

CASE STUDY

3 HIGHER ED CAMPUSES SHARE CATERING SUCCESSES AND BEST PRACTICES

A growing number of colleges and universities are extending their on-campus dining services into full-scale catering operations. As a result, they are gaining a lucrative additional revenue stream that comprises an average of 10 to 12 percent of their dining revenue. Three higher education institutions in particular are generating significant income from their catering operations—Clemson University, Southern Methodist University (SMU), and Sam Houston State University (SHSU). All three have partnered with a professional dining service provider to create and expand their successful catering enterprises. They shared their successes and best practice recommendations for creating best-in-class catering operations that generate significant income in higher education.

CLEMSON[®]
UNIVERSITY



SMU[®]



**Sam Houston
State University**

Is Your Campus Catering Underperforming?

What is the definition of success for on-campus catering operations? From a financial perspective, an ideal benchmark is between 10 and 12 percent of the overall on-campus food service revenue. While many campuses offer on-site catering, few are achieving this level of revenue performance—and, as a result, they are missing out on an opportunity for a significant income stream.

Often campus catering services fall short of their potential because they don't see the full picture. Areas to expand catering often include:

- Luncheons
- Galas
- Picnics
- Boxed lunches
- Coffee breaks
- Athletic events
- Fraternity and sorority events
- Corporate events
- Conference center events
- Weddings (onsite and off)
- Full-service event planning

“We Dream, We Do” Motto Drives Clemson’s Catering Services



In 2012, Clemson University’s Catering was a simple operation. Five years later, it had grown into a huge enterprise offering a full-service (from linens to comprehensive event planning) catering program. It’s experienced impressive year over year growth, generating a 6.25% increase from 2015 to 2016, and more than doubling that growth rate from 2016 to 2017 with a 17.6% increase.

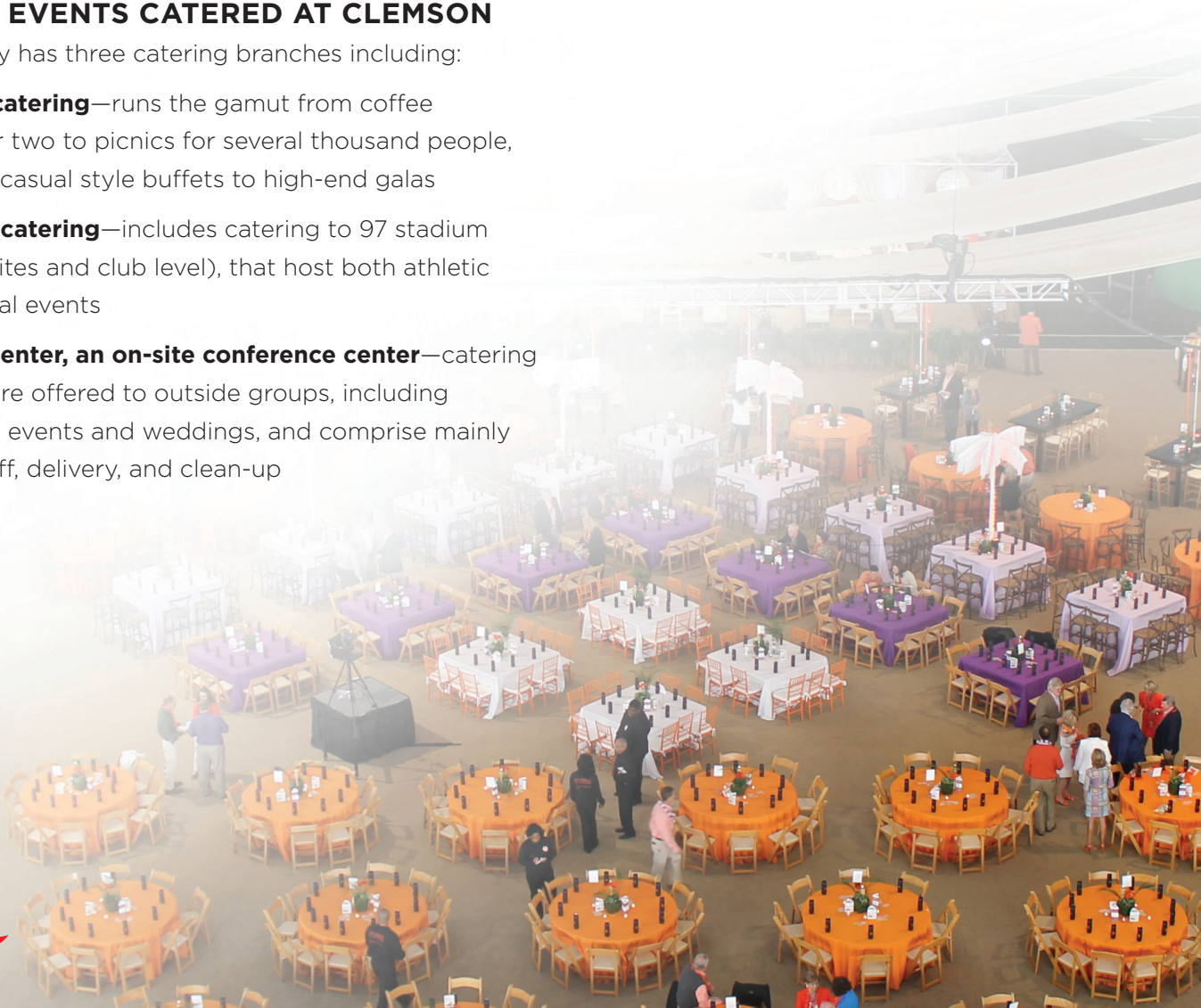
GUIDING PHILOSOPHY

Clemson has adopted its catering partner’s tagline, “We Dream, We Do,” to serve as its catering motto. That translates into always listening to clients and doing everything possible to ensure perfect events. Their full-service approach, laser focus on their clients’ needs and willingness to do everything possible for successful events is paying off.

TYPES OF EVENTS CATERED AT CLEMSON

The university has three catering branches including:

- **Campus catering**—runs the gamut from coffee breaks for two to picnics for several thousand people, and from casual style buffets to high-end galas
- **Athletics catering**—includes catering to 97 stadium boxes (suites and club level), that host both athletic and special events
- **Madren Center, an on-site conference center**—catering services are offered to outside groups, including corporate events and weddings, and comprise mainly of drop-off, delivery, and clean-up



MENU CREATION PHILOSOPHY

Clemson Catering prides itself on its menus, striving to never serve the same menu twice. It also works to add in local flavors. Also, as much as possible, the catering team purchases local products to support its local focus.



FARM *to* TABLE

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

BUTLER PASSED APPETIZERS

Bacon Wrapped Quail Breast (Manchester Farms-Columbia, SC)
Marinated Heirloom Tomato Bruschetta (Sunny Creek Farms-Tryon, NC)
Clemson Bleu Cheese (Clemson, SC)

SALAD COURSE (SERVED FAMILY STYLE)

Warm Pecan Crusted Goat Cheese (Split Creek Farms-Anderson, SC)
Fancy Mixed Lettuces (Sunny Creek Farms-Tryon, NC)
Turmeric Turnips (Walter P. Rawl-Pelion, SC)
Pepper Jam Vinaigrette (Manchester Farms-Columbia, SC)

SERVED PETITE ENTREE #1

Cedar Planked Trout (Sunburst Farms-Waynesville, NC)
Adzuki Grits (Adluh-Columbia, SC)
Pickled Corn (Sunny Creek Farms-Tryon, NC)
Blackberry Compote (Manchester Farms-Columbia, SC)

SERVED PETITE ENTREE #2

House-made Sausage Stuffed Chicken Breast (Greenbrier Farms-Easley, SC)
Carolina Gold Risotto (Carolina Plantation-Darlington, SC)
Kale and Turnip Green Agrodolce (Walter P. Rawl-Pelion, SC)
Vidalia Onion Chow Chow (Bland Farms-Glenville, GA)

SERVED DESSERT

Peach, Ginger, and Vanilla Bean Gelato Pop
Blueberry Sparkling Soda
Vanilla Madeline



We have a lot of clients who allow us to be the professionals and bring them event concepts, ideas and thoughts without pushing back much. They know that we've listened to them and we're really trying to deliver on what they're looking to provide for their guests.

— JERMAINE BOZIER, CLEMSON

“Texas Inspired” Tagline Guides SMU’s Catering Operation

• SMU CATERING •
TEXAS ★ INSPIRED

SMU has offered catering services on campus since 1998. Today its services lean heavily toward full-service sophisticated banquets and galas. However, their services include everything from punch and cookies to five-course dinners. SMU catering has been called upon by many distinguished celebrities, dignitaries and personalities such as The King and Queen of Spain, Desmond Tutu, the Dali Lama, both former Presidents George H. Bush and George W. Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Michael J. Fox, James Cameron, and Julie Andrews as well as many local community groups. Over the years, the income generated by the catering department has grown from \$1.5 million to more than \$5 million. Its biggest growth spurt came when it took over all catering for the campus’s basketball and football events.

GUIDING PHILOSOPHY

Texas Inspired. Most of the menus are customized and inspired by local merchants.

TYPES OF EVENTS CATERED

- Donor fundraisers
- Faculty and staff events, such as a president luncheon for 2,000
- Events for diplomats and ambassadors
- The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum
- On-campus weddings
- Corporate events
- Basketball events at the Moody Coliseum (12 suites and two clubs)
- Ford Stadium (34 suites and two clubrooms)



MENU CREATION PHILOSOPHY

The department works closely with its executive chef to creatively develop new menus for every event. Typically, they'll create several different menus per event and work with the clients to choose the one most tailored to their budget and needs. Sometimes, they conduct a tasting for the clients that are interested in contracting their services, so that there is an opportunity to adjust menu items to clients' specific tastes. This also allows clients to select their favorites among several different entrées, salads, appetizers, and desserts.



Dinner 350

BUTLER PASSED APPETIZERS

Wild Mushroom Bouchon
puffed pastry filled with wild mushrooms, machego cheese, and asparagus spears

Bite Size Shrimp & Corn Fritter
with spicy aioli

Braised Pork Belly Bites
with apple compote

TEXAS-SPANISH INSPIRED MENU

Texas Baby Greens with Seville Orange Vinaigrette

Texas Striped Bass
purple potato puree, fava beans, and sauce verte

Mesquite Smoked Grilled Tenderloin
jalapeño and Eagle Mountain Cheddar cheese stone ground grits, Swiss chard, rioja glaze

CHEESE COURSE

Drunken Goat, Branzos, & Smoked Dallas Mozzarella
house made cracker and Texas honey

BREAD BASKET

Famous mustang bread, olive sourdough bread, jalapeño cheese puff,
pan de horno served with whipped butter



We take care of managing the rental and linen companies as well as florists, if needed, so our clients don't have to. We do the hard work for them so they can enjoy their events and the experience.

— SCOTT RUBIN, SMU

“Best Talent in Town” Ensures High-Quality Catering at SHSU



In just five years, SHSU doubled its catering income. This growth is based on converting the department from a basic catering operation, dealing mainly with pre-made boxed items, to a premier service provider that offers its clients a one-stop catering shop—where food is prepared by professional chefs. Its profitability is achieved due to its high-end approach, with culinary creations, high-quality products, and a full-service offering.

GUIDING PHILOSOPHY

The catering department strives to hire top-notch chefs and support staff to deliver its superior services. That's why their philosophy is to hire the finest catering talent in town.

TYPES OF EVENTS CATERED

- High-end banquets and galas
- Large and small events at the president's home
- Private parties for the mayor with 5-course dinners
- Major weddings held in town
- Football tailgating events (suites and clubrooms)
- Picnic baskets and boxed lunches



MENU CREATION PHILOSOPHY

SHSU ensures it always hires highly creative people to develop unique culinary menus and fulfill its mission. They also utilize as much local fare as possible, in particular, fresh fish and seafood from the nearby Gulf of Mexico.



President's Gala

PASSED APPETIZER & OPEN BAR RECEPTION

Mini New Orleans Pan Fried Crab Cakes with Cajun Remoulade Sauce
Southern Style Buttermilk Fried Green Tomatoes with Horseradish Dill Sauce
Pistachio Crusted Goat Cheese Medallions
Pickled Ahi Tuna and Watermelon Bite

SERVED FIRST COURSE

Roasted Maine Lobster Bisque

SERVED SECOND COURSE

Fresh Butter Lettuce with Cayenne Candied Pecans, Danish Bleu Cheese, and Heirloom Tomatoes with Pomegranate Vinaigrette Dressing

SERVED THIRD COURSE - LAND AND SEA

Pan Seared Herb Crusted Hand Cut Filet with 2 Jumbo Shrimp Stuffed with Jumbo Lump Blue Crab
Roasted Garlic Mashed Potatoes with Vermont Sharp White Cheddar Cheese
Truffled Asparagus
Fresh Grilled French Bread



Over the years, we've had several very talented executive chefs and very strong sous chefs and talented assistants to help them. We work hard to find very creative, very innovative chefs that have good personalities, so they can communicate with our clients about the menus.

— BRAD BLACKBURN, SHSU

Campus Catering Best Practice Recommendations

How can your on-campus catering program achieve great results like Clemson, SMU, and SHSU? The institutions shared their best practices for running catering operations that satisfy a wide range of clients—and generate a significant, consistent stream of revenue for their universities.



TIP #1

HIRE THE BEST CHEFS.

SHSU is a firm believer that the professional experience of a catering chef will significantly impact the catering operation's success. High-quality, creative, and innovative culinary expertise lays the foundation for a successful and profitable operation.

Originally, the catering division at SHSU did not have an executive chef on site. After hiring an executive chef, the program's profits doubled. New chefs go through a rigorous hiring process that includes creating several dishes for the university's executives and presenting them in a formal tasting meal. Along with being experienced culinarians and menu designers, the chefs at SHSU require great personalities, because part of their role is to interact with and entertain guests. Also, these innovative executive chefs require support from strong sous chefs and talented assistants. These individuals are responsible for the planning and directing of food preparation in the kitchen, a critical part of any event.

TIP #2

OFFER FULL-SERVICE, ONE-STOP CATERING.

All three universities have developed their catering operation into full-service, one-stop shops, including sourcing everything from linens to flowers to entertainment, along with planning and preparing customized menus. They feel that going the extra mile to ensure an event is great from soup to decor ensures that they maintain a quality reputation and an optimized income stream. This is not necessarily common on all campuses.





WORK WITH CLIENTS' SPECIAL DESIRES.

TIP
#3

Hand in hand with being a full-service catering operation, the universities also work hard to fulfill clients' special requests—no matter how challenging. For example, SMU says that someone could call in the morning needing catering that day, and they would adjust their schedules to meet the need. According to Rubin: "We'll do whatever we can to keep our regular customers satisfied."

Bozier at Clemson said that the campus catering operation strives to take a "contemplative approach" to their services. They rely on their creative staff to help meet every challenge head on. "It's about listening to what the client is looking for and how to really bring our talents to the table to help make that work for them."

One of the biggest areas of special requests these days is around "healthy options," such as gluten-free, lactose-free and vegan menu options. Rubin at SMU says that if they know in advance, they can meet nearly every special menu request. "We have a designated place in the kitchen where we can make specialty food, so it's not impacted by the rest of the operation. This is a growing trend, so we're prepared to deliver what our customers request."

BE INNOVATIVE—THINK OUTSIDE THE LUNCH BOX!

TIP
#4

Tried-and-true practices have their value, but there's also something to be said for doing something that hasn't changed in 10 years in a new way. In other words, being innovative—or thinking outside the box lunch!

For example, Clemson prides itself on "not being afraid to grab the bull by the horns, and say, 'Let's do something no one's ever done before,'" stated Bozier. "Often innovation comes from just listening to our clients. They'll talk about wanting to do something that at first sounds outrageous. But then I remember that our brand promise is 'We Dream, We Do.' So I tell them 'Let's go for it.' That gives them the courage to be unique. It's amazing what you can come up with when you actually go to the drawing board and say, 'OK. What can we really do to make this happen?'"

"We have a responsibility to ensure that we're always thinking about our clients' desires if we want them to remember us for delivering a positive catering event experience."

TIP
#5**LEVERAGING THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE.**

All three universities use technology to help manage their catering operations. Some of the main tools mentioned include:

- **CaterTrax**—This technology tracks all catering events and customer service feedback and organizes all purchases, tasks and menus for every event. It also allows caterers to go back years and pull up the history of any event.
- **IQNavigator**—This technology is designed for hiring outsourced labor through a staffing agency. It gives catering operations the flexibility to hire staff on an event-by-event basis.
- **SocialTables**—This technology provides event design and room layout capabilities. It also integrates directly with CaterTrax® foodservice software.

TIP
#6**TRAINING THE TEAM FOR EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE.**

Training their teams is a vital component of catering success for the three campuses, whether they use a formalized staff training process or a less formal train-on-the-job approach. According to Bozier at Clemson, “the national team recently released onboarding guidelines for new associates, which has been very helpful.”

According to Blackburn at SHSU, “what we rely on most has been the strength of our catering directors to train our new recruits, a lot of whom are students. Our managers, who oversee the department, spend a lot of time training our talent.”

TIP
#7**PROMOTING CATERING SERVICES TO NEW AUDIENCES.**

Clemson is actively engaged in outreach efforts to promote its services to a wider audience. “Working with Aramark opens a lot of doors. Once they are open, we work hard to build relationships with folks using a lot of the tools in Aramark’s sales-based training program,” Bozier said. “We organize small meetings for prospects and introduce them to our menus and services. We’ll usually either invite them to lunch or to a small tasting table where we share a sampling of our dishes with them. These small, targeted meetings work the best for us in attracting new business.”



Is Your Campus Ready to Expand its Catering Operation – And Generate Additional Revenue?



Is your campus missing out on the exceptional, lucrative opportunity to add or expand your existing dining program into a full-blown catering operation that generates significant income? You can gain this valuable new revenue stream when you work with an experienced food service provider with catering expertise, like Aramark. The partner can help your campus become a leader in event catering thanks to a full menu of catering and event management support services—including a proven name in the industry, extensive dining options, reliable food quality, professional staff training and a cost-conscious catering approach.



**Student Experience is
More Than Food Service**

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