

# Special Dietary Needs Profile: Oswego

Like many schools across the country, the State University of New York (SUNY) Oswego has a number of students who have special dietary needs.

"I have about 40 students who have special dietary needs," said Sarah Formoza, registered dietitian with Auxiliary Services.

When students report to Formoza that they have a special dietary need, she sends them a profile to complete that helps her get to know their needs. After the profile is completed, a meeting is set up at the dining hall the student will use most.

"At the meeting are myself, the student and the manager in that building," she said. "We sit down and get some dietary history on them, get an idea of some foods that they like. Then it all depends on what the allergy is. I can use gluten-free as an example, because about half of those 40 students are on a gluten-free diet. That one is huge. I will show them the

special gluten-free area, and we will do a tour of the dining room, and sometimes introduce them to the kitchen staff and the cooks. We will go through the menu and see if they are able to just eat off of our menu, or if maybe we need to accommodate them otherwise."

If the student is unable to eat off the regular menu, the chefs will prepare special meals. "In the past I have done special menus for students," said Formoza. "I try to work with what we have available. That only happens a couple of times. I have a student now who has severe food allergies, and we do a special menu for him. We prepare it separately, and get in a few products for him."

For those students requiring a gluten-free diet, a designated area is available in each dining center. "On our website, we have a document of gluten-free options," she said. "It will tell you that in our gluten-free area, we have bagels, breads, snacks like granola bars, brownies, cereals. We have pretzels, hamburger buns."

Outside of the designated gluten-free area, students can order gluten-free meals. "We have quinoa pasta, chicken tenders, meatballs, ravioli, pizza and mac and cheese; some of the common things they couldn't have," said Formoza. "They can decide when they go in, but they will have to wait 20-30 minutes, or they can call ahead."

Dining does not use separate pans in most cases to prepare the meals. "The research that I did said that as long it is properly sanitized and cleaned, that there wouldn't be any gluten particles left over," she said. "Some buildings have special colanders for pasta because that is one source where you can have leftover particles. At the gluten-free area, they have

special toasters just for gluten-free students. Otherwise, the staff is trained and they are aware of the cross-contamination, and when they are preparing something, they stop what they are doing, wash their hands and change their gloves. They are conscious of doing that, and making sure they are getting new clean pans."

For those with nut allergies, items are labeled. "If we have entrees or anything on the line, the cooks will have a list from me of items that have nuts, and they will put out a red sign that says 'contains nuts,'" said Formoza, "Just because that is the more severe case, I want to make sure we are covered."

While most of the meals are prepared by the culinary staff, Dining also purchases a number of pre-made products for those with special dietary needs, including waffles, cereals and snack items.

They have had a great deal of success with products from HomeFree. "They are completely allergen free," she said. "It is not only catering to those with food



SUNY Oswego makes a number of gluten-free foods available for students.



allergies, students who are health conscious, or for whatever reason. They taste great. I try not to refer to them as gluten-free cookies because it may shy people away from it. They look very different."

She continued, "We put them out in a bowl. We used to only put them out when we had cookies on the menu, and then we started putting them out at every meal because they loved them so much. We put them in the gluten-free area in case a student doesn't feel comfortable because of cross-contamination. The original intent was for gluten-free, and then it kind of exploded with all students liking them."

While Formoza is only aware of the 40 students who have approached her, she is sure there are more out there. "There are some who don't let us know. I go to all of the orientations and other events to let them know, but I am sure there are more. One reason that I don't know all of the students is because they have been dealing with allergies their whole lives, and already know what they can and can't eat."

—OCH