

Program Review

Executive Summary

Baking & Culinary

Majors Reviewed:

- *Baking & Pastry Arts, A.A.S.*
- *Culinary Arts Technology, A.A.S.*
- *Culinary Applications, Certificate*
- *Professional Baking, Certificate*

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Pennsylvania
College of Technology
A Penn State Affiliate

Academic programming related to food preparation and food service management has a long and distinguished history at Penn College, dating back to the late 1960s. The Culinary Arts Technology (AAS) and Baking and Pastry Arts (AAS) degrees strongly align with the College's mission of providing hands-on, applied technical education that leads directly to meaningful employment opportunities. Together, these programs exemplify the College's vision of being a nationally recognized leader in applied technology education through industry-relevant curriculum, experiential learning opportunities, and exceptional student outcomes.

The Baking and Pastry Arts program and the Culinary Arts program both serve as ambassadors for the College through extensive public engagement and community involvement. Prospective students, employers, advisory committee members, alumni, and community partners are regularly welcomed through experiences at the Le Jeune Chef Restaurant and various campus events. Faculty and students consistently contribute to high-profile events and activities that generate positive recognition for the College, including the Little League World Series, the Kentucky Derby, the Visiting Chef Series, the PA Farm Show Culinary Connections, College celebrations and galas, golf classics, and many other events. These experiences not only showcase student talent and professionalism but also strengthen industry and community partnerships.

The programs feature state-of-the-art labs and equipment reflective of the environments graduates will encounter in their professional careers. Faculty and staff remain committed to continuously reviewing emerging technologies, industry standards, and marketplace trends to ensure facilities, curriculum, and instructional methods remain current and responsive to workforce needs. The programs are supported by experienced and highly qualified faculty who have achieved national recognition as experts in their respective fields. Multiple opportunities for service learning, applied experiences, and industry engagement further enhance student experience and contribute to graduate success.

Student outcomes within the baking and culinary programs remain strong, with students continuing to demonstrate success academically and professionally through consistent graduation, placement, and experiential learning outcomes. Retention within the programs fluctuated during the review period, particularly during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted enrollment and persistence trends across higher education and the hospitality industry nationally. Recent cohorts, however, demonstrate encouraging stabilization and improvement, particularly within the Baking and Pastry Arts program. Retention rates in baking have historically ranged at rates above the College retention rate, while culinary retention has generally remained between on par or slightly below the College retention rate, reflecting national trends within culinary education and the physically demanding nature of the profession. Faculty recognize that some attrition is tied to the strong hospitality job market, as students are frequently offered employment opportunities before degree completion. While early workforce entry can be appealing, Penn College degrees provide students with the advanced technical, operational, and leadership skills necessary for long-term career advancement and management opportunities within the hospitality industry.

Since the previous program review, the department has continued to evaluate instructional delivery, course sequencing, assessment practices, and operational efficiencies to better support student learning and workforce readiness. While the overall curriculum and program goals have remained stable, several course-level instructional methods, assessments, and delivery formats have been refined based on assessment findings and industry feedback. One significant operational adjustment included the implementation of an accelerated three-semester Culinary Arts (AAS) option for academically motivated students. Assessment data indicate that the accelerated format has not negatively impacted retention or graduation rates and may

positively support recruitment by allowing students to enter the workforce more quickly while maintaining consistent, immersive lab experiences. Across both culinary and baking programs, faculty have implemented targeted instructional improvements designed to strengthen student engagement and learning outcomes. Examples include expanded use of reflective learning journals, management simulations, weekly discussion activities, practical “soft-opening” experiences in Regional Cuisine, enhanced production planning in Global Cuisine, and scaffolded project-based assessments in Menu Planning & Cost Control and Capstone coursework. These changes have improved student interaction, reinforced technical and operational competencies, and strengthened connections between classroom learning and real-world hospitality experiences.

As national leaders in culinary and baking education, the school administrative staff and faculty remain committed to the programs’ mission, vision, and goals while continuing to evolve to meet the needs of students and industry partners. This executive summary provides an overview of recommendations and strategic priorities designed to support continued innovation, student success, operational effectiveness, and long-term program sustainability.

Recommendations:

After thorough review, the efforts in the next five years should be focused on:

- opening a student outlet store adjacent to Le Jeune Chef for product sales to the College community;
- prepare for the American Culinary Federation Education Foundation (ACFEF) reaccreditation cycle: self-study year 2028 and onsite visit in Fall 2029;
- maintain a regimented assessment cycle timeline and reporting;
- review programs curriculum needs by updating and adjusting any curricular sequences that merit attention. Special consideration will focus on curriculum maps; and
- creation of a digital online employer and internship portal for transmission of documents and surveys.