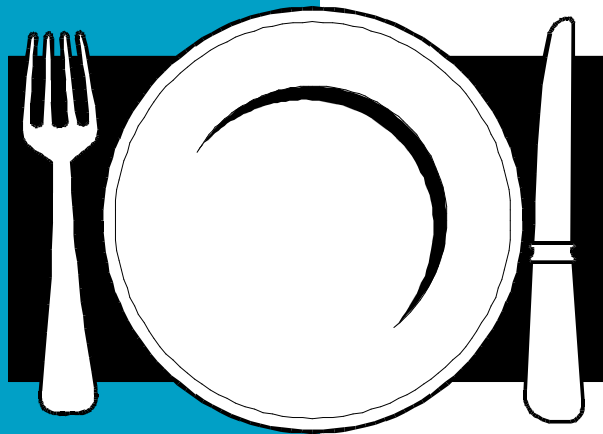


# How to Achieve Halal Food on Campus





# The Muslim Accommodations Task Force

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The Muslim Accommodations Task Force (MATF) of MSA National works to make campuses better places for Muslim students. "Muslim-friendly" campuses are ones that embrace diversity by fulfilling the needs of their Muslim communities. Students and administrators work hand in hand to promote programs that facilitate multiple facets of a student's life, ranging from praying to learning to dining.

We believe that every campus can improve in meeting Muslim student needs. As you will see, becoming "Muslim-friendly" is not a one-size-fits all process. This guide is created to help you explore the options available, select the level appropriate to your campus, and tailor your efforts accordingly.

Know that achieving Muslim accommodations on your campus requires planning and persistent effort. As a source of inspiration, we share with you a hadith. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "...he who finds relief for one who is hard pressed, Allah would make things easy for him in the Hereafter." (Sahih Muslim Book 035, Number 6518). Inshaallah the results of your efforts will make life easier for generations of students after you, and thereby leave you with a legacy of reward.

Sincere thanks is due first to Allah (swt) then to all the students, alumni, and advisors who contributed their experiences and thoughts.

## What is Halal Food?

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Halal food literally means "food permissible under Islamic law." The opposite of "Halal" is "Haram," meaning "not permissible or prohibited under Islamic Law." Meat, poultry, other food items, and food ingredients may be classified as Halal or Haram. For Muslims, it is Halal to consume the meat of most animals (i.e. cows, chickens, lambs, sheep, among others) that are slaughtered and prepared in accordance with the religious teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. However, it is Haram for Muslims to consume the

meat of pigs and any food items that contain blood and/or alcohol. Therefore, dining hall personnel must also consider whether food product derivatives are produced with blood, alcohol, or ingredients of animal origin.

Visit our website [www.msanational.org/matf/halal-guide](http://www.msanational.org/matf/halal-guide) for access to Halal Food Supplement A: Detailed Halal Food Definitions and Handling Instructions for Your Dining Hall staff

# Choose The Right Level To Meet Your Needs \_\_\_\_\_

Almost all Muslim accommodations come in different levels. The key is to recognize what your campus and especially Muslim students on campus are ready to sustain for the long term.

## LEVEL 1

Labeling food inappropriate to Muslims in dining halls. Even the seemingly innocent yogurt can be inappropriate if it contains gelatin from pork sources.

## LEVEL 2

Allowing Halal food vendors to be covered in Munch Money, Dining Dollars, or similar meal options that allow for a certain amount to be spent outside the main cafeteria.

## LEVEL 3

Allowing students to take food out for the pre-dawn Ramadan meal (suhoor) or arranging to have halls open at that time.

## LEVEL 4

Serving Halal food on a given day of the week. Think Halal burger night.

## LEVEL 5

Designating a particular dining hall or section of a dining hall to always have Halal food available.

# The Process: Steps to Halal Food on Campus \_\_\_\_\_

1

Assessment

2

Presentation

3

Implementation

4

Long-term Survival

# 1

## Assessment

Engaging in the assessment process in consultation with the Muslim community at large will inshallah serve two benefits:

- 1) It will provide MSA representatives a solid proposal, backed with facts and evidence, with which to negotiate with university officials.
- 2) It will ensure community support for and participation in a sustained program. As with any type of Muslim religious accommodation, a failed experience will make future negotiations with university officials more difficult.

Before you begin to lobby your university administration to provide Islamically acceptable food on campuses, it is critical to assess both

- a) The current meal offerings on campus (Supply)
- b) The size and needs of the Muslim population at your school (Demand)

### Current Nature of Meal Offerings (Supply)

In evaluating the status quo of what food options are available, it is important to keep in mind the following questions:

1. What, if any, are the dining requirements on campus? Are students required to eat on campus for a portion of meals and/or for a number of years on campus?
2. What is the ease of access to food on campus and the surrounding area? Even if there are no requirements, is the university excluding Muslims from equal and fair access to campus privileges and conveniences if alternative options are too expensive or too far away. Does it become an undue hardship for Muslims to find off-campus meal alternatives?
3. Precisely what is current level of accommodation that is offered (if any)? (Levels include: Halal Food Labeling, Microwaveable Halal meals, Halal night, and an entire Halal Kitchen).
4. Are any other special interest groups receiving accommodations at your university? Are vegetarian or kosher meals being offered to students with these special dietary requirements?
5. What are the event catering/vending restrictions? Does the university require students to cater campus events or events in certain buildings (student union) using only the University Dining Services? If not, are Muslim vendors on the list of acceptable outside vendors?

## Muslim Population Size and Needs (Demand)

It is important to make sure that the type of meal accommodations the university may be willing to offer matches the needs of the Muslim community on your campus. If the university is willing to offer more than Muslims are willing and able to consume (for example, if they offer halal lunch and dinner options and Muslims only tend to eat lunch on campus and go home for dinner), then the program may experience problems or even failure. In such a case, the campus may perceive unused halal meals as lack of interest among Muslim students and/or as a losing business venture which could end the program altogether.

Therefore, it is necessary to survey the relevant Muslim population (students, faculty, administrators, doctors, employees, etc.) to determine the following:

- a) Size (or relative size to other groups receiving special treatment, ie Jewish students)

Size is a useful indicator to know when negotiating with university officials, to strengthen the case for needing such a program.

- b) Demographics (ethnicity, religious persuasion, pricing constraints)

Demographics can help to determine Muslim tastes in halal food, level of commitment to a halal food program, and affordability issues.

- c) % Desiring to eat on campus, and with what frequency

Setting up a Halal food program may require a large investment on the part of the university in terms of training staff on food handling procedures, and any equipment and labor costs. This is why the last factor is perhaps the most critical one because the number of students who eat on campus and the frequency of their on-campus meal consumption lends the most credible basis and generates the most interest and support for establishing a Halal food program.

Visit our website:

[www.msanational.org/matf/halalguide](http://www.msanational.org/matf/halalguide) for access to Halal Food Supplement B: Halal Food Demand Survey.

# 2

## Presentation

### Leadership

As with most MSA tasks, leadership is essential. Once your MSA decides to make a case for Halal food on campus, effective leadership will play a major role in the outcome of the endeavor. We recommend one or two committed students who agree to oversee all aspects of the project. Ideally, these students should have played a role in the assessment phase, and if not, should have a thorough understanding of the nature

of assessment. They should also review the definition of Halal food, and be prepared to express the Muslim students needs based on findings from the assessment phase. Because of the possibility that the endeavor will take more than one term, leaders should thoroughly document everything. Practically, this can be as simple as a notebook of meeting dates, times, participants, and minutes.

### Contact Administrative Allies and the Dining Hall Chief

Administrators that the MSA interacts with on a regular basis (faculty advisors, Dean of Students, Student Programs Director) typically are not well-versed in dining hall logistics, so they are not always the most helpful first stop. If you have positive relations with any administrators, you should inform them of your intention to establish a halal food program, get their input, and see if they are interested in helping. If you have not worked closely with administrators in the past, you may choose to first schedule a meeting with the Dining Hall Chief. Presenting the concept of Halal food to the Dining Hall Chief is advisable for several reasons. The Dining

Hall Chief is trained to be concerned about students eating habits. It is in the person's best interest that students are pleased with their meal plans -- happy customers mean a repeat sale and positive publicity. On campuses where meal plans are mandatory for the first semester and subsequently optional, the Dining Hall staff wants students to enjoy the food enough to continue voluntarily. Additionally, the Dining Hall Chief would be able to give a quick evaluation of the feasibility of a Halal meal option. In meetings with the Dining Hall Chief, be sure to note options, potential obstacles, and contacts identified by Dining Hall staff.

## Communicating your proposal

In conversations with the Dining Hall Chief and other administrators who become involved in approving the project, emphasize the following points which are relevant to your campus's context:

### **a) Requirements**

Highlight key principles such as neither pork nor alcohol products, and meat being slaughtered in accordance with Islamic guidelines. Save details of implementation for after tentative approval and mention that training will be provided to all dining staff.

### **b) Muslim student need**

Campus dining halls were created to facilitate student life. They allow students to conveniently dine and socialize without having to travel far distances. Muslim students are currently denied these benefits, and face hardship by having to go off campus to find a local Halal vendor or getting by with less food. The university could be effectively excluding/preventing Muslims from equal and fair access to campus privileges and conveniences if alternative options are too expensive or too far away.

### **c) Muslim students right**

This point is especially valid if the meal plan is ever mandatory for any students. If students are required to eat on campus for a portion of meals and/or for a number of years on campus, you have a strong case for lobbying the university, since they are obligated to provide you with food that is religiously permissible. Point out that students are being required to pay for a service they cannot completely benefit from. Additionally, if special dietary arrangements (vegetarian/kosher) are explicitly offered to students with those needs, Muslims have strong grounds to make a petition for equal consideration of their dietary requirements.

### **d) National trends and publicity**

Other campuses already have Halal food options, and are being recognized nationally for their efforts. The college or university will benefit by having a reputation for caring for their Muslim students. Provide a complete list (updated on [www.msanational.org/matf](http://www.msanational.org/matf)), then give detailed examples based on what you consider to be the ideal option for your campus.



# 3

## Implementation

### Education

#### a) Training the staff

Although you have already provided basic information in previous communication, the education needs to reach a higher level once the dining hall is committed to implementation. At this phase, think beyond basic definition-based education, and consider steps needed to train staff to competently prepare Halal food. The Halal food vendor you choose may have materials that facilitate training. Otherwise, key points to effective training include:

- Separate grill or cooking area for Halal meat products that is not used for pork products.
- Clean utensils and storage areas that do not become contaminated with pork products.
- Ability to identify common ingredients that contain pork or alcohol. (red wine, gelatin, vanilla extract, enzymes)
- Identification of local and national vendors that carry Halal products

#### b) Selling to the public

Education for the general public is markedly different than training for dining hall staff. Think of general education as a marketing campaign. Your goal is to convey to students not only what Halal food is, but why they should consider eating it. General education can take the form of an article in the campus newspaper and publicity information passed out in the first few days launching the Halal food program. All students should know what Halal food is, and what it entails. Convey that all are welcome to eat Halal food, and that it is pure and clean. Meat products are prepared under the highest standards of sanitation, and had the name of God pronounced at the time of slaughtering. At some campuses, non-Muslim students are known to choose Halal meat because of its benefits.

## Product Selection / Refinement

Once dining hall staff has basic training, a selected panel of Muslim students should commit to testing out their dishes and providing comments on pricing, taste, and product selection. This is the time to choose between hamburgers and roast beef, between chicken nuggets and baked chicken, and to comment on ingredients at a stir-fry station. It is also the time to convey concerns about pricing if the food would be purchased separately from an unlimited dining hall. Availability decisions such as times of day and days of the week (if relevant) should also be finalized at this time.

## Pilot Program

Most successful Halal food programs start with a two-week pilot program. This approach has dual benefits. If the pilot program succeeds, feedback can be used for further improvement and implementation of a full program. If the pilot program fails, the MSA can reserve the option of launching another pilot program in the future. The term "pilot program" allows for either success or failure, and so a failure will not look nearly as bad in a pilot program as it would in a program that was meant to be permanent.



## Long-term Survival

Now that the Halal food program has been approved and passed the pilot program phase, the MSA should work to help the program grow and improve. The MSA should have a regular contact on the Dining Hall staff, typically identified through previous discussions and the pilot program. If food is not available as advertised or is being improperly handled, the MSA should immediately get in touch with the dining hall contact.

In order to institutionalize the program, publicity should reach every student and prospective student. Practical publicity points to sustain a long-term

program include roles for the Dining Hall and the MSA. Dining halls that carry Halal food should have a sign always displayed. (insert Stanford picture). Meal plan brochures distributed by the Dining Hall should mention the availability of Halal food. The MSA website should include information on Halal food on their website section for new students and inform them at orientation events. Report the success to MSA National [www.msanational.org/matf](http://www.msanational.org/matf) so prospective students will know of Halal food on your campus...they may even decide to attend your campus instead of the closest competitor because of the Halal food program.

# Sample Success Stories

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## NYU goes Halal!

In Fall 2004, the Muslim community at NYU will be able to choose from a variety of quality Halal meals from the Kimmel Dining Center by using Declining Dollars. In the spring 2004 pilot program, food that was purchased was sold out in the first two days. Since the meat was purchased at such a good price, the meals included large quantities of meat for the same price (double Halal burgers!). Supplier and Dining officials were very pleased with response and with quality of food. While attempts to establish a halal food program date back to 1998, a well-planned and strategic approach was newly begun in May 2003.

Here's how they did it:

### 1 Assessment

- Interview with campus newspaper, brought up halal meat issues
- Conducted a survey to assess Muslim community's preferences and needs

### 2 Presentation

- Dining officials approached President of MSA

### 3 Implementation

- Searched for a supplier accredited by Aramark representative
- Trained Dining Hall staff
- Put together price lists, and conducted sampling of possible meals
- Ran a pilot program during the last 2-3 weeks of the school year

ADVICE: Be assertive, persistent, professional, persuasive, and patient. Demand your rights, market aggressively, and choose a credible and excellent meat supplier.

# Dartmouth – Demand Surpasses Expectations!

As of 2001, The Dartmouth program features The Pavilion, a dining facility with half the kitchen exclusively dedicated to Halal meal preparation. Chefs prepare Halal stir fry, burgers, soups, lasagna, and more. Meals served per day are about 100 more than the manager considered necessary. The Pavilion is seen as a slightly quieter dining hall with delicious meals and shorter lines. Halal hamburgers are available in other dining halls.

Here's how they did it:

## 1 Assessment

- In 2001, the Muslim community at Dartmouth joined Jewish students, Hindu students, and vegetarians to present the need for meals that meet their dietary needs. The students met with each other and their advisors to discuss their needs and prepare for a presentation.

## 2 Presentation

- Though discussions were ongoing, Dartmouth administrators strongly supported the project after September 11, 2001 as a means to promote cooperation and understanding.

## 3 Implementation

- Searched for a supplier that would meet the highest Halal standards
- Supportive administrators created a search committee of students, administrators, faculty advisors, and dining hall representatives. The search committee contributed to hiring the manager of the dining hall facility that would provide specialty meals.
- New manager trained Dining Hall staff

## 4 Long-term Survival

- Advocating meals that appeal to the general American diet, rather than ethnic cuisine.
- Publicity of the Pavilion through the Dining Hall brochures to new students

ADVICE: Take advantage of unique opportunities that may emerge, because the opportunity may never return. Have effective communicators and design meals that will appeal beyond the Muslim audience.

# Stanford - Over Three Dining Halls serve Halal meals!

Since 1997, several Stanford dining halls carry a variety of Halal meals. The dining halls proudly display signs advertising the availability of Halal food. Dining hall staff also prepare carry out meals for Muslim students during Ramadan.

Here's how they did it:

## 1 Assessment

- The Stanford MSA realized that the mandatory meal plan did not serve Muslim student needs. In fact, many Muslim students asked for meal plan exemption on religious grounds. The MSA assessed how many Muslim students were not participating in or were not satisfied with the current meal options.

## 2 Presentation

- The Stanford MSA presented their findings to Dining Hall managers. The managers were eager to work to find a solution to the loss of Muslim students.
- Later, they also were happy to provide Ramadan carry out meals.

## 3 Implementation

- Searched for a supplier that would meet Dining Hall standards.
- Students worked with individual dining hall managers to explain points related to handling (separate grill and utensils) and availability (in the initial stages, sometimes meals would take 30 minutes to prepare)

## 4 Long-term Survival

- Dining halls have fliers advertising the availability of halal food.
- Availability of Halal food is publicized by the Stanford Muslim community.

ADVICE: Research dining hall restrictions in advance and work to find vendors that met the standards. Try not to overwhelm the staff with too many details in the first presentation. Work to maximize variety and high quality food.

# Things to avoid

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As you read through the success stories, know that a number of campus halal food programs have also discontinued or failed. The top reasons for failure? Yucky food, lack of variety, and inadequate Muslim student commitment.

# Resources/Contacts

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To establish contact with a MATF Consultant who specializes in halal food on campus, send an e-mail to [matfhalal@msa-National.org](mailto:matfhalal@msa-National.org). Your MATF Consultant will work with you to provide the following services as appropriate:

- Phone / e-mail consultation
- Letter of Support from MSA National
- List of campuses with halal food on MSA National letterhead
- Research Assistance
- Proposal Comment and Review

The following halal food vendors are the ones we know of that meet dining hall requirements, and that have been used on campuses we interviewed.

- 1) Fresh Farms (northeast US only), 1-617-571-3069
- 2) Midamar Halal (national service), [www.midamarhalal.com](http://www.midamarhalal.com)
- 3) Al Safa Halal (national service), [www.alsafa.com](http://www.alsafa.com)

This list is preliminary, and may not reflect all the available options. Dining hall requirements vary by campus, and may allow for either a local, regional, or national provider. We suggest consulting with dining hall staff, scholars, and the local community before deciding which vendor to use. For existing MSA research on halal food vendors, visit [www.msanational.org/matf/halalguide](http://www.msanational.org/matf/halalguide) for access to Halal Food Supplement C: Halal Food Vendor Information and MSA Comments.





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