



Innovative
Hospitality Solutions

Transforming Campus Dining Services

**STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR OPERATIONAL
EXCELLENCE IN COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES
AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

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Innovative Hospitality Solutions (IHS), is a leading management advisory firm specializing in transforming on-site food and hospitality programs across corporate, healthcare, senior living, and educational sectors. Since 2006, IHS has been dedicated to educating and inspiring organizations to elevate their hospitality services, enhancing experiences that align with their mission and culture.

IHS offers tailored advisory services, operational oversight/support, and strategic program partnership for on-site services. Our evidence-based solutions drive improved satisfaction, significant cost savings, and sustainable results for our clients. At IHS, we believe in creative collaboration, combining diverse expertise and passion to deliver innovative solutions that achieve exceptional outcomes.

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Industry Outlook.



The New Expectations of Campus Dining.

Industry Outlook.

College campuses have always been gathering places—but today's students are reshaping what it means to gather, to eat, and to belong.

The New Expectations

Chapter one.



Across the country, students are arriving with elevated expectations formed by digital convenience, health consciousness, and cultural inclusivity. They want dining that feels relevant. Not institutional. Not obligatory. They want options: quick grab-and-go lunches, locally sourced ingredients, plant-forward choices, and social spaces that reflect who they are. And they expect it all to work.

Dining programs must now balance culinary innovation with operational precision, all while navigating economic pressures, staffing shortages, and aging facilities. Meanwhile, institutions are asking their dining programs to step up and reinforce retention, support wellness, model sustainability, and deliver a financial return along the way.



These trends are not temporary. They are structural. They require transforming the role of hospitality on campus from a cost center to a strategic platform. At Innovative Hospitality Solutions (IHS), we've seen how dining can evolve from reactive to responsive, and from operational to aspirational. The difference lies in understanding what students want, how teams operate, and how institutions measure value. We help you bring those pieces together in a way that's uniquely yours, while building on the foundation of insight, collaboration, and performance.

Because in higher education today, the dining experience is not a footnote—it's a front door.

The IHS Impact

Chapter two.

Redefining Dining Through Partnership



There's a difference between advising and solving. At Innovative Hospitality Solutions, we go beyond offering recommendations – we help campuses execute bold, thoughtful solutions rooted in your mission, your students, and your operational realities.

For nearly 20 years, IHS has partnered with colleges and universities across the country to reimagine what's possible in campus dining. We are an independent advisory and operational oversight/support firm that's proudly objective, strategically embedded, and outcome-driven. We aren't an outsourcing provider, and our goal is not to fit you into someone else's model. Our goal is to build a framework that fits you.

Strategy is just the beginning. We stay engaged through implementation. We support your team. We manage transitions. We lead when needed and stand beside you when it matters most. That's because transformation isn't just about planning—it's about momentum, accountability, and trust. We work with institutions who outsource. With those looking to hold providers accountable. With those considering a new model altogether. In each case, our role is to listen deeply, challenge respectfully, and align operational improvements with campus values.

The result? Dining programs that drive satisfaction, support wellness, enhance institutional identity, and—yes—improve financial performance. We call it the IHS Impact. Our clients call it a partnership they can count on.

Independent by Design. Integrated by Nature.

Project Advising That Drives Institutional Alignment

For many institutions, deciding to outsource dining services is one of the most high-stakes decisions they'll make. It's not just about vendors and contracts—it's about culture, expectations, and how the campus defines its relationship to hospitality.

At IHS, we approach project advising as both a procurement process and a transformational journey. We start with a conversation. Then we listen. Deeply. We explore your pain points, your ambitions, and the nuance that makes your campus different. From there, we lead with clarity and care. Whether you're considering outsourcing for the first time or looking to renegotiate an existing relationship, we guide every stage of the process with precision and transparency.

Our Advisory Services Include:

- **Operational Assessments** to clearly define your vision for your dining services program, and identify performance gaps, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities.
- **Financial Benchmarking & Forecasting** to model impact, mitigate risk, and set clear expectations.
- **RFP Strategy & Development** to ensure proposals from outsourcing companies address your vision and identify priorities in a clear and transparent manner, and that the ensuing selection process is thorough, fair, and tailored to your needs.
- **Contract Negotiation Support** to align terms with your goals, establish operator accountability measures, and protect your long-term interests.
- **Transition Planning & Oversight** to ensure continuity, accountability, and a seamless rollout.



Reframing Campus Success in Dining: Project Advising

We understand the complexities of bringing in an outside operator. We also know what effective partnerships look like, and how to build and maintain them. Most importantly, we know that your decision will shape not just the dining experience, but the daily life of your students, faculty, and staff.

That's why our project advising focuses just as strongly on institutional alignment as it does on contractor selection. After all, success isn't just who you choose. It's how well they're positioned to succeed within your ecosystem.



How One Operator Increased Satisfaction by 70%

Chapter four.

How One Campus Partnered with IHS to Increase Student Satisfaction.



A Case Study



Transforming Student Experience at an IHS Partner Institution

When our partner, the institution, began hearing mounting concerns about their dining program—from students, faculty, and even prospective families—they knew it was time to take action. The food wasn't the only issue. It was the experience: long wait times, inconsistent service, lackluster menu rotation, and a general sense that the dining halls weren't keeping pace with the rest of campus innovation.

The institution didn't simply want to switch providers and hope for the best. They wanted a partner who could help them understand what wasn't working and would then develop a roadmap for change. That's when they brought in IHS.



Rebuilding Trust, Reshaping Experience

The Opportunity

Student satisfaction scores had dropped significantly. While the administration recognized the provider's operational limitations, there was no internal framework to evaluate contract performance or implement improvement strategies. The dining program lacked data, structure, and a forward-thinking plan.

The Solutions

IHS led a campus-wide operational and financial assessment, engaging directly with students, leadership, and frontline teams. Our insights uncovered key areas for improvement—from food quality and presentation to dining flow and communication breakdowns. Rather than just deliver a report, however, we activated a full-scale improvement initiative.

We partnered with the dining vendor to create accountability structures, adjusted service standards, and introduced CrossCheck QA to provide independent performance evaluation and coaching.

To lock in these new commitments around accountability and operational excellence, IHS negotiated contract revisions with the operator that clearly defined future expectations to include performance measures and processes for addressing substandard performance.

Services Delivered

- Defining the institutional vision for dining services
- Operational and financial benchmarking
- Voice of the student research
- Culinary and service audits
- A framework for provider accountability
- Ongoing coaching and quality assurance oversight

Outcomes

Within one academic year:

- 70% increase in student satisfaction scores
- Reenergized campus perception of dining services
- Increased collaboration between administration and provider through IHS-led quarterly business reviews
- Renewed student trust in campus leadership

This transformation was about more than the development of better food and service. It was about creating a system of accountability, listening to student voices, and empowering operators to deliver on their promises. For our partner institution, it became a model for what's possible when dining is treated as a strategic asset.



IHS didn't just provide recommendations—they stayed with us through the process, helping both our leadership and our operator get better. It's rare to find a partner who truly understands both the big picture and the day-to-day details.

— **Campus Operations Leader**

Build Proven Foundations: Operational Excellence in Dining Services



Empowering Dining Programs to Thrive

It's vital for institutions to retain control of their dining services while preserving culture and maintaining a direct relationship with the campus community. Maintaining this balance in today's environment is no small task. It requires vision, consistency, and operational excellence across culinary, compliance, staffing, and service experience. A breakdown in any one of these areas creates dissatisfaction on the part of students, visitors, and parents, harming an institution's reputation and revenue.

At IHS, we help universities and private schools elevate their internal programs through dedicated support and structured resources (people, tools, technology) to introduce operational excellence to their program. We don't come in with a one-size-fits-all playbook. We don't replace your team — we become a strategic partner that supports the growth and success of your team. We help you build infrastructure, inspire frontline engagement, and move from reactive to proactive operations.

We know what good looks like. Let us help you build it, sustain it, and master it.



A Day in the Life of Partnership



Picture this: a student texts a peer to meet for lunch, walks into the dining hall, and is immediately greeted by a smiling team member. They head to the sauté station that they themselves helped vote into place, thanks to this university's new student feedback initiative. This student chooses from freshly prepped vegetables, builds a bowl exactly to their liking, and sits with their peers.

Following service, the general manager is in the back office reviewing dashboard trends from the last CrossCheck QA evaluation, planning the next staff coaching session. Later that day, the Director of Dining meets with the campus CFO to walk through their latest real-time financial performance metrics and upcoming capital needs.

That's what operational excellence looks like when IHS is by your side.

Chapter five.

What We Deliver

- **A Clarified Vision for Dining Services** We clarify your institutional aspirations and vision for your dining services program.
- **A Detailed Roadmap** We assess current dining operations, mind the gaps between your vision and today's reality, and map out a detailed operational and financial plan to bridge those gaps.
- **Leadership Coaching & Daily Oversight** We develop and support your campus dining leaders with the tools, technology, industry insights, and training they need to manage and grow their teams confidently.
- **Culinary & Menu Development** From allergen awareness to scratch cooking systems, we ensure food is safe, deeply satisfying, on trend, and reflective of your student body's preferences.
- **Financial Performance** We review budget variances on a regular basis (monthly or quarterly) to support spend management and revenue generation to ensure budgets are achieved.
- **Labor Planning & Workforce Development** We help build stable, motivated teams with practical solutions for training, retention, and shift coverage.
- **Branding, Marketing & Merchandising** We turn meals into experiences and dining spaces into destinations students talk about.
- **Financial & Operational Performance Tracking** We install KPI systems that measure what matters and use that data to drive every improvement.

Beyond the Playbook: Real Partnership. Real Impact.



We don't take over. We build up. We work within your framework, alongside your team, to identify blind spots, clarify expectations, and help you move from good to great with confidence. Whether it's redesigning your menu cycle, addressing budget variances, improving student satisfaction or addressing measuring audit compliance, we bring a calm, capable presence that helps campus dining programs perform like best-in-class brands.

Why it Works



Turning Operational Programs Into Strategic Revenue Streams

There's a long-held belief in higher education that dining services are a necessary expense—something to be subsidized, managed, and tolerated. That's not how we see it. With the right support and strategy, campus dining can become a self-sustaining, revenue-generating engine.

At IHS, we've helped every one of our higher education clients increase income from their dining program. This success doesn't come from raising prices indiscriminately or cutting corners, but by unlocking unrealized value in places others overlook.

Where We Find Opportunity

There are no campus dining painpoints we haven't encountered. Sometimes it's inefficient labor models or underutilized retail concepts. Sometimes it's outdated pricing strategies, poor merchandising, or inventory losses. Often, it's a lack of alignment between financial goals and the day-to-day decisions being made in the kitchen and on the line.

We bring a fresh lens, backed by experience and data, to help you identify new revenue channels, manage costs more effectively, and position your program as an asset instead of a burden.

Dining Services as an Income Generator

What it Looks Like in Practice

- **Retail Optimization:** We help campuses redesign underperforming retail venues by updating menus, branding, and service models to attract more traffic and increase check averages.
- **Pricing Strategy:** We conduct price sensitivity analyses and market comparisons to ensure your dining program is competitive while still financially sustainable.
- **Contract Review:** For outsourced campuses, we evaluate your agreements to ensure they're structured for mutual success and eliminate hidden cost leakage.
- **Operational Efficiency:** We build staffing models that align with peak periods, reduce waste, and increase productivity without burnout.

A Real-World Result

At one regional public university, our analysis revealed that the campus café—located in a central academic quad—was missing a prime revenue opportunity. Dated design, a confusing menu, and long prep times were turning students away. We worked with the culinary team to redesign the menu around speed, freshness, and mobile order pickup. We also advised on point-of-sale layout, marketing, and digital signage. Within six months, revenue had increased by 42%, and student satisfaction scores rose alongside it.

A Smarter Way Forward

When you align your dining strategy with institutional goals, you start to see improvements in student feedback and boosts to your bottom line. Dining doesn't have to be a drain. With IHS, it can be a driver.

Quality Isn't a Guess. It's a Measurement.

In a world where student expectations evolve by the semester, and food service programs are expected to deliver more with less, maintaining consistent quality is no small feat. Yet for many institutions, the only performance feedback they receive comes in the form of student complaints—or worse, silence.

CrossCheck was created to change that.

Born out of our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement, CrossCheck is an independent quality assurance and contract compliance company that helps institutions measure what matters—and act on it.

A New Standard for Accountability

We've seen what happens when a dining program lacks objective oversight. Expectations drift. Service fluctuates. Contracts go unchecked. As a result, the student experience quietly suffers until it's too late to reverse the damage.

CrossCheck puts a stop to that drift. We bring a structured, third-party lens to your dining operation, evaluating more than 300 key indicators across service, food quality, sanitation, marketing, and operational readiness. Our assessments, utilizing our proprietary technology, go far beyond a checklist; they're dynamic, detailed, and designed to guide action. They're based on industry standards, regulatory requirements and customized to reflect your vision for your dining services program.



Elevating Standards: The CrossCheck Approach

How It Works



Every CrossCheck engagement begins with a custom assessment plan, aligned to your specific goals, contract requirements, and operating model. We conduct unannounced, in-person evaluations, capturing detailed observations and photo documentation. Within 48 hours, you receive a full digital report that's been scored, visualized, and prioritized.

Our team then walks through the results with you and your dining operator. We don't just report—we coach. We help your teams understand the “why” behind each score, and support them in closing gaps quickly and sustainably.

Key Evaluation Areas:

- Food Quality & Temperature
- Cleanliness & Sanitation
- Customer Experience & Staff Engagement
- Marketing & Merchandising
- Administrative & Contractual Compliance

Tiers of Support

CrossCheck offers three service levels to match your goals and internal capacity:

- Silver: Baseline audits and clear action planning
- Gold: Dashboard access, ongoing trend reporting, and implementation check-ins
- Platinum: Re-evaluations, leadership coaching, and strategic consulting layered in

Why It Matters

At a partner institution, we implemented CrossCheck alongside IHS consulting, which resulted in a 70% increase in student satisfaction scores in one academic year. Our client made massive strides in both service recovery and culture shift. Dining managers started leading with clarity. Team members knew the expectations. Students felt seen and heard.

That's the power of consistent, independent evaluation: it transforms operations from good intention to great execution.

Learn more at crosscheckqa.com



The Dining Table as a Strategic Touchpoint

The role of campus dining has never been more complex—or more critical. In the past, food services were largely considered operational: meals to serve, calories to count, lines to move. Today, they sit at the intersection of experience, wellness, inclusion, and institutional brand.

To stay relevant, institutions must understand the social, behavioral, and economic forces reshaping dining expectations, and be prepared to respond with agility and intention.

1. Students Expect Flexibility and Personalization

From customizable bowls and dietary transparency to mobile ordering and all-day access, Gen Z isn't interested in fixed formats. They want options, and they want them in a convenient format. Programs that cling to rigid service models risk alienating a generation raised on customization and instant gratification.

→ 71% of Gen Z students prefer grab-and-go or customizable dining formats over traditional models.

2. Wellness Isn't a Trend. It's a Standard.

Nutrition-forward menus, mental health awareness, and clean ingredient transparency have moved from niche to norm. Students are asking more questions about sourcing, allergens, and how food supports their lifestyle. The institutions that answer thoughtfully will win back trust and loyalty.

→ 92% of students say food quality and service are top influencers in their overall satisfaction with campus life.



Industry Trends

3. Dining Is a Brand Statement

What students eat and how they feel about it reflects directly on the institution's values. The inclusive dining experiences that respect cultural dietary needs, offer plant-forward choices, and create social connection are the ones that reinforce a sense of belonging.

More than ever, dining is seen as a measure of how well the institution sees and serves its community.



4. Labor Shortages and Inflation Aren't Going Anywhere

Campus dining teams face the uphill battle of recruiting and retaining staff amid wage inflation, while managing budgets impacted by supply chain volatility. Institutions must support dining leaders with smart systems, coaching, and data—otherwise, even the best food program will struggle to perform.

→ The average turnover cost for one foodservice employee exceeds \$5,800.

5. Sustainability Demands Are Growing

Students care deeply about sustainability initiatives such as compostable packaging and local sourcing. Achieving these types of environmental goals without compromising cost or consistency requires thoughtful design and operational innovation. Institutions must stop treating sustainability as an add-on and start embedding it into strategy.

What This Means for You

The landscape is changing—but so is the opportunity. With the right partner, your dining program can become a competitive advantage, a cultural heartbeat, and a trusted platform for student experience.

That's what IHS delivers. Not a service. A strategy for what's next.

What it Means for You



The Impact: The Benefit of Partnership

Chapter nine.



What It Feels Like to Work With IHS

The reason 90% of IHS clients come back to us for future engagements? We don't disappear after we deliver results. We stay with you, we roll up our sleeves, and we treat your program like it's our own.

When you partner with IHS, you're not outsourcing your strategy—you're gaining a dedicated ally who understands what it takes to drive change and sustain momentum. We embed with your team, align with your leadership, and advocate for your students. You'll never wonder where we stand, because we'll be standing right beside you.

Our Promise in Action

You bring the vision. We bring the experience to make it real.

Together, we build dining programs that:

- Attract and retain students
- Improve satisfaction and engagement
- Emphasize quality and variety of menu options
- Optimize financial performance
- Create operational consistency
- Foster a culture of hospitality, accountability, and pride

By the Numbers:

- 100% of IHS higher education clients have increased dining program income
- 70% increase in student satisfaction at Stevens Institute of Technology
- 300+ annual quality assurance assessments conducted through CrossCheck
- 90% client retention rate across our education portfolio

At Innovative Hospitality Solutions, our greatest metric of success is more than financial—it's the moment when a dining program begins to operate with clarity, confidence, and pride.

The true impact of partnership is when your students feel cared for, your teams feel supported, and your outcomes speak for themselves.



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