



## Overview of the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative

*Jointly Led by **The Culinary Institute of America** and **Stanford University***

### The Vision

To create a dynamic, invitational network of leading university-based scholars, foodservice business leaders, and executive chefs to collaborate on research and education in support of culinary-centric, evidence-based food systems innovation within and beyond universities.

This initiative leverages the unique position of universities to advance healthier, more sustainable life-long food choices among students—who will soon be parents and adult decision-makers—by connecting a diversity of insights from academic programs, dining services, and athletics (performance dining).

### The Initiative

In 2012, **The Culinary Institute of America (CIA)** and **Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (HSPH)—Department of Nutrition** launched Menus of Change, an ongoing initiative to advance better food choices and menu development at the intersection of health, sustainability imperatives, culinary insight, and next-generation business strategy. With the success of the initiative’s annual Menus of Change (MOC) Leadership Summit and following the release of its annual report, “Charting the Future of Food & the Foodservice Industry,” the CIA and Stanford University launched a complementary initiative: the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC).

The MCURC is a working group of scholars and campus dining leaders from invited colleges and universities interested in accelerating efforts to move American consumers—and college/university students, scholars, and staff in particular—toward healthier, more sustainable, plant-forward diets. The collaboration recognizes that a significant amount of energy for food systems transformation today is being driven by concerned university students and forward-looking faculty and administration, and understands that university food systems hold considerable untapped potential to further catalyze existing efforts.

At the foundation of the Collaborative are the 24 Menus of Change Principles of Healthy, Sustainable Menus, and central to the work of this network is a research agenda that uses campus dining settings as real-world testing grounds to evaluate an entire matrix of hypotheses on how best to implement these principles in high-volume foodservice. In doing so, MCURC is developing and scaling a new methodology for behavioral research around food choices that uses campus dining halls as living laboratories.

The MCURC members serve over 700,000 meals per day, and one of the Collaborative’s strategic goals is to enlist the combined power of the Collaborative members through Collective Impact. This strategic initiative of data collection and impact analysis empowers members by enhancing their understanding of the Collaborative’s combined protein purchases. The members’ protein purchases directly affect the global environment and the health of their students. The data is aggregated so that the MCURC membership’s ability to enhance both of these efforts is exponentially increased beyond that of any one university. Once fully understood, the most effective strategies for reaching these goals will be shared more broadly.

We held our first meeting of key MCURC campus dining representatives at the CIA’s campus in Napa Valley in November 2014, establishing a strong core, and soon after, we brought on board foodservice leaders from several additional colleges and universities around the U.S., as well as academic faculty from a broad range of disciplines (please see p. 5). We held our first annual meeting in October 2015 at Stanford, our second annual meeting in October 2016 at Harvard, and our third annual meeting in October 2017 at UCLA. The message from these university leaders has been clear: There is an urgent need for a network such as MCURC; the time for this change is now; the opportunities are immense.

To date, the network consists of 226 members representing 64 institutions:

### **Participating Institutions**

#### **The Collaborative Was Founded and Is Jointly Led by:**

- The Culinary Institute of America
- Stanford University

#### **University Members:**

- Boston College
- College of the Holy Cross

- Columbia University
- Cornell University
- Duke University
- Harvard University
- Kansas State University
- North Carolina State University
- Northeastern University
- Ohio State University
- Oregon State University
- Princeton University
- Rutgers University
- Tufts University
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of California, Davis
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of California, Office of the President
- University of California, Riverside
- University of California, San Diego
- University of California, San Francisco
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- University of Colorado, Boulder
- University of Colorado, Colorado Springs
- University of Connecticut
- University of Maryland
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- University of Michigan
- University of Montana
- University of New Hampshire
- University of North Texas
- University of Notre Dame
- University of Southern California
- University of Washington

- Vanderbilt University
- Yale University

**Academic Members  
(Participating Faculty):**

- Chatham University
- Colorado State University
- Drexel University
- Fairleigh Dickinson University
- Hotel Management School Maastricht
- INSEAD
- Johns Hopkins University
- Lebanon Valley College
- The New School
- New York University
- Penn State
- Penn State-Lehigh Valley
- Queens College (City University of New York)
- Rice University
- Singapore Institute of Technology
- Universite de Dijon
- University of Barcelona
- University of Vermont
- Virginia Tech

**Ex Officio Members:**

- Airbnb
- Google
- U.S. Olympic Training Center

**Research Collaborators:**

- EAT Foundation
- LeanPath.org
- Monell Chemical Senses Center
- World Resources Institute

For more information about all member institutions, please visit our website--[moccollaborative.org](http://moccollaborative.org)--to read through the individual member profiles and learn about the many innovative initiatives and programs these leading-edge schools and organizations are implementing to advance healthier, more sustainable food choices.

## **The Research Opportunities**

The study of food—whether focused on the related areas of agriculture, the environment, medicine and public health/nutrition, food science, hospitality, business, psychology, anthropology, history, political science, or law—is often siloed within academia. Furthermore, not all of these disciplines or programs within which they reside are typically engaged with the culinary and business leadership of university foodservice. Food studies programs that are emerging across the U.S. are starting to chip away at these silos. However, it is not yet standard practice for university efforts around food studies to be truly comprehensive, or thoroughly reflected in the food choices, menu development strategies, and procurement guidelines of their respective foodservice operations.

**The MCURC Research Working Group focuses on projects that impact students' diets, by developing scalable, applied solutions to promote delicious, healthier, and more sustainable food.** We have developed three key types of research:

- Collective Impact projects. As described above, we aim to develop a culture of sharing data on the combined purchasing of specific foods that are at the center of the Menus of Change Principles. This continuously updated, robust data set presents myriad opportunities for rich analysis and research projects that will be valuable in real-world contexts.
- Operational Research. The Research Working Group develops “process improvement interventions” that inform more evidence-based improvements to dining operations.
- Academic Research. The support of academic research is one of MCURC’s most important roles. Our research portfolio includes numerous projects that aim to be published in peer-reviewed journals and provide broadly generalizable results.

Here are some of the projects that have been conducted so far.

### **The DISH (Delicious Impressions Support Healthy Eating) Study**

The Protein Flip, one of MCURC’s main research focus areas, aims to improve consumption of vegetables and plant-based proteins vs. animal-based proteins. Several studies have shown that healthy labeling is counter-effective to improve vegetable consumption, whereas indulgent labeling can have a positive impact on immediate consumption and postprandial satiety.

A pilot study, conducted in one MCURC institution in 2016, had shown the positive impact of indulgent labeling vs. neutral or healthy labeling on vegetable consumption. A scaled replication of that study, the DISH Study, has now taken place at six member colleges

and universities. The manuscript has been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

### **Food Waste Messaging Study**

What is the impact of messaging on students' mindsets around food waste reduction? Food waste messaging is a strategy broadly used by dining operations to reduce food waste. Based on a pilot operational study conducted in one MCURC university, this experiment has now taken place in five universities. The study investigated whether students saw the signs, if the signs had an impact on their food choices, and if they thought this kind of communication was important in their dining halls.

This study confirmed the relevance of using this strategy to build awareness around food waste, and a second iteration of the study will take place in late 2018/early 2019.

### **Faith in Fat Study**

In an attempt to maintain a low weight, some students choose no-fat options. But fat is needed to absorb fat-soluble vitamins. The type of fat is important for health because it can affect chronic disease risk. Menus of Change encourages choosing healthy fats, not no fats, so this study investigated whether students think a dish with no fat is healthier than a dish with unsaturated, "healthy" fat, such as olive oil.

The data is currently under statistical analysis, and preliminary results show that students lack knowledge regarding the role of fat in the diet.

### **MCURC Implementation Science**

This research project, conducted in 2016/2017, aimed to evaluate whether multi-site behavioral investigations were even feasible. This was the first collaborative experiment conducted across multiple institutions participating in MCURC; the experiment was a meatball taste test conducted in five campus dining halls comparing different proportions of a mushroom-beef blend.

The manuscript, *Building a Living Laboratory Model in University Dining Halls: Process Evaluation of a Coordinated 5-University Taste Testing Experiment*, has been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Examples like these speak to the remarkable amount of interest in developing research among different departments, between campus dining and academia, and between different colleges/universities. In addition to opening up new avenues of research, working with other universities through studies conducted at multiple sites presents the opportunity to increase sample sizes and therefore chances for grant funding. These examples also illustrate that the potential for this type of collaborative work is

tremendous—and that the results can extend well beyond the sum of initial parts.

The MCURC initiative is meant to break new ground in terms of how scholars, foodservice experts, and business leaders interact around opportunities to advance successful food systems transformation within universities. Beyond this, MCURC works to cross-pollinate academic research that addresses the Menu of Change research agenda and that reaches beyond university communities to global opportunities for change. The Collaborative is a culinary-centric initiative that seeks to bring chefs, food experts, and key academic leaders and innovators around a table of enhanced vision, dialogue, and sharing.

***In short, the MCURC recognizes that, in order to advance critical food issues, systems-level solutions are required that integrate academic, business, culinary, and consumer insights. One of the best ways to advance such thinking is by incubating novel collaborations in university-wide academic and foodservice settings—and innovative collaboration among universities.***

### **Universities, Schools, Divisions, and Departments Represented in MCURC**

Dining services divisions	Schools of liberal arts—American studies, anthropology, history, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and others
Athletic departments and performance dining divisions	Schools of environment and natural resources
Business and management schools	Schools of food systems and food studies
Design schools	Schools of journalism
Schools of agriculture/departments of food science	Schools of hospitality
Schools of government and policy	Schools of science
Schools of law	Select interdisciplinary programs such as intra- university food studies centers
Schools of medicine	
Schools of public health/departments of nutrition	<i>Note: Other schools to be considered as appropriate</i>

### **Organizational Structure**

The initiative aims to work toward measurable impact, leverage new research findings in actionable ways, and develop concrete tools and resources to support the implementation of Menu of Change principles. As such, MCURC relies on committees and working groups, led by chairs and co-chairs responsible for organizing and facilitating dialogue among the committee or group, setting goals, and establishing priorities for action.

### **Professional Committees:**

Divides all members into five committees grouped by professional affiliation:

1. Executive Chefs and Culinary Directors
2. Senior University Administration
3. Directors of Dining Programs
4. Academics
5. Registered Dietitians and Sustainable Food Program Managers

These committees facilitate cross-university collaboration, providing professional groups an opportunity to connect and delve deep into issues relevant to their work.

### **Working Groups:**

The Education Working Group is responsible for leveraging key research findings to create resources and strategies in support of health and sustainability imperatives. These may include toolkits, trainings, recipes, menu strategies, as well as educational programming for the annual member meeting. The Research Working Group is responsible for establishing research questions to pursue, stimulating the design of new studies, and developing a next-generation, culinary-centric national research agenda.

### **Leadership Council:**

Composed of a small number of members from both foodservice and academia, and from across professional committees and working groups, this council of MCURC chairs and co-chairs serve as the drivers of project work and strategic goals and objectives, as well as advisors on the MCURC research agenda at large.

### **Advisory Council:**

This collection of invited MCURC members, both operator advisors and academic advisors, bring unique subject matter expertise and skills to effectively advise the Collaborative leadership on Collaborative-wide decisions, key priorities and objectives, and the overall strategic direction of the Collaborative. The work of MCURC is also supported by a representative from the All-Member Meeting host institution—to connect planning for the annual summit with the year-round work of the Collaborative—and by a Communications Chair, who helps guide strategy for press outreach and equips members with the tools and training to tell the individual and collective stories of the great work taking place in the Collaborative.

### **Finance & Development Committee:**

This committee consists of a small number of members with a track record in fundraising and sponsorship who oversee the plan and budget with corresponding support goals, and priority and aspirational needs, with full transparency toward members. An Industry Advisory Council serves as the voice of sponsor representatives, providing feedback and shaping sponsor engagement.

### **Membership Committee:**

Handles membership inquiries, guides the growth strategy and consideration of new candidates, and makes key decisions about the meaning and terms of membership.

### **Sponsors:**

The work of the MCURC would not be possible without the generous support of its sponsor organizations. For a full list of both founding sponsors and annual sponsors, please see the MCURC website page--[moccollaborative.org/sponsors](http://moccollaborative.org/sponsors)--featuring profiles of all 20 sponsor organizations.

### **Meetings**

- **7<sup>th</sup> Annual Menus of Change Leadership Summit** | June 18-20, 2019 | CIA in Hyde Park, NY
- **All-Member Meeting 2019** | October 7-8, 2019 | University of Colorado, Boulder
  - Member universities take turns hosting the All-Member Meeting each October.