swarthmore College; Swarthmore, PA

Opened in the Fall of 2013, the Free Zone is designed for students who need to eat an entirely gluten-free diet. Gluten-free hot foods, staples, and desserts are available in the Free Zone, as well as equipment for students to prepare their own items. "Free Zone options are designed to mirror our general offerings as much as possible. This is an emphasis that I hear frequently from our students—that they desire a dining experience as broad and interesting as we offer students without dining restrictions,"



Gluten-Free Zone ready for service, Cal Poly Campus Dining

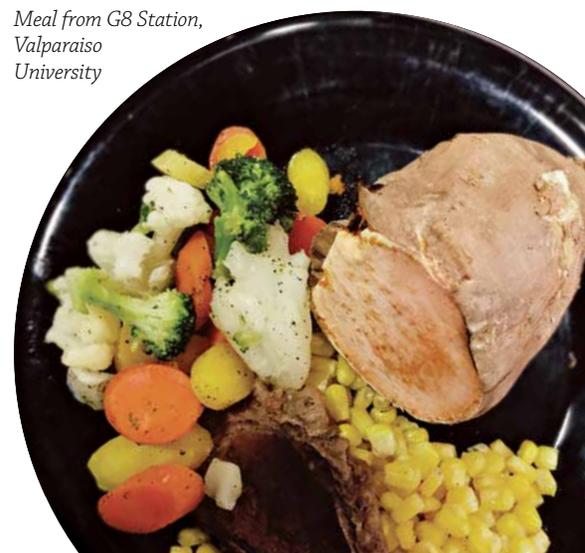
Starches and vegetables on the line in the Gluten-Free Zone, Cal Poly Campus Dining

says Mary Kassab, Special Diets Advisor. Packaged gluten-free products are available at coffee and snack bars. To have access to The Free Zone, students must complete a food allergy/intolerance health form and submit it to dining services.

#### Gluten-Free Zone California Polytechnic State University; San Luis Obispo, CA

"Since its inception in 2013, our Gluten Free Zone has served thousands of students, staff, and faculty. The menu rotation offers one roasted protein, a cooked vegetable (local when available), a starch option, 2-3 composed salads, and a robust salad bar which includes two rotating fresh fruit options. While our gluten free zone was specifically designed for our customers with celiac disease, it is also

Meal from G8 Station, Valparaiso University



frequented by many others looking for simple and healthful items. The gluten free station is also virtually free of the eight most common allergens including milk, egg, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, and shellfish,” says Megan Coats, RD.

## Dawes

### Smith College; Northampton, MA

Students with celiac disease started advocating for a dedicated kitchen in 2014. Now the renovated Dawes dining hall serves two hot gluten-free meals for dinner plus breakfast, lunch, and snacks for students who have registered with the Office of Student Affairs and Disability Services. “From 14 original students, we have grown to accommodate over 70 students in need of a strict gluten free diet. In the many conversations I’ve had with incoming students and their parents regarding their college decision, many referenced Smith College’s commitment to accommodating food allergies as a factor in their decision,” says Andrew Cox, director of dining services.

## Gluten-Free Station in Café 1201 & Special Dietary Lockers in Broderick Dining Commons

### Old Dominion University; Norfolk, VA

“We are proud to be one of only seven universities in the country to achieve GREAT School recognition, and we are dedicated to providing healthy and flavorful menu options for all ODU students. Our gluten-free menus

## WINNING MENU ITEMS

According to the Beyond Celiac student survey, some of the top food options gluten-free students would like to see added in their dining halls include: grab ‘n go pizza, pasta, burgers, grilled cheese sandwiches, stir-fry, breakfast pastries, and homemade desserts.

include freshly prepared whole proteins, starches, vegetables, and desserts. With the rise in diagnosed celiac disease cases throughout the country, it is very important to us that we provide options for Old Dominion University students with a gluten sensitivity so we implemented the Gluten-Free station in Café 1201 and the Special Dietary Lockers in Broderick Dining Commons,” says Monarch Dining/Aramark Executive Chef Robert Patton CEC, CCA.

The Special Dietary Lockers in Broderick Dining Commons will be ready for use in Spring 2017. Gluten-free menus include freshly prepared whole proteins, starches, vegetables, and desserts free from gluten or their specific allergy and house them in a temperature controlled locker accessed with their student ID. “Through the use of dedicated lockers, we assist these students in accommodating their individual needs. We work with students, parents, and the Office of Educational Accessibility to identify these students and assign them swipe access into these lockers. Dry, refrigerated, and frozen sections provide meal solutions for all day-parts,” says Janet McLaughlin, Aramark’s

Resident District Manager, Old Dominion University.

## Happy Endings

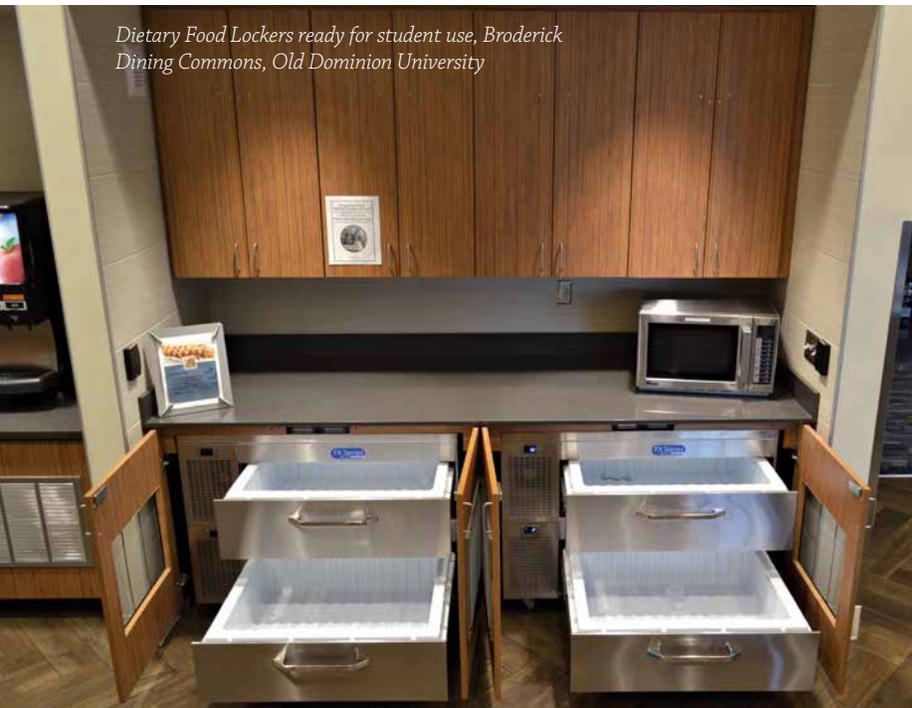
Ashley was the first student to eat at Smith’s gluten-free Dawes dining hall in the Fall of 2015. She and the other students note that they were very happy with the school, the staff, the chefs and the experience. Now they feel like regular students—they can get pizza and bagels and have a place to go whenever they are hungry. There are also containers for to-go options that are completely safe, and the students have a great relationship with the chef(s) and the staff.

Cox, along with 20 other Smith foodservice staff members, have completed the online training of the GREAT Schools program from Beyond Celiac. This online multimedia course teaches foodservice staff how to properly prepare and serve gluten-free meals. Participants learn how to identify gluten-free ingredients, avoid cross-contact, and answer gluten-free students’ and parents’ questions. Participating college and universities and other foodservice operations can apply to receive GREAT accreditation. ♦

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/Allergens/ucm106890.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2013/08/05/2013-18813/food-labeling-gluten-free-labeling-of-foods>

*Dietary Food Lockers ready for student use, Broderick Dining Commons, Old Dominion University*



*Students eating in the dedicated dining hall, Dawes, Smith College*

