

# CULINARY CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Throughout history, society has never had a more diverse and accessible world of food at their fingertips. American food culture in particular has become a complex intersection of family tradition and global influence that is constantly redefining itself. In recent years, the social popularity of the hospitality industry has often reached celebrity status; its presence in our lives has grown accordingly. Modern society has made food available and accessible to us through a near infinite number of means, and left us with the question of: How can culinary arts and hospitality education both respond to and drive this demand?

The two-year college experience is uniquely tuned into providing excellence in culinary arts and hospitality education. Because food service and hospitality academics have inherently strong connections to the communities they serve, these programs can produce valuable amenities beyond the student/faculty population, and benefit the greater public.

The following is an exploration and analysis of modern culinary trends, and how design can be the connective tissue between the community and educational collective.



## The Culture of American Food

Modern American society is presently living through what is most likely the most complex point in its history of food culture and hospitality. The demand for diversity and choice has never been higher, especially among the millennial and younger generations. As a society, we are cultivating more than a simple market demand: we are quite literally changing the landscape of our everyday lives.

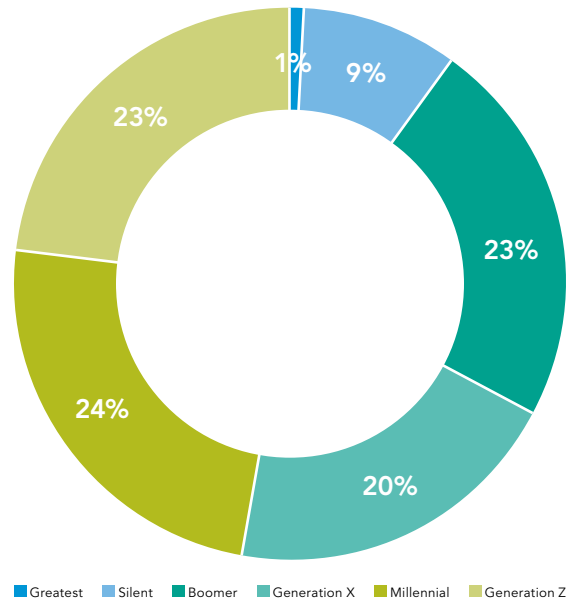
This revolution is fueled by a complex series of elements, many of which are found on our television screens. Hospitality and food preparation have been steadily elevated to a celebrity status, with some chefs and restaurateurs as glorified as athletes and film stars. Popularizing cooking has created new trends and demands that are impacting everything from agribusiness to our dining room tables. Our technology and our food experiences are also closely tied together. Social media has especially taken hold of our love for dining and as the technology to capture our experiences advances, so does the demand for fresh and exciting new culinary choices. Combined with social media's sharing of what we are eating and where, cooking and hospitality have never been a more visible part of our culture.

Another major shift is taking place among younger generations: the rising demand for natural and unprocessed food. In a 2017 survey by the National Restaurant Association, eight of the top 10 culinary concept trends involve locally sourced and sustainable ingredients and/or another socially conscious practice.<sup>1</sup> Young people are concerned not only with the food on their plate, but also the history of the ingredients before they reach the plate. This trend indicates that a cross-section of consumers are not only becoming more conscious of our personal health, but also the health of the environment and the sustainability of agriculture in general.

Entire generations are seeking more responsible choices, especially concerning health and the food industry. The best way to navigate this terrain is through education. The community college experience has the ability to actively engage, and even lead, this cultural movement.

FIGURE 1

Generations in the Workplace



“There is huge progress being made and it’s largely because the industry is seeing that millennials are not going to be spending their money on processed foods. It’s exciting that people aren’t just eating and talking about their meals, but thinking critically about food policy, food distribution, food equality, food deserts, all that stuff.”

Eve Turow Paul, author of “A Taste of Generation Yum: How the Millennial Generation’s Love for Organic Fare, Celebrity Chefs and Microbrews Will Make or Break the Future of Food.”

## Cooking Up Opportunity in Community Colleges

The community college academic mission falls into a unique place within the greater educational system. There are many goals built into this model, all of which are born from a typical institution's need to accommodate a very broad student base. But at its core, a community college exists to provide opportunity to the region it resides within. In order to become a true amenity to the region overall, an institution must engage the greater population. Culinary arts and hospitality programs are keenly oriented to accelerating this objective in educational and cultural ways. Typical programs tend to include food service components that are open to the public, which naturally tunes them toward engaging the communities that they reside in. These relationships have limitless potential to benefit the educational mission and the local populous, but most importantly provide students with access to professional experience.

"A number of our guests are local food/beverage operators and hotel owners and direct connections have developed and created job opportunities for students and graduates."

Mark Mistriner, C.E.C., A.A.C., Division Chair of Hospitality, Tourism, and Culinary Arts, Niagara County Community College

To create a partnership with the population of any region, a hospitality/culinary program should be located in a place that promotes access and visibility. If the campus is not immersed in an active part of the town or city, it is most likely not the best home for a culinary or hospitality program. In just the past few years, we have seen multiple colleges relocating their culinary programs into denser urban areas and/or creating satellite campuses. Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan; Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York; and Niagara Community College in Niagara Falls, New York have all developed satellite facilities in their region's urban center. The benefits to this concept are two-fold:

1. Many cities are undergoing revitalizations to their urban areas. The development of a satellite campus is an opportunity to aid this effort and be a visible part of the urban renewal.
2. Any program functions that are geared to serve the public - such as restaurants and cafés - are more visible and accessible, helping increase positive revenue opportunities for the program.

"Relocating our program to an urban setting has allowed us to be closer to our industry partners, which in turn has increased our workforce training and continuing education offerings, as well as raising the community's exposure to our retail outlets for breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

Mark Mistriner, C.E.C., A.A.C., Division Chair of Hospitality, Tourism, and Culinary Arts, Niagara County Community College

To ensure these satellite facilities are successful, proper market research needs to be conducted to align the goals and services of the program to regional demands. Successful community engagement can only be achieved by understanding the local trends and establishing a clear target demographic. The public components of any program, such as restaurants and cafés, are naturally going to be limited to specific cultural food styles and atmospheres. These styles define everything from the ambience and décor of the establishment, all the way to what ends up on the customer's plate. Designing to meet the region's restaurant trends can only be done through diligent research and, when conducted properly, maximizes income potential for the program. The income potential built into these public venues is beyond restaurant/café service, and can encompass an entire academic facility by strategically designing for flexibility. Restaurant, café and other public programs that are typically part of hospitality and culinary arts education offer students access to real-time experience. These connections can be maximized through design.



## Niagara County Community College Niagara Falls Culinary Institute

The Niagara Falls Culinary Institute is an 85,000 sf, state-of-the-art mixed-use hospitality facility composed of a diverse series of program components. Designed to serve both students and the community, the Institute is home to several publicly accessible functions, including food service platforms, retail space and family entertainment.

The design process was a close collaboration between the college, local municipalities and CannonDesign, motivated by a strong educational mission paired with urban renewal. The Culinary Institute transformed an abandoned shopping mall that stood vacant for nearly 30 years, becoming major component to the landscape of downtown Niagara Falls,. Since its opening, the institute has enriched the Niagara Community College vision, and created valuable partnerships with the local tourism and hospitality community.

**Project Completion**  
September 2012

**Total Occupied Levels**  
3

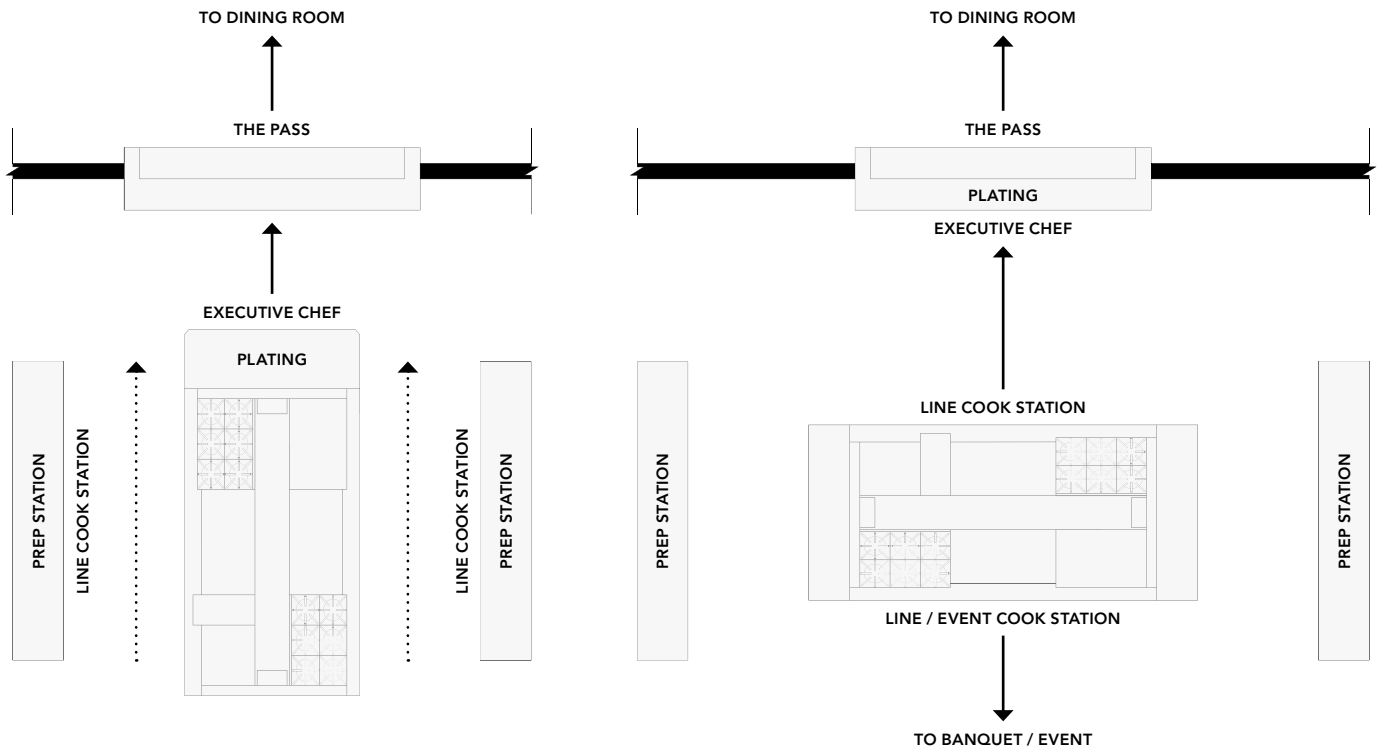
**Project Cost**  
\$26M

**Project Type**  
Renovation

**Total Gross Area**  
85,000 Square Feet

### Program Composition: Culinary Teaching and Support

- **5 Culinary Teaching Labs**
  - Garde Manger, 1,700 sf
  - Saucier, 1,620 sf
  - Pastry, 1,200 sf
  - General Culinary, 1,580 sf
  - General Culinary 1,580 sf
- **1 Culinary Production Lab**
  - Produces product for sale to local partners
- **Storage and Ware washing**
  - 3,320 sf
    - Core centralized storage/freezer/cooler areas
    - Satellite local storage spaces at each lab
    - Ware washing is local to each food service lab
- **Specialty Culinary Teaching Spaces**
  - Ice Carving Lab, 590 sf
  - Mixology Lab, 600 sf
  - Wine Tasting Lab, 550 sf
  - Chocolate Room, 90 sf
  - Culinary Theater, 2,700 sf
    - Fixed tiered seating for 100
    - Culinary instruction station
- **Public Food Service Components**
  - Fine Dining Restaurant, 6,200 sf
    - Includes front and back of house
  - Pastry and Coffee Shop, 500 sf
  - Delicatessen, 500 sf
  - Tourist and Guest Cooking Center, 2,100 sf
    - Cooking demo and instruction center for general public
  - Atrium Lobby and Event Space, 6,000 sf
  - Barnes and Noble College Bookstore, 2,500 sf
- **General Academic Spaces**
  - 4 Classrooms, 1,000 sf each
  - Small Business Development Center, 610 sf
  - Student Served, 650 sf
  - Faculty and Administration Offices, 7,280 sf
  - Computer Lab, 1,000 sf
  - Open Study, 2,500 sf
    - Multiple closed and open spaces
  - Library and Resource, 410 sf



## Designing for Culinary Education Environments

### Flexible Environments are Key

Flexible and multi-function designs unlock many hidden opportunities in culinary academic environments. Through experience-based design, culinary labs can achieve an academic mission along with supporting community events of many sizes. This multi-use capability is centered upon symmetry and how it plays into function and capabilities.

Symmetrical lab designs are, quite simply, central cooking islands flanked on both sides by student preparation/work stations. Many individualized layouts exist within this concept, allowing for plenty of customization to align with user preferences, but the overall model promotes three objectives: faculty supervision, student flexibility to work in teams and interface between prep and heat, and dividing the lab to serve two simultaneous functions.

### Considerations for Lab Design and Class Size

Industry standards for lab class sizes range from 12 to 20 students, with the most common classes being 16. Any higher than an absolute maximum of 20 prohibits the professor from adequately providing individual instruction and limits proper supervision. Although class sizes are affected by the overall size of the program and other variables, the 16 student per lab average best aligns with teaching and learning for most culinary academic modules. Enhanced technology capabilities push the lab environments even further and increase student's ability to interact with the professor. Designing labs around this typical class size results in culinary labs that also possess the firepower to function as an event production kitchen. Beyond food preparation, the symmetrical lab design breaks this down further and directly engages the event guests. Two sided environments can then become a back of house/front of house set up during events, whereas, the back is geared for event production and the front is used for guest showcasing, tours and sampling. This immerses the community in the event and facility in a way that engages all five senses and imbeds a lasting impression in any guest or patron, which is the true goal in creating these multi-function spaces.

### Creating Contemporary Facility Layouts

How the multi-functional culinary spaces are organized within the overall building is the key to unifying the program's academic mission and its community engagement. Contemporary culinary learning environments should aim to promote visual connections into and out of cooking lab spaces. Food production is an amazing process, and showcasing it for others is a key component in culinary academics. Incorporating common gathering spaces can provide nodes to organize labs around, resulting in public space that visually connects directly into culinary space. The remaining core functional spaces are traditional classrooms and storage.

Typical culinary arts and hospitality programs also involve a number of non-lab credits and require classrooms to conduct these sessions. Classrooms should be a part of any satellite facility, culinary or otherwise, so that the full suite of credits can potentially be fulfilled without reliance on the main campus. This also allows the college to conduct other, non-culinary related classes in the building and further promote the venue.

### Don't Forget About Storage

Product movement is the last major factor to a culinary facility. Designed correctly, product receiving, storage and distribution should operate smoothly and remain in the background. Designed incorrectly, poor product management can bring an entire operation to a halt. A major question during culinary facility design is commonly centralized vs. de-centralized storage. Do you bring ingredients to one or two large areas, break down and distribute from there, or do you break down immediately after product is received and provide local storage for each food preparation space? Both techniques possess their own pros and cons. In the end, a workflow that begins with products arriving at receiving, moving to a storage area, then arriving in the food preparation space tend to favor a centralized storage design.

But collecting all ingredients into one to two larger areas provides benefits decentralized storage does not: control and management over the product, and energy savings by consolidating cooling and freezing. When working with a centralized storage operation, storage management staff are often employed. This individual(s) will control and catalogue all incoming and outgoing products and thereby securely manage these assets. Professors and students develop orders that get sent to this person and they prepare the list in advance of a class or function. This usually results in the most secure and efficient form of ingredient movement and distribution. In addition to this, a smaller number of large coolers/freezers is both more efficient in terms of energy use as well as spatial use than many smaller coolers/freezers distributed across the space [or whatever having a smaller number of large coolers is better than].

"Is there any practice less selfish?  
Any labor less alienated? Any time  
less wasted than preparing  
something delicious and nourishing  
for the people you love?"

Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*

## Conclusion

American society is presently experiencing the most exciting and innovative time in the history of its food culture. This resurgence of interest shows no indication of slowing in the future and continues to grow across multiple generations. There is great opportunity for community colleges to play a critical role in sustaining the industry's growth, forge new paths and create the future's trends. To reach these goals, design is the mechanism that can fluidly mix education, community and people together to capture the energy of the advancing culinary world. Demands change quickly, and so must our approach. Flexibility in our physical designs are key, but the most important element is a forward thinking and nimble thought process. With this attitude, we can help to create positive change across a landscape that stretches from a single meal experience to the revitalization of our cities.

### About the Author

Peter McCarthy, AIA, LEED AP, is a registered architect, currently practicing in Buffalo, NY. Much of his career has been focused on higher education design, with a focus on culinary education and food service. His design approach draws upon the parallels between culinary creativity and architectural design to produce powerful moments that converge over the most instinctive parts of our lives. Peter believes that design excellence placed in the hands of the hungry consumer is the best place to enact positive momentum towards a healthy, sustainable food and agricultural system.



### References

1. National Restaurant Association. (2018). What's Hot 2018 Culinary Forecast. Retrieved from [https://www.restaurant.org/Restaurant/media/Restaurant/Sitelmages/News%20and%20Research/Whats%20Hot/Whats\\_Hot\\_Culinary\\_Forecast\\_2018.pdf](https://www.restaurant.org/Restaurant/media/Restaurant/Sitelmages/News%20and%20Research/Whats%20Hot/Whats_Hot_Culinary_Forecast_2018.pdf)

### Resources referenced for FIGURE 1:

knoema. (16 December 2016). US Population by Age and Generation. Retrieved from <https://knoema.com/infographics/egydzc/us-population-by-age-and-generation>

### About CannonDesign

CannonDesign is an integrated, global design firm that unites a dynamic team of strategists, futurists, researchers, architects, engineers and industry specialists, driven by a singular goal — to help solve our client's and society's greatest challenges.

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