

D211 POST: COUGAR PERK RETURNS IN A MODIFIED WAY



For more than a decade, one thing staff at James B. Conant High School could count on was the presence of the student run bakery Cougar Perk during the spring semester. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 season of the café was cut short.

In early February, instructors of Conant's Practices in Entrepreneurship announced that Cougar Perk would be returning in a modified capacity.

"We are pick-up only," said Conant High School Family and Consumer Science teacher Jackie Brown. "We don't have our normal cafeteria set-up."



Brown added that due to reduced class sizes to accommodate hybrid learning, Cougar Perk is currently offering a smaller selection.

Senior Elizabeth Gonzalez, who has been a part of Cougar Perk for the past three years said the different set-up has had an impact, but she still enjoys it.

“It’s been a little bit slower for our business,” she said. “We usually have people lined up out the door. It may be slower now, but I still really enjoy it.”



Brown said that one aspect of the new set-up did not require any adjustments.

“We typically follow very strict sanitation guidelines regularly,” she said. “Because we have always done that, we were already used to the new rules.”

The response to Cougar Perk’s return in the halls of CHS has been overwhelmingly positive.

“People are so happy to have us back,” Brown said. “While we may not be completely back to normal, everyone has been glad to have something from a normal school year back.”

D211 POST: COUGAR PERK RETURNS FOR 9TH YEAR



Students and teachers welcomed the return of the Cougar Perk Cafe at James B. Conant High School Jan. 26. The student run cafe is in its ninth year.

At 5:30 on a Friday morning, a small group of students and teachers walk in to James B. Conant High School to begin cooking. These individuals are members of a student run café called Cougar Perk, which sells baked goods and coffee to faculty and staff members of Township High School District 211. On Jan. 26, the café started its ninth year.

The Cougar Perk operates every Friday through the second semester allows students to experience multiple aspects of operating a small bakery. For students to participate, they must take the practices in entrepreneurship as well as one foods class. Patti Ertl, who teaches the entrepreneurship course said she enjoys seeing the students using everything they learned.

“I enjoy seeing the kids put into practice everything they’ve learned in both the business side and the family consumer science side,” she said. “This has really become part of our culture at Conant High School.”

English teacher Heather Munao said she has seen the students work to keep the café moving forward.

“[The café] is really sustained here,” she said. “They come up with different things like coupons, specials and apps to keep in moving forward and keep it moving forward and follow the natural trajectory of a business.”



The student run Cougar Perk Cafe returned to James B. Conant High School. This year marks the cafe's ninth in operation.

Munao said her favorite item from Cougar Perk is the bacon quiche tart. The quiche is an item which senior Hanan Barrett enjoys to make for the café.

“The quiche is really the only savory dish we have, and I enjoy the savory stuff,” he said.

Barrett chose to do Cougar Perk because he has an interest in pursuing culinary arts through college. He said working the café provides a nice get away.

“I get to just cook for the first two hours and kinda destress to go on with the rest of my day,” he said.

Senior Dylan Toth has been a part of Cougar Perk for three years. He said working with the students and staff in the café provides a feeling of being a part of a team.

“If you don't do a sport, it's nice to have that team feel that Cougar Perk really gives you.”

One big change Dylan has seen this year was the addition of the new culinary arts kitchen which opened this year.

“We have a convection now which can make things much faster.”



Senior Hanan Barrett operates the register during the semester opening of Cougar Perk Cafe at James B. Conant High School

The increased speed is not the only advantage of the new kitchen according to culinary arts teacher Angela Drenth.

“The new kitchen has helped tremendously,” Drenth said. “Kids are practicing on industry standard equipment, so it’s preparing them for when they go out into the real world.”

Cougar Perk Café is open every Friday from 7:15 a.m. until 8:30 a.m.

STUDENT-RUN CAFE PERKS UP CHS

FACULTY, STAFF

On select Fridays during second semester at Conant High School, a group of students arrive at school at 6:30 a.m. dressed in bright blue uniforms ready to open and prepare for Cougar Perk, a student-run café that serves coffee and baked goods to faculty and staff.

Cougar Perk is part of the Business Education and Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) departments modeled after the same course at Schaumburg High School. Students are part of the year-long course and learn about entrepreneurship and all aspects of running a business.



Students serve for Cougar Perk on Friday mornings in the faculty cafeteria.

“One of the best things about Cougar Perk is these are kids that might not be connected to school in another way, these are not athletes, these are not kids who are necessarily involved in clubs, these are kids who in another class might totally be shy or don’t participate,” said Angela Drenth, family and consumer sciences department chair. “In this class, you really see the pride they take in what they do.”

Drenth teaches the FACS side of the course, along with Business Education Teacher Patti Ertl, who teaches the business side of the course first semester. In Ertl’s class, students discuss everything about the backend of a business, such as starting off, marketing, budgeting, customer service, and financing a business. From there, Drenth takes over second semester where students learn about the food side of running the café, such as preparing the food, menu planning, presentation, and cooking.

Cougar Perk started three years ago with seed money from a District 211 Foundation Grant of \$1,000. Each food item is \$1 and drink items are \$1.50. Any proceeds automatically get put back into the business for the next week. During second semester, the café is open every Friday morning before school starts in the faculty

cafeteria. Some key items that always sell are bacon quiche tarts, cinnamon rolls, and parfaits.

“We probably go through about 10 pots of coffee, 80 bacon quiche tarts, 30 cinnamon rolls, and 50 parfaits, so we’re serving a good amount of people,” Drenth said.

What Drenth and Ertl said is so great about a course like this is the support they receive from the CHS administration and staff, in addition to watching their students gain real-world experience they can certainly use outside of the classroom.

“Every month during first semester, students work on a promotional food items with Angela because the bakery isn’t run until second semester,” Ertl said. “The staff is all over us and they always want Cougar Perk, so we want to keep the memory of it out there until second semester.”

Seniors Christina and Alexandra Cruz have been a part of Cougar Perk for multiple school years, and said in addition to other plans they have after graduation, opening their own bakery someday would be something they are interested in. A lot of the knowledge they learned from Cougar Perk makes the sisters feel like they could open their own bakery someday.

“This is my third year, and what I like is interacting with the teachers and getting to know them,” Alexandra said. “Just the experience of being able to know a bakery on the business side, and to know how much production we need to put out there for baked goods and how to work with other people,” Christina added.

Not only does Cougar Perk open its café on Fridays in the faculty cafeteria, it also does catering and deliveries. They have catered several after school events and administrative meetings. This teaches students to plan not only for what they need during the actual café on Fridays, but also for extra events and deliveries. The class also went on a field trip to see real bakeries in action. This year, they went to three bakeries in Chicago where they were able to speak to business owners and chefs to see how what they learn in Cougar Perk can be applied to the workforce.

Drenth and Ertl said many of their colleagues ask if Cougar Perk can run during both semesters, instead of just one. Although they said they would love too, there is a lot of work that goes into it. Each year, the group of students that does Cougar Perk is new. Some students repeat the course because they enjoy it, but many students are new to the course and generally haven’t been exposed to entrepreneurial skills yet.

“What keeps faculty coming back each week is seeing one of the kids they might have in class who never participates. They can see them on our service line smiling,” Drenth said. “They are kind of like a little family. They are doing such a nice job running a business, giving feedback and really taking ownership over their bakery. It’s not something that we need to force, and they do a fantastic job meeting expectations.”

For more information on Cougar Perk, visit its website [here](#).