

Bridging the Gaps



The Intersectionality of Food & Medicine: Creating a Healthy Sustainable Diet

Student Interns: Rodaina Ahmed, MS, Drexel University College of Medicine
Cynthia Huang, Drexel University College of Medicine

Academic Preceptor: Emily Spengler, MD, Drexel University College of Medicine, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children

Community Preceptors: Jonathan Deutsch, Ph.D., CRC, CHE, Drexel Food Lab
Rachel Sherman, Drexel Food Lab

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Do Good. Feed Better. Keep Going. The Drexel Food Lab is a faculty-mentored interdisciplinary food product design and culinary innovation research lab solving real-world problems in sustainability, health promotion and access. It applies culinary arts and science to improve the health of people, the planet and economies. In doing so, they not only develop new food products and menu items with entrepreneurs, industry, non-profit, and government partners, but also develop flagship "products," graduates across disciplines who are poised to improve the food system.

<https://drexel.edu/cnhp/research/centers/Drexel-Food-Lab/>

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

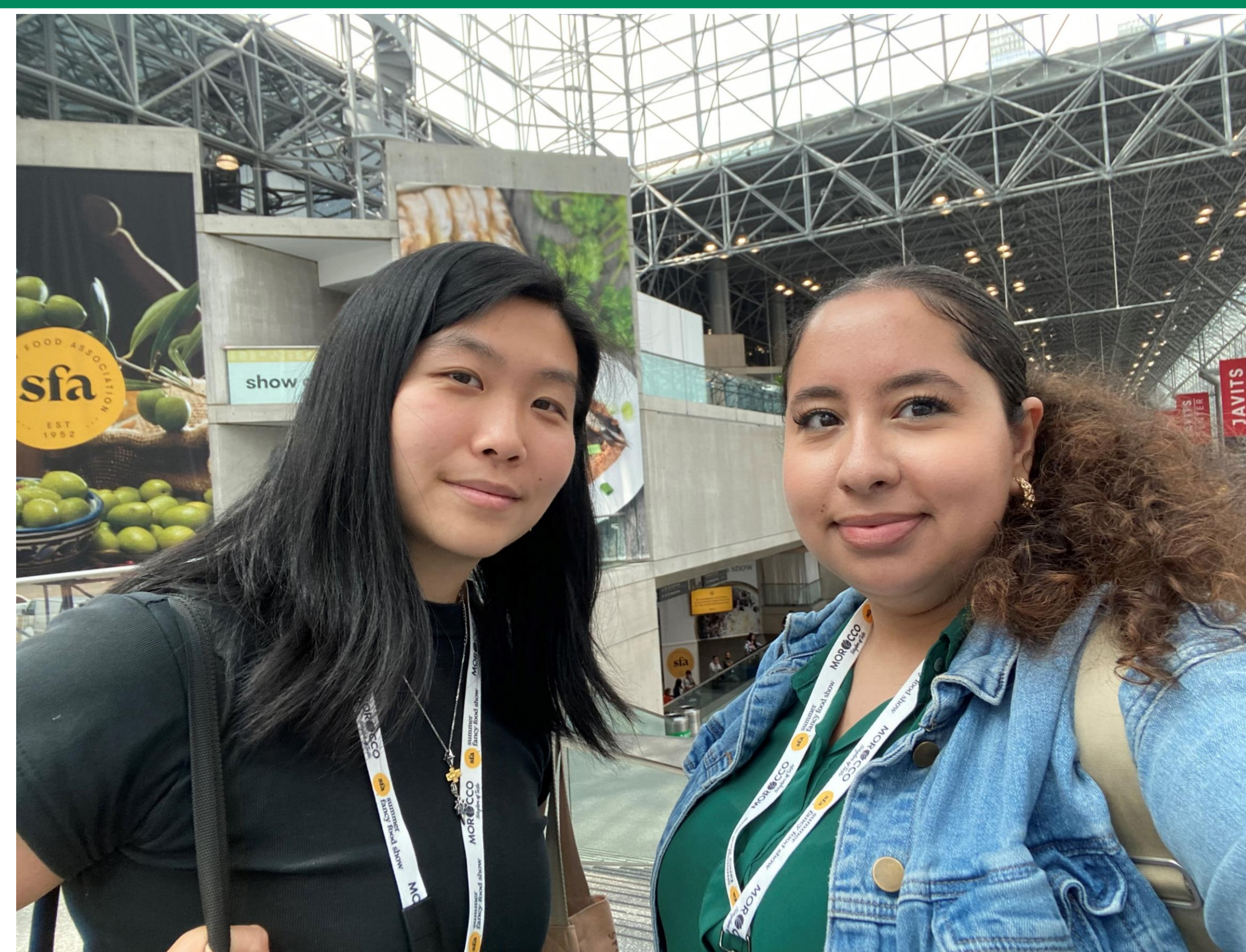
The Food Lab is not the most conventional community health site: on a day-to-day basis, there is minimal interaction with the community. However, the work that Food Lab does can have widespread impact throughout the world. The Food Lab works with clients throughout Philadelphia, the US, and the world to develop products that will improve nutrition for a large population. For example, one current client is from Saudi Arabia, and she is working on developing healthy, frozen baby food. The sky is really the limit for the impact that Food Lab can have: it sits on the crossroads of medicine, nutrition, community, innovation, and much more.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gap interns assisted with all the various activities of the Food Lab including but not limited to community lunches, product development, client meetings, research, and presentations on healthy eating. The main project this summer focused on sustainability through teaching home cooks how to reduce food waste. Another major project was centered on the concept that food plays a critical role in healing for chronic health diseases. The interns also volunteered with various community food organizations, such as Manna, Philabundance, and Broad Street Ministry, in order to gain a better understanding of the food resources available in the community.

REFLECTION

"Being a part of the food lab this summer has been nothing short of exceptional. We purposely chose this site to step outside of our comfort zone and get more experience in the culinary realm and learn more about nutrition. We followed the daily activities of the lab from meeting clients to developing recipes in the kitchen. Everyday was different and exciting, and that spontaneity is part of what made the Food Lab so fun to work in. Our preceptors welcomed us with open arms and gave us various options of projects to work on each day. To get more first-hand involvement in the community, we volunteered at Manna, Broad Street Ministry, and Philabundance, and they were all such fulfilling experiences and great resources to take into the future. This site really emphasized the concept that food is so much more than just sustenance: it is community, innovation, collaboration, culture; and perhaps most relevant to us as future physicians, food is health and food is medicine. Interning here has widened our scope on nutrition and taught us numerous valuable skills transferable to the medical field. It is definitely not the most conventional community health site, but we think it is an invaluable opportunity for future health professionals to get a unique and deeper understanding of how food has huge impacts on health and on communities."



ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/JOYS

- Catered a community brunch for 100+ guests
- Cooked and styled new dishes
- Created nutrition labels
- Food trend spotters at the Summer Fancy Food Show
 - <https://feed.specialtyfood.com/2023/07/19/junior-trendspotters-identify-fancy-food-show-trends/content.html>
- Assisted with research and development for various clients
- Assisted with research on reducing food waste and improving sustainability for home cooks
- Cheese tasting at Di Bruno and food tour at Reading Terminal Market
- Assisted with New Product Development: Trend tours and market research
- Assisted with a presentation on using mocktails to reduce alcohol consumption
- Assisted with a summer cooking camp for high schoolers
- Learned various cooking skills including grilling, tempering chocolate, and making pasta