

THE GRAPEVINE

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



In this issue...

Letter From the Editor
Page 2

Fresh Off the Vine
Coping with Remote Learning
Page 3

New Student Notes
Page 4

TC Students Give Online Fitness a New Purpose
Page 6

An Ode to the Good Farmer
Page 8

NY Food 20/20 Recap: What Can the NYC Food System Learn from Covid-19
Page 10

Alumni Corner: Ana Islas Ramas
Page 11

Nutrients and the Immune System: Research and Actions in Response to COVID-19
Page 13

High School Students Reflect on Summer TC Internships
Page 15

Recipe Corner: Apple & PB Oat Bake; Burmese Pumpkin Curry
Page 18

TC Students Give Online Fitness a New Purpose

By: Rebecca Valdez

I had the pleasure of speaking with my friends and colleagues, Autumn Rauchwek and Vinny Panza, who teach yoga and martial arts, respectively, and are students in the TC nutrition program. During the pandemic, both Autumn and Vinny brought their services online to the TC community and beyond, and found strategies to cope with changes and uncertainty. Thank you, Autumn and Vinny, for sharing your experiences, insights, and wisdom!

Interview with Autumn:

Tell me about how you got started with yoga. What influenced your approach?
I've struggled with anxiety my whole life and yoga was a way for me to cope with my anxiety. It's helped me to start embracing, listening to, and paying attention to my body and respond to what my body is telling me. Teaching has been a really big

way for me to help people accept imperfection and feel compassion for themselves. In my class, I strive to make it a dialogue that we are all human, imperfect, and vulnerable and we can all show up as we are. I love that aspect of it.

How has your work changed since things have transitioned online?

Encouraged by a few students/close friends, I started offering livestream classes right when everything started. I wanted to make it accessible to anyone who wanted to join so classes are donation-based, using a sliding scale that is low so that people would not be prohibited by cost. My work has changed from teaching private and group lessons through a studio to teaching many friends, friends of friends, former in-person students, and family.

Continued on page 4

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Students, Faculty, Alumni and Staff,

The spring and summer 2020 semesters thrust us into a state of frenzy: we transitioned to online classes; relocated and set up our homes for quarantine; faced the plethora of COVID-19 related consequences; and felt the intensity of the social and political climate at hand. Now, well into fall of 2020 and 9 months into our pandemic way of life, I feel that we have begun to settle into our new state of normal: we have welcomed in a new year of students; we have found ways to incorporate habit and routine into stay-at-home orders; we have practiced patience with ourselves and one another; and now months without Joes as an option, we have mastered the at-home ratio of milk to coffee before our 10:00 am classes. Overwhelmingly, I feel hopeful for our future as students, health educators, and active members of our society, a feeling that is undoubtedly thanks to the student body and faculty here at TC.

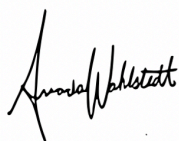
As a result, I wanted this issue to highlight the strength of our community, serving a purpose to both returning and new students amidst this strange time of distant learning. Throughout these last few months, I have been awestruck by the resilience that the faculty and students have continued to display. Students like Autumn and Vinny have used their expertise in the fitness world to bring us together through Zoom. I have watched students gain a deeper appreciation for our local heroes, expanding their knowledge of their work, such as Maya did during her summer internship on a local farm. Students and faculty have continued to engage in and with webinars, lectures, and literature around the current state of food insecurity, the immune system, and other health-related implications as a result of COVID-19. And above all, I have watched us continue to support the work of one another, stay dedicated to our classes, education, preserving faculty, and desire to make the world a better place through the power of food, health, and nutrition.

As our last editor of the Grapevine, Caroline Markowitz, put it, “there is no guidebook for such a time and I have felt so lucky to be part of the TC community.” While you may have times where you feel discouraged, remind yourself that you are a part of something that extends beyond Gottessman Library or Thorndike Hall. Hopefully, in this recognition, you can gain the strength and comfort that it gives me, and put it towards your motivation to do good. While we may be apart, we continue to work and thrive together.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to this issue. I wish everyone health and safety, and I am excited for all of us to embark upon this year together.



Amanda Wahlstedt



Editor-in-Chief

The Grapevine Staff

Editor

Amanda Wahlstedt

Nutrition & Public Health

Faculty Advisors

Randi L. Wolf

Associate Professor & Program Director

Isobel R. Contento

Professor

Contributing Writers

Rebecca Valdez

Nutrition & Education

Katherine Ippolito

Nutrition & Public Health

Maya Billig

Nutrition & Exercise Physiology

Ally Mirin

Nutrition & Education

Lindsay Beck

Nutrition & Exercise Physiology

Victoria Rinsem

Nutrition & Exercise Physiology

Thu Thu May Oo

Nutrition & Education

Hannah Gedanke

High School TC Intern

Catherine Ching

High School TC Intern

Nicholas Martin

High School TC Intern



Fresh Off the Vine: Events and Announcements

Looking for a conference to present your research? Submit an abstract to Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB):

- Program in Nutrition faculty member Pam Koch is president of SNEB, which is an organization aligned with the values and philosophy of our program. The virtual SNEB2021, planned for August 7-10 in New Orleans, has the theme, "Raising Reliance and Resilience." As described on the conference website, "Our world is in a period of rapid change and many are feeling a sense of urgency, given the ongoing trauma of racial injustice, economic and political upheaval, a global pandemic and more frequent, severe climate changes. With increasingly unsustainable systems, burdens are compounded and experienced disproportionately by people of color, indigenous people, and those who are low-income." To learn more about submitting an abstract go to <https://www.sneb.org/2021> and click on abstracts. **Abstracts are due February 14, 2020.**

Updates from the Health Nuts:

- The HealthNuts have been putting on events to get our community engaged while everyone is home! Two workout classes, and one game night down - and more events to come. Come meet your fellow TC nutrition friends by joining the fun! We have another game night and a cooking class to round out the semester that we hope you will be able to participate in. Let us know if you have any questions at healthnutsevents@gmail.com.

COVID-19 and Remote Learning Resources:

- For general coping and counseling resources, TC emergency funding, food insecurity resources, such as Food Pantry at Columbia, and other support services, visit <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/studentwellness/resources/for-students/>
- For health and wellness related resources, such as virtual fitness classes, medication, and webinars on reducing stress, please visit <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/human-resources/workplace-resources/covid-19-employee-resources/health-wellness/>



COPING WITH REMOTE LEARNING: A MESSAGE FROM A RETURNING STUDENT

BY: KATHERINE IPPOLITO

I am sure many of my fellow TC students share my frustration with the recent announcement that the spring semester will be online. I feel as though I can't complain because at least my family and I are safe and healthy. However, each day of my semester at home has been a challenge nevertheless, as well as a learning experience. Without the day-to-day connection with teachers and peers, life feels a bit 2-D. Time seems to blur together when the future is unpredictable. I miss listening to podcasts while people-watching on my morning commute, the small rush of endorphins you get from walking up five flights of TC stairs, and getting some fresh air during a Joe's coffee break. It has been difficult to find fulfilling social interaction and stress relief when really there is not much to do, other than argue about politics, complain about lack of motivation, and dream about what we're going to do when "this is all over."

Slowly but surely, I am learning what I need to do for me during this time of remote learning and amidst the hectic state of the world. Initially, I was seeking support from and connection with others, until I realized that my biggest struggle was getting distracted by the weight of the world, social media, and lack of division between home and work environments. The library used to be the place where I got my work done because I could sit in complete silence and still be uplifted by the determination and focus beaming from surrounding students. Being on campus gave me that external motivation I needed to keep going when the work got difficult, coupled with the inspiration from our professors who remind us of what we're working towards. It gave me the "we're all this together" sense.

Now 9 months into remote learning, I can recommend creating space for yourself to focus inward, in order to foster your intrinsic motivation to keep going. Discover a place of solitude and write down your values, your goals, and how they connect. Keep visualizing where you want to go, reflecting on how you can manifest your desires, and practice gratitude for the opportunities we have at TC and all of the work we've put in to get this far. While there are many things out of our control right now, focus on the things you can control, and take it one day at a time with your end goals in mind.

NEW STUDENT NOTES - WELCOME TO TC!

On behalf of The Grapevine and the Program in Nutrition, we would like to extend a warm welcome to the new students who began the program in the fall 2020 semester.

Eleanor Smith: Originally from Columbus, Ohio, Eleanor attended Cornell University where she earned her undergraduate degree in Nutritional Sciences with a concentration in dietetics. She is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. Eleanor spent last summer working at Stanford University in the sports nutrition department, and her goal is to work with collegiate and professional athletes as a sports dietitian.

Amanda Harb: Calling home both Lebanon and the United States, Amanda completed her undergraduate degree in Nutrition and Dietetics at the American University of Beirut, and her graduate degree in Nutritional Sciences at Arizona State University. She is enrolled in the PhD Program in Behavioral Nutrition, and hopes to work in research on food decision-making, behavioral nudges, and nutrition education.

Elisa Iglesia: From Minneapolis, Minnesota, Elisa completed her undergraduate degree in Kinesiology and Nutrition at Miami University of Ohio. She is currently enrolled in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. A fun fact about Elisa is that she is originally from Madrid, Spain and speaks fluent Spanish.

Ally Mirin: Originally from New York, Ally completed her undergraduate degree in Biology and Society with a minor in Nutrition and Health from Cornell University. She is enrolled in the Nutrition Education program. Ally hopes to go on to culinary school and integrate her nutrition knowledge into cooking.

Leora Apfelbaum: From New York, Leora completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania in Neuroscience, with a minor in Nutrition, and her masters of science degree from IHN at Columbia University. She is enrolled in the MEd in Community Nutrition Education program. Before coming to TC, Leora worked as a diabetes educator at the Florida Department of Health, where she enjoyed being able to combine her interests in nutrition with public health.

Olivia Haase: Originally from West Windsor, New Jersey, Olivia received her undergraduate degree in Health Sciences from Furman University. She is enrolled in the Nutrition and Public Health program. Olivia hopes to work in food and nutrition policy, while incorporating her passion for 'food as medicine' and wellness in schools. Additionally, she hopes to be involved in the movement to increase nutrition education and bring better access to real, healthy foods to underserved areas.

Michael Henze: Originally from upstate, NY, Michael completed his undergraduate degree in International Health at Georgetown University. Michael is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. A fun fact about Michael is that he is obsessed with his dog.

Michelle Yu: From New York City, Michelle completed her undergraduate degree in Financial Economics at SUNY Binghamton. She is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. Michelle loves cooking and trying out new recipes, and finds it truly gratifying to watch people enjoy the food she makes.

Qianhui (Jera) Zhang: From China, Jera completed her undergraduate degree in Laws of Sociology, her MA in Sociology, and MS in Nutrition Education. She is enrolled in the PhD in Behavioral Nutrition program. Some fun facts about Jera are that she has been in the program of nutrition for a while, loves knife noodles, and journals everyday.

Yea Jin Kim: Originally from South Korea, Yea completed her undergraduate degree at Ewha Woman's University, and associate degree at The Culinary Institute of America. Yea worked as a chef in a 1-Michelin starred restaurant.

Continued from previous page

Natalie Greaves-Peters: Originally from the United States, Natalie got her undergraduate degree in Computer Information Systems with a minor in Mathematics at Baruch College, CUNY. She is enrolled in the Behavioral Nutrition Doctoral Program. Natalie worked on Wall Street in technology for seven years before going to NYU for her MS in Nutrition & Dietetics, and becoming a RDN.

Mirel Grossman: From Brooklyn, New York, Mirel got her undergraduate degree in Social Sciences from Adelphi University, and her AAS in Interior Design from Parsons. She is enrolled in the Nutrition Education Program. In the future, Mirel hopes to write a cookbook.

Thanh Thanh Nguyen: Originally from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Thanh Thanh completed her undergraduate degree in Nutritional Sciences and DPD coursework at Cornell University. She is enrolled in the Nutrition Education program. While Thanh Thanh is not sure exactly what she wants to do in the future, she aspires to help improve the health status and quality of life of Vietnamese people.

Katie Baird: Originally from Ridgewood, New Jersey, Katie completed her undergraduate degree in Comprehensive Sciences with a minor in Global Health at Villanova University. She is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. Katie enjoys nature, hiking and travel, and hopes to become a health educator for children in areas of nutrition, fitness, and sports.

Victoria Rinsem: Originally from Arizona, Victoria received undergraduate degree in Health and Exercise Science with a minor in Psychology from Regis University. She is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. Last summer, Victoria interned with an exercise program for cancer patients at the University of Colorado's Anschutz Medical campus. At TC, Victoria is eager to expand on this experience, and take a deep dive into how nutrition and exercise physiology interconnect within the individual, communities, and sustainability.

Nicholas Sterghos: From Cornelia, Georgia and now living in Boulder, CO, Nicholas received his undergraduate degree in Life Sciences at West Point and his MA in Leadership Studies at the University of Texas in El Paso. He is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program. Nicholas was once a professional triathlete, and his favorite fruit is watermelon, and favorite vegetable is cucumber.

Yuyan Liao: From Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, Yuyan received an undergraduate degree in Food Science and Engineering from East China University of Science and Technology. Yuyan is enrolled in Nutrition and Public Health. Yuyan was initially anxious at the start of the semester, as it was the first time that she studied as an international student; however, after two months, Yuyan feels that she has adapted well to the class format and teaching method in English. While she is still a bit shy to communicate with classmates and teachers, she hope that she will be braver in the future!

Thu Thu May Oo: Originally from Myanmar (Burma), Thu The completed her BA in Medical Anthropology & Global Health with a mini run Nutritional Sciences at the University of Washington, Seattle in 2018. She is enrolled in the Nutrition and Education program. Thu Thu is passionate and curious about all things related to nutrition, food, health, and social justice. She wants to learn more about community-based healthcare services in Myanmar to help integrate nutrition guidelines and make them accessible to the public. During her free time, she enjoys cooking, trying different cuisines, and hiking.

Yitong Zhang: From China, Yitong received his BS in Public Health in 2020. He is enrolled in the Nutrition and Exercise Physiology program.

Additionally, please join us in welcoming Charlotte Bresee, Jiashi Fu, Qiongzhi Hu, Xinyang Lin, Muring Liu, Jiahui Ma, Camila Miller, Kimberly Panik, Zhimeg Qiu, Maoyue Wang, Sarah Wenig, and Yintong (Jayne) Zheng.

(continued from cover)

How has your approach to nutrition/fitness changed during the pandemic?

My goal has always been to create a safe space for us to show up as we are. The pandemic has been hard for me, too, so when I show up to teach it has been especially hard being transparent and vulnerable. I started a newsletter so people could sign up for the weekly classes, and I've started sharing some thoughts and insights through that. The newsletter is helping to build my own community of yogis. Since the pandemic, a lot of people have gotten into yoga more consistently so it's a cool thing to experience it with them.

What has been your greatest obstacle during this time?

My own anxiety and perfectionism has been coming up in a different way because everything is elevated, and there's less room for distraction. This has also held me accountable to myself. Before, if I was stressed or anxious, I would just plow through a class, but now I have to be more in tune with how I'm feeling. In terms of class attendance, consistency is definitely a challenge at times. I've noticed that word of mouth is important. Encouraging people to share my class with friends, talking about their own experience in my classes, is really helpful to bring new students onboard.

What are your best strategies for coping so that you don't burn out?

Meditation. Over the past year or so, I've appreciated it more and more. For most of my life, I felt like I couldn't sit alone quietly for even 5 minutes. Being with myself was not a comfortable place to be. Since the pandemic, I've started to meditate every day and sometimes twice a day. Meditation is how I've learned to just be with myself and start to pay better attention to how I'm feeling, where my emotions are coming from, how they are manifesting, and

how to practice true self care.

Therapy is also huge and has been a big part of my life for the past three years. The other crucial piece is my relationships. I am so grateful to have people in my life who I can unconditionally come to with whatever is going on and they can hold space to be there and just listen, not try to fix anything. I've actually met a huge portion of my support system in the grad program.

For new students in the program, what advice do you have for how to build the strong support system?

Work on things together. This can be assignments or getting together if you're in the city or via Zoom. Reach out and invite everyone who wants to join. See who shows up, and you'll find who you resonate with and find out what you have in common. Set up an outdoor walk/run, etc. Your relationships will naturally and organically happen. That's what has worked for me.

Now four of us from my year in the program have matching tattoos. It's cheesy, but I'm so proud of the relationships we have built with one another and how we have prioritized them. You can also reach out to Randi, Pam, Lora, and ask them for help to bring students together.

What trends do you think the fitness/nutrition industry will be headed in the future?

I'm hoping it will be more about learning how to listen to your own body and less about doing things that we are supposed to do or checking things off a list. We should focus more on paying attention to your own cues and how different forms of

movement make your body feel and less about achieving a perfect body or meeting requirements for a certain amount of physical activity. I hope that we'll move towards more internal and less external cues.

How can we support you/your business during this time?

Sign up for my newsletter. You'll get reflections for the week and updates about my classes. You can join Livestream classes or I have plenty of folks who don't practice yoga but just read the newsletter for the reflections I share. You can also follow me on Instagram: @autumnrosewellness.



Interview with Vinny:

Let's get started with how you got into teaching martial arts.

I've been practicing martial arts since I was a kid and started teaching at an early age, about the time I got my black belt at 12 years old. I've been lucky enough to

have amazing master instructors, teachers, and mentors in all styles of martial arts. It taught me a lot about fighting technique, training strategies, and even proper instruction for everyone—all levels, people from all walks of life, young or old, experienced or complete beginners, etc.

What do you love about teaching?

I generally just enjoy teaching. I'm always learning new ways to help people understand techniques and I find that element of problem solving really interesting. I also love helping people learn how to defend themselves and do things with their bodies they didn't think they could

do. The body is an integrated system and talking about that with students, helping them realize it about themselves, is really rewarding. In a fight, somebody is literally throwing their limbs at you, even if you're tired, so your training involves being prepared for circumstances that are not always in your control. You condition yourself to be in the best position physically and mentally to control the situation and mitigate the risks. That kind of training teaches you a lot about yourself and how the body works.

How has your approach to fitness changed during the pandemic?

There have been a lot of unexpected benefits in the transition from in-person to online training for me, personally. I feel like I've gained back time I didn't have before, enough so that I've been able to focus on my own training and nutrition more than I could before. I used to spend all of my time between commuting, school, and work, but now I actually have time to sit down for a meal or a workout. The last six months are probably the most consistently and often I've exercised in fifteen years.

What about changes you've seen to the industry and the direction it will be headed?

An interesting change I saw occur was that, prior to the pandemic, a lot of fitness industry people downplayed the efficacy of online training. They felt it was a 'cop out' and considered in-person training to be superior. You're in front of your client, there's a shared energy, and it's easier to keep them honest about the intensity of their workout. But then the pandemic forced us all into this virtual world and everyone had to adjust. When everyone realized you

could still run an effective streaming class, it broke down the barrier and legitimized online instruction as a way to interact with clients.

How has your own work changed?

At the beginning of the pandemic, I started teaching livestream classes on YouTube because the gym I owned already had a user base there. It was a difficult switch, at first, because I normally run classes with members striking pads or heavy bags. After the gym shut down, I started my own classes on Zoom which has been a better, more interactive format. Virtual training has also allowed me to train a lot of people I would not normally train because it removed logistical barriers. People can work out at home more easily, so hosting virtually opened the door to a lot of people who would have missed my workouts for work and family obligations. I've tried to adapt my training routines to working out at home. I make it a point to teach classes that require no equipment and no prior experience. I want



anyone to be able to join, even if they don't have expensive weights or lots of space.

What has been your greatest obstacle during the pandemic?

I used to feel if I didn't get my heart rate up to 180 BPM or if I didn't feel

exhausted after, the workout wasn't worth it. The pandemic helped me expand the threshold for what I consider to be beneficial exercise, so I started accepting lower intensity workouts instead of forgoing exercise completely if I couldn't go 110%. I try to pass this along to my clients, as well, that something is always better than nothing. If I only have 10-15 minutes to sweat, or I can only get in

some stretching, it is better than doing nothing at all. I can always go hard the next day.

What else can you offer to current students working remotely?

I would say that perspective matters. It's true that everyone has issues and we are all going through things that might feel difficult; but, at the same time, it's important to take a step back and look objectively at our situations. More often than not, once we have a more accurate understanding of what's getting us down, we realize things are better than they seem. That leads to having more gratitude for what we do have, and when we have more gratitude, we can give more. Still, this has been a crazy year and we have to remember that what worked for our lives in 2019 may not work in 2020. We live in a time where we have so many options that we take many of them for granted, and we have a lot more in our control than we realize. We just have to take a step back and see it. It's up to us to make our own reality.

How has the program at TC impacted your career?

I feel that the program helped me understand the science more thoroughly and gave me the information I need to further substantiate the recommendations I give clients. It helps me be more specific about why it's beneficial to do things a certain way and I can ground that in data and science.

Lastly, how can we support you/your business during this time?

You can follow me on Instagram @gorillavinny. My contact information is there. I also run donation-based Zoom classes during the week. They're technically free because I don't want people missing out on exercise simply because they can't afford it. I offer virtual and in-person private training, too, for anyone that really enjoys or is interested in the group workouts.

AN ODE TO THE GOOD FARMER

By Maya Billig

We all want to feed ourselves and our families with the healthiest, freshest, highest quality food we can get our hands on. But where does that food come from?

I asked myself that same question this past July and took a chance reaching out to two farmers in upstate New York to inquire whether I could learn the answer to my question through helping out on their farm. I was pleasantly surprised when Paul and Sandy Arnold of Pleasant Valley Farm responded saying that they were able to offer me that opportunity. Within days, I packed my bags and drove 3 hours north to Argyle, New York to spend the rest of the summer living, learning, and farming on a beautiful 60 acre produce farm. When I first stepped foot on Pleasant Valley Farm, I was ignorant of the lessons I would soon learn about the agricultural system, the food cycle, and sustainability, but I was excited to get my hands dirty in the fields and be put to work.

Pleasant Valley Farm is a family run farm that raises over 40 types of organic fruits and vegetables year-round. While I was on the farm I cared for, harvested, and tasted home-grown tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, summer squash, zucchini, broccolini, cabbage, celery, leeks, a variety of lettuces, beans and the biggest bulbs of garlic I had ever seen!

As TC students learn in Nutritional Ecology, soil health is very important in organic agriculture. To maintain soil health and fertility we used crop rotations and soil testing. We covered the soil surrounding the young plants with straw to control for weeds, soil-borne diseases, and build organic matter to feed the beneficial microorganisms in the soil that help the plants grow.

With each day there were new important tasks to complete, so there was no such thing as a typical day's work. However, some of the jobs I performed throughout the month included seeding, transplanting, harvesting, washing, and then selling the fresh, seasonal produce at the local Saratoga Springs outdoor farmers market. A concept that I quickly learned is that farming

is not for the weak. Those weak in spirit, motivation, mind, heart, or vision need not apply. If you are weak in physical strength, that will quickly change.

Some of my favorite moments interning at Pleasant Valley Farm were when I could pick Paul and Sandy's brains and learn more about sustainable farming. They taught me that nutritious food starts with nutritious soil. Fruits and vegetables absorb their nutrition profiles from the soil's micronutrient reservoir. Plants will grow stronger if they grow in soil rich with beneficial microorganisms and organic matter.

Quite often, the answers to my complex questions boiled down to one of two simple mantras Paul repeated: "it depends," and "just enough but not too much." These were answers with which I had to learn to be satisfied because farming depends on difficult to

predict factors such as the temperature, forecast, soil type, moisture level, and crew availability. Therefore, to become an expert farmer, you have to be a jack of all trades. Farming requires a thorough understanding of botany, land plotting, mathematics, earth science, organic chemistry, animal biology, business, marketing, politics, and nutrition. If you are lacking in knowledge or skills, Paul would joke "there are many

growers, but few farmers." Farming is hard, but if it were not for these hardworking and dedicated farmers, we would have no food.

Not all food is created equal though. Most of the mass-distributed food in supermarkets is produced by farmers who pollute our air, water, and soil. If you value quality and flavor, I encourage researching big produce companies and seeing how long their food is in transit after harvest. The answer may explain why the produce bought only a few days prior lacks in taste, or has already started to rot in your refrigerator. If ecologically ethical and fresh food is important to you, although rather idealistic, I recommend attending your local farmers market and building a relationship with a farmer whose growing methods and quality control measures you



Continued on next page

bought only a few days prior lacks in taste, or has already started to rot in your refrigerator. If ecologically ethical and fresh food is important to you, although rather idealistic, I recommend attending your local farmers market and building a relationship with a farmer whose growing methods and quality control measures you support.

Stewarding the land while working on a small farm has instilled a deep appreciation for the hometown heroes who take on the responsibility of growing food and feeding their local communities. With fewer and fewer farmers entering the agriculture sector comes the increased fragility of our food system. We owe our support and our dollars to the hardworking good farmers who voluntarily dedicate their lives to protecting their customers' health and producing wholesome nutritious food.

Thanks to my experience farming, I realize why it is important to know where your food comes from. Food is more than just macronutrients and micronutrients; the way in which food is grown has a tremendous impact on your health. Now, not only am I committed to eating food sourced from trustworthy farmers whenever possible for my own health, but in my future practice as a dietitian, I will also be committed to educating others on the importance of understanding how and where farmers grow the food you eat.



NY FOOD 20/20 RECAP: WHAT CAN THE NYC FOOD SYSTEM LEARN FROM COVID-19?

By: Ally Mirin

In early October, Tisch Food Center's Pam Koch, the CUNY Urban Food Institute's Nick Freudenberg, and Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center's Charles Platkin discussed their collaborative landmark report, *NY Food 20/20: Vision, Research, and Recommendations During COVID-19 and Beyond*. Here, they shared key findings and recommendations regarding New York City's response to the pandemic with a focus on the food system. Food insecurity among NYC residents has jumped from 1.2 million pre-COVID-19 to nearly 2 million people, emphasizing the need for significant policy changes moving forward. Though the pandemic presented an immense challenge to NYC, it also helped to uncover how elected officials and city residents alike can catalyze change and foster a healthier, stronger, more equitable food system.

Key Findings

The discussion kicked off by presenting the most important findings uncovered in the centers' research. Three major takeaways included:

- * Food related policies and programs, including emergency plans and charitable organizations, were inadequate for the challenge and scale that the pandemic presented to NYC.
- * There was significant tension between getting New York residents enough to eat, while still providing nutritious and culturally relevant meals.
- * Food insecurity remains high and will persist as the public health and economic crises continue. Communities that are especially vulnerable include immigrants, small food business owners, food workers, and school children.

Recommendations

To address the key findings, the centers proposed several recommendations. Among the many solutions offered, three proposals stood out:

- * A comprehensive database created by the city where food pantries can easily communicate hours, openings, and inventory to the public. This would help to eliminate some redundancies and ensure access to emergency food.
- * The panelists emphasized that the ultimate solution to high rates of food insecurity should not depend on charitable organizations. Instead, pressure needs to be put on policymakers to pass legislation that makes it possible for all New Yorkers to afford healthy food,

including plans for future emergencies that outline concrete steps to support healthy diets.

- * Promote the Good Food Purchasing Program, a program that provides a framework for large institutions to focus their buying power on supporting local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition. This addresses the connection between the unhealthy food supply that is most available, affordable, and advertised in low-income communities and increased diet-related diseases such as COVID-19.

What Can You Do?

The panelists urged the audience to do their part to help make change. Some actions you can take include:

- * Encourage the city council to continue to develop their 10 Year Food Plan with input from the community. This plan will focus on food policy, food equity, food justice, and food security, and address many of the food issues New Yorkers face such as hunger, access to healthy foods, and food waste.
- * Contact the mayor's office and tell them the importance of the Office of Food Policy. Let them know that the Office needs clear authority and greater resources to expand!
- * Every individual or city organization from schools, to workplaces, to public housing can put pressure on leaders to address food insecurity and diet quality issues by contacting their local elected officials.

Though the panel expressed a sense of dread with the issues brought to light with the pandemic, they also showed immense hope that the crisis will be an opportunity for change. It is their vision that this report will be evidence that we need to use the challenging situation to achieve more for NYC, including making adequate, healthy food a basic human right, ensuring that all food workers have adequate pay and working conditions, and making hunger history in the city.



ALUMNI CORNER: INTERVIEW WITH ANA ISLAS RAMOS

By: Lindsay Beck

Ana Islas Ramos, MS, EdD completed the Program in Nutrition's Nutrition Education program and then went on to complete her doctorate at TC. She now works as a Nutrition Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide and its goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives.

How did you come to TC and the field of nutrition?

My father was a neurologist, which led me to become very interested in the medical field while in high school. I decided that nutrition might be a better fit for me. I got into the Food Science and Nutrition program at the Iberoamericana University in Mexico City. After finishing all the coursework, we were required to do a 6-month to one-year internship and a thesis. At first, I completed a sub-specialty in Food Technology and began an internship at a cereal company. However, when my mentor at the company quit, I thought about going back to school and completing a sub-specialty in Human Nutrition. Surreptitiously, a friend asked if I would be interested in doing a one-year college level course on childbirth education with her. I decided to join her and ended up loving it so much, I went on to complete a two-year certificate program. After that, I began teaching childbirth education classes and being a guest speaker on Nutrition. I fell in love with teaching nutrition and decided to pursue a Master's in Nutrition Education. I was eventually awarded a Fulbright scholarship and was accepted to TC's Program in Nutrition.

What was the most valuable part of your experience at TC?

The close contact with our professors. Nutrition Education was a small program at the time, so I really felt that my professors knew and cared about my professional growth. It fostered a strong sense of community and a positive learning environment that allowed me to learn so much from them.

Were there any teachers, classes, or experiences that influenced your career path?

Absolutely. The LiFE program and the LiFE Sim project were two experiences that had a large effect on my career. Because of my experience in schools during the

LiFE program, I received an offer to work on a project in schools with the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico City. After that experience, I continued working with them and eventually got invited to participate in the 2014-2015 Mexican Dietary Guidelines.

What was your career path before joining FAO?

Before graduation from TC, I was working on a project for my dissertation with post-menopausal women. I then moved to Atlanta because my husband got a job offer there. That is when, thanks to Pam and Isobel, I started working for the LiFE Sim project in Atlanta. After I finished my dissertation, I got the offer to work at the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico City.

How did you end up at FAO?

I ended up at FAO because of someone I met at TC. I came back to TC as program associate from 2013-2014. When I was about to leave, Isobel asked me if I could talk to a prospective student from Spain, Cristina Alvarez, who had been working at FAO. We got to know each other pretty well and she said that my profile might be interesting for FAO and that I should apply. I created a profile in their recruitment site and forgot about it. I later received a job alert for an opening in Nutrition Education at FAO. Since I already had a profile, I decided to apply and got the job.

Can you tell us more about your role at FAO and the kind of work that you do?

Mainly, I lead the work for the development or revision of Food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs), and we have a great team working on that. Mainly, we:

- * Develop guidance on how to develop, revise or implement FBDGs
- * Produce knowledge products on FBDGs (for instance, this publication: Plates, Pyramid, Planet)
- * Promote the exchange of experiences and lessons learned from member countries

How long have these guidelines been around?

Guidelines on what and how to eat based on nutrition principles started to become widespread in the early 20th century as Nutrition science evolved. Then around the 1990s, there was a call to shift the guidance from nutrients to foods, thereby inspiring the name, food-based dietary guidelines.

How are FBDGs administered to their respective countries?

FAO provides guidance to countries on how to develop or revise their FBDGs, which means that it is a country led process. A ministry or government entity typically leads the process and the country decides how they will implement them. To learn more on how they are developed, we have a repository of more than 95 countries here.

What has the feedback or results from FBDGs so far?

Typically, FBDGs have been implemented as either Nutrition Education tools or to inform (mainly) social protection programs. However, experts have been calling for FBDGs to be more widely implemented to inform other policies and programs throughout the food system using a socioecological model to better support behavior change. In addition, there is a call to integrate sustainability into FBDGs. We are currently in the process of revising the guidance for development of FBDGs to better respond to these calls. Results so far have been promising, except for a few due to the difficulty in carrying out meaningful monitoring and evaluation and limited studies evaluating their impact.

What have you learned from this process?

The complexity of what is being asked from FBDGs. It has taken us a long time to get our ideas on paper, and every time it becomes clearer how complex this is.

How has COVID-19 affected this year's World Food Day and other projects at FAO?

Well, a lot of the WFD events were done online, which meant that I was able to participate in two events. Unfortunately, that also meant that FAO's 75th anniversary (on WFD, 2020) had to be adapted to the circumstances. By all means, do watch the Colosseum with the colors of FAO. The amount of work seems to have multiplied, with concerns about what effects COVID-19 and the economic downturn will have for food security and nutrition.

Is there anything you would like to share with TC students about FAO?

Absolutely. We are now half-way through the Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) and there is a lot to do. We need all hands on deck. Do what you can, in your context to promote healthy diets. Next year, 2021, will be the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, so make sure to check our website for tools that will help calls for better production of and easier access to fruits and vegetables and more consumption for healthy diets.

Do you have advice you can offer TC students?

Nutrition educators are needed in many places, if you don't already know one, learn a second language, volunteer or do an internship in a low or middle income country and keep your eyes open for opportunities abroad!



NUTRIENTS AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM - RESEARCH AND ACTION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

By: Victoria Rinsem

It has now been over eight months since the initial onset of COVID-19 in the United States. As cases begin to rise once again, the question of what we can do to help control the spread and protect ourselves is at the forefront of our minds. One particular focus of research has turned toward the key role that vitamins and minerals can play in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. With winter approaching, and flu season along with it, our dietary habits can have a direct effect on the function of our immune system. This brings up the critical debate on the topic of supplements and how we can best focus our nutrition to support immunity.

On August 22nd, the CDC released its latest update regarding food and nutrition practices for COVID-19 prevention. The report portrays nutrition as a form of self-care and as instrumental to taking care of our bodies, specifically highlighting vitamins C and D, and zinc for their influence on the immune system. It is important to note that these nutrients do not have superpowers – they will not fully prevent or treat COVID-19 alone – however, achieving the recommended daily values through whole food sources is paramount to retain proper function of the immune system and regulate inflammation.

Past research has acknowledged the role of the three aforementioned micronutrients as they relate to immune function. When specifically examining acute respiratory distress, vitamin C has long been shown to have a role in reducing oxidative stress. Recent preclinical trials indicate vitamin C's role in limiting the production of these radicals and restoring endothelial function of the lung during respiratory infection. The clearance of neutrophils from infected lungs depends on vitamin C's function to enhance phagocytosis and apoptosis. Therefore, low levels of the vitamin can be a causal as well as consequential factor due to the increased metabolic demand of respiratory infections.

Currently, the RDA for Vitamin C among those 19 years and older is 90 mg/day for males and 75 mg/day for females. Consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables, especially green and red bell peppers, and citrus fruits can ensure meeting and exceeding this RDA. Due to its influential role on the immune system, consuming sources of vitamin C from whole foods is critical to consider, but does excessive intake of perhaps 1000 mg of easily accessed vitamin C in one Emergen-C packet really have profound effects? The question around the benefits of excessive intake from supplements remains controversial. Research has shown conflicting results: some studies have concluded that a vitamin C supplement plays a preventative role in respiratory infections while others argue that supplementation of this vitamin is only beneficial or

necessary when one is unable to meet the RDA through whole food sources.

Due to conflicting information, when in doubt, look for whole food sources of vitamin C as mentioned previously. To maximize absorption of this vitamin, consume foods high in vitamin C raw when possible or steam or microwave, as the heat used in other cooking methods can be damaging.

The role of vitamin D has garnered even greater attention in current research with its effect on COVID-19 outcomes, especially as its deficiency has been recognized as a worldwide pandemic. Vitamin D enhances cellular immunity function by reducing pro-inflammatory and increasing anti-inflammatory cytokines. It is inversely related to risk of pneumonia, sepsis, and acute respiratory distress syndrome. Our primary source of this vitamin comes from exposure to sunlight, and so the recommended intake remains a complex topic due to its low presence in whole food sources. A lack of conclusive research exists on the exact amount of daily vitamin D necessary, but currently the RDA in the US is set at 600 IU per day from food sources.

There is current evidence that supplementation of vitamin D could reduce the risk of influenza and COVID-19 infections and fatalities, so as winter approaches and sunlight exposure decreases in the Northern hemisphere, it becomes critical to consider vitamin D intake. If exposure to sunlight is not accessible, or your diet is low in vitamin D, a supplement of 2000 IU/day or even higher is currently supported by the research to raise plasma levels to at least 30 mg/day to reduce infection risk. When taking or if considering a vitamin D supplement, be sure to take it with foods high in fat to maximize absorption. When looking to increase vitamin D in your diet, consume fatty fish such as trout or salmon, eggs and fortified cereals and milk. A single tablespoon of cod liver oil can also provide 1360 IU! Further, it never hurts to get outside and get some sunlight for an extra bonus of vitamin D.

Finally, zinc is known for its direct antiviral properties and balancing the immune response during infectious disease. It preserves tissue barriers, prevents pathogen entry, and inhibits viral replication. Deficiency in this mineral is an established risk factor for respiratory and infectious diseases, making it a subject of interest as a potential link to the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. A characteristic of this novel viral infection is its imbalanced immune response due to pro-inflammatory cytokines, lung tissue damage, and systemic inflammation. There are a growing number of studies regarding the benefits of a zinc supplement for its anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant role, especially as most diagnosed COVID-19

Continued on next page

patients are at risk of zinc deficiency. Further, mild zinc deficiencies go largely unnoticed, with at least one-third of the world population affected, and the elderly and those with underlying conditions most at risk.

For adults, the current RDA for zinc is 11 mg/day for males, and 8 mg/day for females. In order to meet this goal through your diet, consider animal proteins such as beef, pork, lamb, or dark meat from chicken. Nuts and whole grains are also abundant in zinc. Be on the lookout for common symptoms of severe zinc deficiency such as hair loss and poor appetite. Rising issues with loss in senses of taste and smell are also a side effect of zinc deficiency as well as COVID-19, a proposed mechanism for the role and use of zinc against the infection. If you are considering zinc supplementation due to a lack in dietary sources or

increased risk, most multi-vitamins contain adequate amounts of zinc but draw caution to over-supplementation of greater than 40 mg/day as this can cause adverse gastrointestinal side effects as well as lead to copper or iron deficiency.

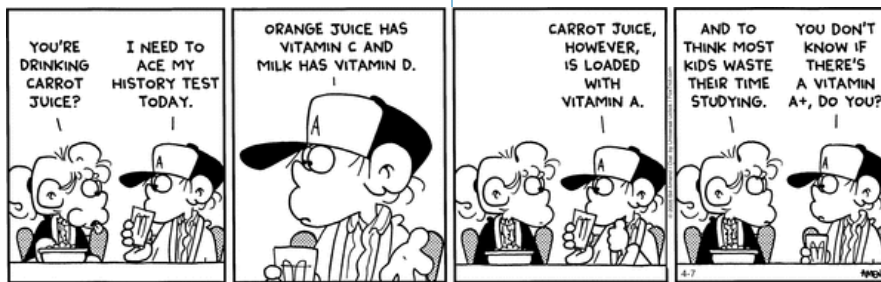
While the CDC report briefly cited these three nutrients as key players in the immune system and emphasized the benefits of whole food consumption, current research in supplementation has been spurred by this pandemic. The NIH has several ongoing and upcoming clinical trials analyzing the use of concentrated amounts of Vitamin C, D, and Zinc in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. For example, one trial will be studying the effects of Hydroxychloroquine and vitamin C in prevention for high risk health care workers. Another randomized triple-blind trial conducted in Quebec is in phase three, consisting of over 2,400 high risk healthcare workers, with half receiving a vitamin D₃ intervention, and the other half receiving a placebo. Further, a study which began in June in California is examining the effects of supplementation of vitamins C and D and zinc along with Hydroxychloroquine in prevention. This research will provide new insights on the influence of micronutrients, supplements, and whole food sources on COVID-19 prevention and other immune system factors.

Outside of just these nutrients, the CDC also addresses the changes and challenges in food availability during this time of COVID-19, where many face a lack of access to fresh produce. Tips on purchasing canned and packaged goods using the nutrition label are also emphasized and can be found at www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates. Some budget friendly tips to keep in mind while shopping

include focusing on in-season produce (which is also higher in vitamins and minerals) or purchasing frozen and canned produce to use for cooking. If considering supplementation of any micronutrient, it is always important to check in with your primary care physician and reflect on your individual needs and circumstances.

It is clear that nutrients found in our foods play unique and vital roles in our health. In a hopeful sense, we await the results of several clinical trials that are currently underway which will provide a clearer path for the future of supplementation in both the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. For now, when incorporating these new or continuing foods into your diet, make sure to enjoy and celebrate them as well! Mindfulness and happiness have been linked as crucial contributors to

immune health. On that note, the best we can do is continue our journeys in nutrition education, follow the CDC's guidelines to preserve social distancing, wear a mask, and take care of our minds, our bodies, and one another.



References:

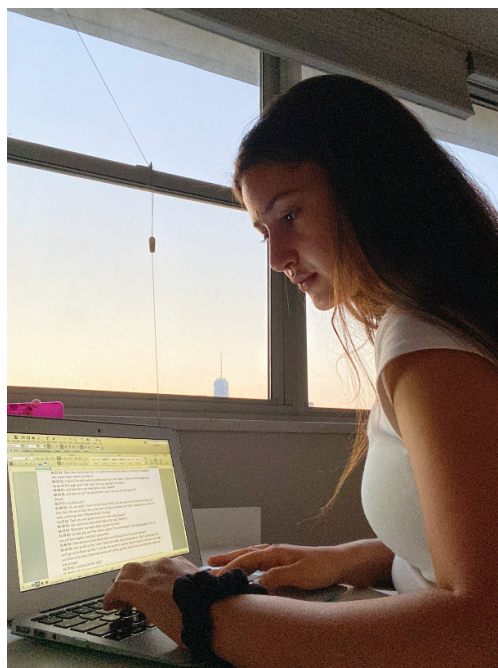
- Carr, A. et Maggini, S. (2017). Vitamin C and immune function. *Nutrients*. doi:10.3390/nu9111211
- Food and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/food-and-COVID-19.html>
- Grant, W. B., Lahore, H., McDonnell, S. L., Baggerly, C. A., French, C. B., Aliano, J. L., Bhattoa, H. P. (2020). Evidence that vitamin D supplementation could reduce risk of influenza and COVID-19 infections and deaths. *Nutrients*. doi:10.3390/nu12040988
- Holick, M. F. et Chen, T. C.. (2008). Vitamin D deficiency: a worldwide problem with health consequences. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. doi:10.1093/ajcn/87.4.1080s
- Office of Dietary Supplements - Vitamin C. Retrieved from <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminC-HealthProfessional/>
- Office of Dietary Supplements - Vitamin D. Retrieved from <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-HealthProfessional/>
- Sarma, N., Giancaspro, G. et Venema, J.. (2016). Dietary supplements quality analysis tools from the United States Pharmacopeia. *Drug Testing and Analysis*. doi:10.1002/dta.1940
- Wessels, I., Rolles, B. et Rink, L.. (2020). The potential impact of zinc supplementation on COVID-19 pathogenesis. *Frontiers in Immunology*. doi:10.3389/fimmu.2020.01712
- Zinc in diet: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002416.htm>

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REFLECT ON SUMMER TC INTERNSHIPS

Over the summer, three high school students interned with graduate and doctoral students in the Nutrition Program, as well as with the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy at Teachers College. Hannah Gedanke, Catherine Ching, and Nicholas Martin shared their thoughts on their summer experience here at TC.

Hannah Gedanke: Perspectives from a High School Summer Intern

As a rising senior at Millennium Brooklyn High School, I have always had an interest in nutrition and psychology. I was excited to have an opportunity to volunteer this summer as an intern in the Program in Nutrition at Teachers College. My research involved assisting two graduate students, Suzanne Finkel and Samara Holba, with their integrative projects by listening to recorded interviews and transcribing their content. First, I transcribed an audio recording of an interview on how low-resourced families navigate celiac disease. The interview was of a sibling of someone who had celiac disease and asked how they thought their sister felt about having to eat gluten-free. The interviewee said they believed their sibling tends to feel very insecure in social settings. Listening to this made me realize how dealing with a gluten-free diet can trigger psychological problems, especially anxiety. It also made me realize that, for some people, it is not only social



Hannah Gedanke hard at work this summer

situations that can cause anxiety, but also the stress of having to find affordable foods that they enjoy eating. For example, in another interview, the teen said that they began meeting with a food therapist who helped them try more gluten-free options that they liked. They also said that sometimes they can't get certain gluten-free items because they are too expensive. This experience gave me a more in-depth understanding of the way food and nutrition can play a role in mental health. It seemed clear that dietary restrictions, such as a gluten-free, can be harmful to some individuals in ways beyond the physical effects.

My second research project was on the experience of graduate students during quarantine. One interviewee stated that group exercise always motivated him to stay committed to working out, but now that he is isolating, it is more difficult to maintain motivation without the support from his community. He also said that, despite not having other people around him, exercising has helped him be a happier person overall. Another interviewee shared a similar perspective by saying that running kept her mentally stable during the pandemic. Listening to these interviews provided me with additional support that taking care of our bodies by exercising can benefit our mental health.

I relate very strongly to the fact that taking care of our bodies helps us feel better in various ways, as I myself have helped and encouraged teens to eat healthy for their psychological well-being. I even made an Instagram account dedicated towards this cause. As a result, many friends have been able to improve their self-image and self-esteem. This summer internship at Teachers College helped me engage with the topic of the food, exercise, and mental health connection on a deeper level than I had before. For example, I never thought about how dietary restrictions such as celiac disease affects people not just physically, but mentally as well. I was also able to learn about the role of a food therapist, a profession I had never heard of before. I hope that connections between physical and mental health are talked about more in the future so that people can find new ways to relate to health in the same way I did.

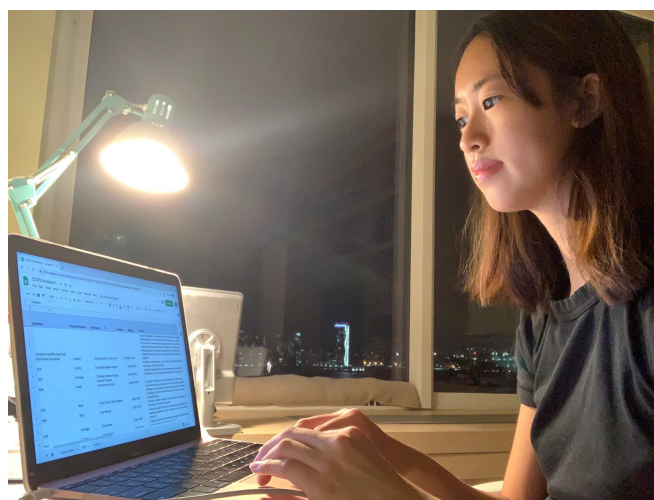
Catherine Ching: What I Learned about the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Funded Initiatives

Growing up, my father owned a Cantonese Dim

Sum restaurant in Brooklyn Chinatown, and every Saturday I would sit behind the cashier and enjoy a plate of Cheung Fun and Char Siu Fan. Constant meat eating was so ingrained in my culture and so normalized in my daily routine that I didn't think twice about it. It wasn't until the spring of 2020 when I took my first nutrition course that I realized that I had the power to choose what I eat. This revelation was so simple, yet life changing. I learned about nutrient sources in vegetables and legumes, plant-based meat alternatives, vitamin supplements, and healthy snacks. I also learned about the influence of the food industry on school meals. The facts were shocking. Pizza included a 'vegetable' just because it had sugar filled tomato sauce and mozzarella milk fat. Private funded school cafeterias were serving McDonalds and Popeyes for lunch. Indeed, it was clear to me that there needed to be an increase in healthy nutrition education accessible to all people, especially young children.

As the coronavirus started to spread throughout New York City, I became increasingly interested in how much the city would provide healthy food and food and nutrition education to our community. A high school summer internship at the Teachers College Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, & Policy working with Julia McCarthy was a perfect fit for my interests. I was assigned to look at the 2021 NYC Discretionary Budget and determine the amount of funds that went towards food related initiatives (Emergency Food, Food Benefits, Nutrition Education, etc.). I also had to note the council member who funded the food initiative, the organization that received funding, the agency, the amount funded, and the purpose of the initiative. I then analyzed the data for specific patterns and compared the findings to the data doctoral student, Laura Raaen, analyzed from the 2020 NYC Discretionary Budget. The comparisons were interesting. It was not surprising to see the huge increase in emergency food funds from last year to this year, given the demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was shocking to see how little of the budget went towards medically tailored meals, especially since people with medical conditions are more susceptible to the coronavirus and need more assistance. Similarly, though a lot of the budget went towards nutrition education, there was very little towards nutrition education in schools. In fact, the DOE only funded seven initiatives of the same organization, FAN4KIDS, a non-profit dedicated to reducing childhood obesity targeting low-income, elementary school kids.

As shown from personal experience and my data collection as an intern, a major problem that still exists is the lack of healthy nutrition education taught in public schools. As a rising junior at Stuyvesant High School, I am happy to see that my school cafeteria has implemented Meatless Mondays. Of course, there are still improvements to be made in making the vegetarian options more nutritious and delicious. I am planning to found a vegan club at my high school, so that I can educate my peers about plant-based nutrition, spread the word about creating a more sustainable food system, and encourage other clubs to implement Meatless Mondays at food gatherings. The summer internship at the Columbia's Teachers College Tisch Food Center has helped me to understand the connections between the impact of coronavirus on government funded food initiatives. The experience has also educated me on the various professions related to food policy and advocacy work and has confirmed my passion in the fields of nutrition and environmental science. In the future, I hope that people will start to advocate for more government funding towards nutrition education for children and medically tailored meals so that we can create a more just and inclusive food system.



Catherine Ching working with the Tisch Center

Nicholas Martin: Perspectives from a High School Summer Intern

Chicken Nuggets. Mozzarella Sticks. French Fries. The school lunch line looks like a fast-food conveyor belt, the only colors provided by soggy tomatoes, yellowing lettuce, and dried-out baby carrots. Prior to the pandemic, as I would make my way closer to one million other students across New York City, is supposed to provide a nutritious meal that will help us stay energized and focused throughout the day.

Schools encourage us to “eat healthy” by nudging students to take fruits and offering salad bars. To me, they seem to contradict their own suggestions by serving entrees that are breaded and fried to a greasy, oily, tasteless mess. I felt hopeful that change was coming as I interned on a research project with Teachers College Program in Nutrition graduate student, Lauren Kaufman, on the history of NYC school menus. I helped her comb through lunch menus dating back to the past decade and was pleasantly surprised that options for students were *somewhat* improving and more inclusive food was being offered. For example, as the years passed, the school system moved away from using any kind of pork, and began offering “Alternative” and “Vegetarian” menus and options like “Mexicali Bean Chili” and “Cheesy Stuffed Shells” on regular menus. Although few schools actually have adopted the Alternative and Vegetarian menus, their creation seems to mark a promising commitment to make school food more plant-based, less ultra-processed, and, in my opinion, more appealing.



Nicholas Martin examining School Lunch Menus

I also had the opportunity to attend meetings at this summer’s virtual SNEB conference, which helped me to understand developments that are being made in teaching healthy eating practices to students and their families. For example, the “Future of Food in Schools” presentation by Brighter Bites and Produce Moms emphasized the importance of exposing people to new foods and showing them different ways of cooking and eating them. Real-life interactions increased the likelihood of vegetable purchase by parents and consumption by students, showing that healthy eating

can healthy eating can, once demonstrated properly, be an empowering skill that increases culinary awareness, creativity and flexibility.

Another emphasis was placed on diversity, a topic also discussed at the SNEB session, “Developing Nutrition Education Resources for Diverse Audiences”. The presentation explained that while it is important to represent various cultures in nutrition education, one must do so accurately and respectfully, tailoring how information is made available based on the target audience. Taking this advice into consideration, I created my own supplemental nutrition course, consisting of two lessons and a final project, meant to teach kids to be nutritionally aware and open to trying new foods. By “exposing” some popular foods with nutrition and ingredient labels and “spotlighting” some items representative of different cultures, I hoped to make healthy eating seem both easier and more enjoyable. Hopefully, should a child participate in the course I developed, they will find themselves also questioning what they are served in school, and try to see what actions they can take not only to eat healthier but to encourage change.

All in all, as I enter my senior year at Stuyvesant high school in NYC, I feel satisfied that I have done my part (however small) in thinking about the way kids are fed and ways to better educate kids about food. Although school menus are improving and nutrition education is becoming more mainstream, a lot of work still needs to be done. Nonetheless, I am confident a day will come when all chicken nuggets are replaced with grilled chicken, French fries with baked potatoes, and stale vegetables with thought-out, non-soggy salads.

BY: VICTORIA RINSEM

Apple & PB Bake

Ingredients

Apple Prep:

- 1/2 Tbsp coconut oil
- 1 medium apple, chopped (about 1 cup)
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup
- 1/2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1/8 tsp vanilla extract
- Cinnamon and nutmeg to taste

Wet Ingredients:

- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/3 cup apple sauce
- 1/3 cup peanut or nut butter
- 1 egg (can substitute with a flax egg)
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract

Dry Ingredients:

- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375° F
2. In a mixing bowl, add the apple pieces and coat with maple syrup, lemon juice, vanilla extract, and cinnamon and nutmeg to taste.
3. Heat a medium sized skillet on medium heat. Add the coconut oil. Once melted, add the apple mixture and bring to a simmer until edges become slightly browned (5-10 minutes).
4. In a separate mixing bowl, add in wet ingredients and whisk together.
5. Add the browned apple to the wet ingredients and stir.
6. In a separate mixing bowl, add dry ingredients except walnuts and stir.
7. Fold in dry ingredients to wet. Then fold in walnuts.
8. Line a 9x9" baking tray with parchment paper and add in mixture evenly, flattening the top.
9. Bake for 25-30 minutes
10. Take out the baked oats and allow to cool for at least 15 minutes before slicing. Enjoy!!

**Can be stored in the fridge for up to four days



This Apple and PB Oat Bake is a new fall staple in my family's house. Autumn is all about apples and this oat bake features this seasonal ingredient nicely, along with simple, satisfying, and shelf-stable ingredients. They're perfect for breakfast, a snack, or even paired with ice cream for dessert!
- Rebecca Valdez

BY: THU THU MAY OO

Burmese Pumpkin Curry

Ingredients

- 2.4 lbs. of Kabocha Squash (Japanese Pumpkin)
- 1 medium onion
- 3-4 garlic cloves
- 1/4 cup small dried shrimp (optional)
- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 1/2 Tbsp vegetable bouillon powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Water as needed

Directions

1. Peel and dice the pumpkin into cubes.
2. Finely slice the onion.
3. Mince the garlic.
4. If using shrimp, wash and drain small dried shrimp.
5. Add onions, garlic, and dried shrimp into food processor and blend together (skip this step if not using shrimp).
6. Heat a medium saucepan at medium-high heat.
7. Once hot, add vegetable oil.
8. When oil is hot, add the onions, garlic, and shrimp if using. Cook and stir for 3 minutes or until fragrant.
9. Add the pumpkin, vegetable bouillon powder, and salt and pepper to taste.
10. Add water as needed, starting with
11. Cook for 15-20 minutes or until the pumpkin is cooked through.
12. Serve with rice or eat as is!



My mama's pumpkin curry, also called "Shwe Payone-thee Hinn" in Burmese, is my favorite dish! Even though we don't have autumn in Myanmar (Burma), I like eating this dish especially on the rainy days because its sweet, hearty, and very comforting! Here I am, testing this recipe and savoring it under the Seattle's drizzle. Hope you enjoy. - Thu Thu May Oo