

Executive Summary

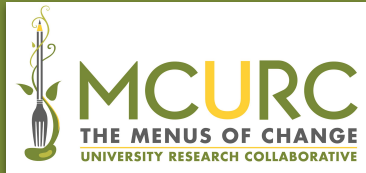
Faith in Fat: A Multisite Examination of University Students' Perceptions of Fat in the Diet

Using dining halls as living laboratories to explore students' perceptions of fat



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ABOUT THE MCURC

Co-founded and jointly led by Stanford University Residential & Dining Enterprises, Stanford Prevention Research Center, and The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) – and as an extension of the groundbreaking Menus of Change initiative presented by the CIA and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition – the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC) is a collaboration of forward-thinking scholars, foodservice leaders, executive chefs, and administrators for colleges and universities who are accelerating efforts to move people toward healthier, more sustainable, and delicious foods using evidence-based research, education, and innovation.



Introduction

A Student-Driven Research Model

For the last 30 years, public health policies globally have focused on reducing the consumption of fat, leading to a false perception that “fat is unhealthy.” More recent research shows that all fats are not equal, and that unsaturated fats have a positive impact on human health. The Mediterranean Diet, and its flagship ingredient, olive oil, is a prime example of a healthy diet that promotes a healthy consumption of fat. However, “fat” still has a bad reputation in most eaters’ minds. Based on this observation, Rutgers University students developed a research project to evaluate the perception of fat among their peers.

This pilot study became a quick, plug-and-play “seed study” -- research that could be easily implemented throughout the Collaborative -- called the “MCURC Faith in Fat Seed Study.” This was the first MCURC research project to gauge perceptions of the Menus of Change Principles -- in this case, “Go Good Fat, Not Low Fat” and “Choose Healthier Oils” -- within the student population.

Involving the MCURC members--from students and faculty to chefs and dining directors--in the research process is key to achieving our goals. Democratizing research allows us to embrace the operational constraints of data collection, collaboratively develop the research protocol, and allow for a more direct application of the findings into the dining environment than is possible with traditional academic research.

The MCURC research model is built on these ideas. In this model, the MCURC Student Fellows have a key role in collecting and analyzing the results. Their participation in the research process--from inception to publication--allows them not only to learn how to conduct field research, but also to contribute to the research process with insights and ideas from the very population being studied. By welcoming Fellows to be immersed in the research process, the MCURC removes the historical barrier of research being left to only seasoned academics.

- The Faith in Fat study aimed to investigate if students would consider a food item healthier if it were made without fat, with unsaturated fat, or with saturated fat.
- This study was approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board.

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The Business of Healthy, Sustainable, Delicious Food Choices

CHOOSE
HEALTHIER
OILS

CLIMATE UNIVERSITY
HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Department of Nutrition

View all 24 Principles of Healthy, Sustainable Menus at menusofchange.org

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GO “GOOD FAT,”
NOT “LOW FAT”

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Research Model

The MCURC has pioneered a groundbreaking behavioral research model to scale innovative research projects from one university to multiple universities across the MCURC network.

Rutgers University
Faith in Fat Pilot
Study 2018



MCURC
Faith in Fat Seed
Study 2020



1

Institutions



201

Participants



603

Diner Decisions

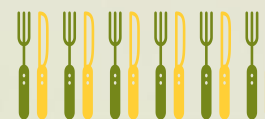
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533



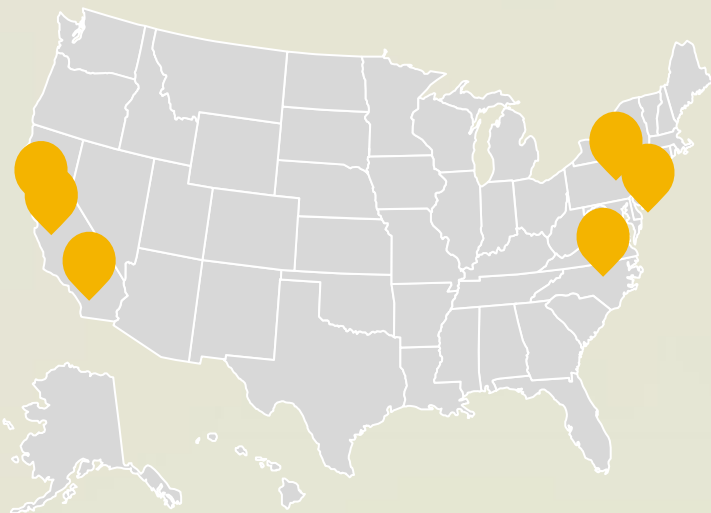
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The Faith in Fat Study Asks:

Would students consider a food item healthier if it were made without fat,
with unsaturated fat, or with saturated fat?



Ucla

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OF NEW JERSEY

NC STATE
UNIVERSITY

Stanford

LVC

UCDAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

The study was implemented using dining halls as living laboratories
in six colleges and universities across the United States.

Study Design

Interactive Booth

The Faith in Fat study aimed to investigate if students would consider a food item healthier if it were made without fat, with unsaturated fat, or with saturated fat.

Three food items (salad, chicken, and cookie) differed in the type of fat described in the recipe: no fat, olive oil, or dairy based (butter or ranch dressing).

The foods used in this experiment were chosen because they are regularly available in campus dining halls and represent three major categories of dining options: appetizer, entrée, and dessert.



Students were asked to look at the menu and choose the option they thought was the healthiest. This picture shows the display used at Rutgers University. The five other participating institutions used booths and table set-ups that looked the same.



Results

“No Fat” is Seen as the Healthy Choice

Most participant chose the “no fat” option for the salad (71%), chicken (73%), and the cookie (68%), confirming Rutgers University’s data from the 2018 pilot.

49% of participants chose the “no fat” option for all foods.

Conclusion

- For students, foods with no fat are seen as the healthiest options.
- The type of dishes tested did not impact the perception of fat.
- Students lack knowledge regarding the role of healthy fat in the diet.

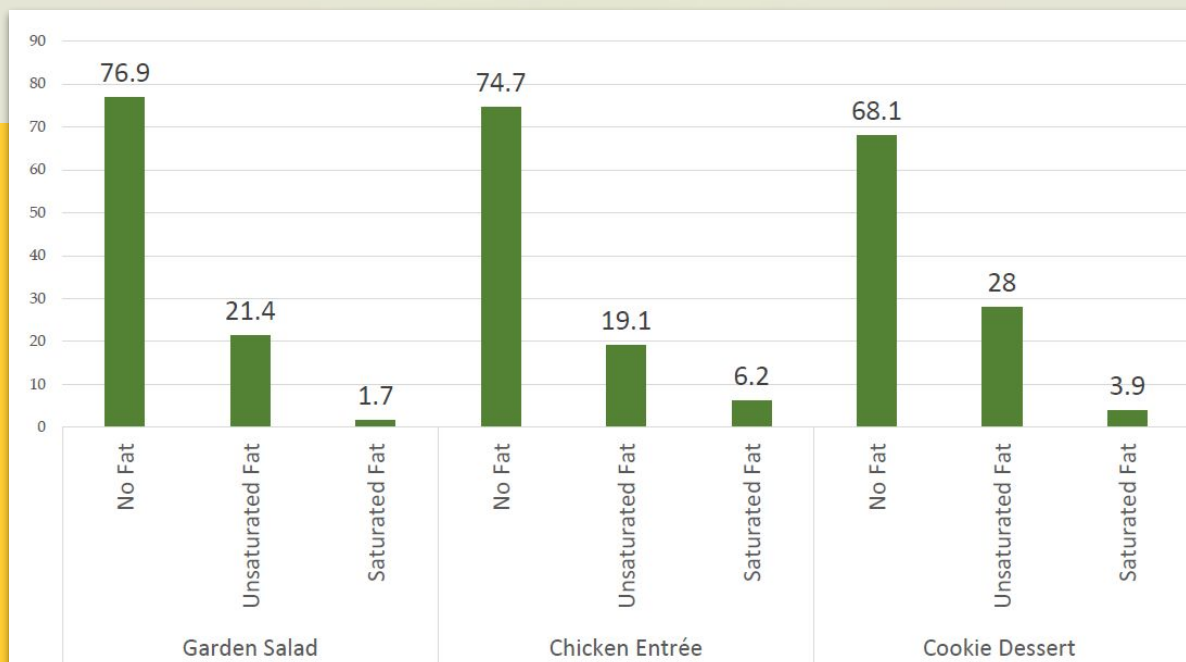


Figure 1. Frequency of fat option choice per meal type in the Faith in Fat Study. Across all meal types, the no fat preparation option was chosen 73% of the time.

The “no fat” options were selected as the healthiest for each of the dishes.



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Opportunities for Impact

Educate Students on Menus of Change Principles

College and university students lack knowledge regarding the vital role played by healthy fats in the diet.

- Nutrition education, such as food literacy programs or teaching kitchen classes, are needed to help students understand that **the type of fat is more important than the total amount of fat.**
- Experiential education—such as using healthy dishes with and without fat on interactive **Tasting Tables** placed in dining halls—could show the importance of fat in eating healthier foods such as salads, legumes, and lean proteins.
- Providing chefs and operators with information on the origin, quality, and usage of fat can **increase dining leaders' knowledge and expertise** around fat, which, in turn, can help them educate the students they serve.
- Recognizing that students turn to coaches, chefs, and teachers as trusted sources for nutrition and sustainability information, tools must be provided for these groups to **promote evidence-based information to their athletes, diners, and students.**



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Academic Publication

Faith in Fat: A Multisite Examination of University Students' Perceptions of Fat in the Diet

Matthew J. Landry, Jasmine M. Olvany, Megan P. Mueller, Tiffany Chen, Dana Ikeda, Danielle Sinclair, Lesley E. Schatz, Priscilla Connors, Robert T. Valgenti, Ghislaine Amsler Challamel, Christopher D. Gardner, and Peggy Policastro.

The article was published on August 24, 2020 in the peer-reviewed journal *Nutrients*. The publication is available on the MCURC website:

www.moccollaborative.org/mcurc-academic-publications



nutrients



Article

Faith in Fat: A Multisite Examination of University Students' Perceptions of Fat in the Diet

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Abstract: Despite recent relaxation of restrictions on dietary fat consumption in dietary guidelines, there remains a collective “fear of fat”. This study examined college students’ perceptions of health among foods with no fat relative to foods with different types of fats (unsaturated and saturated). Utilizing a multisite approach, this study collected data from college students at six university dining halls throughout the United States. Data were available on 533 students. Participants were 52% male and consisted largely of first-year students (43%). Across three meal types, the no-fat preparation option was chosen 73% of the time, the unsaturated fat option was selected 23% of the time, and the saturated fat option was chosen 4% of the time. Students chose the no-fat option for all meal types 44% of the time. Findings suggest that college students lack knowledge regarding the vital role played by the type and amount of fats within a healthy diet. Nutrition education and food system reforms are needed to help consumers understand that type of fat is more important than total amount of fat. Efforts across various sectors can encourage incorporating, rather than avoiding, fats within healthy dietary patterns.

Keywords: dietary fat; dietary recommendations; nutrition knowledge; consumer behaviors

1. Introduction

Dietary fat intake is an essential facet of a healthy diet for cell functioning and for facilitating the utilization of fat-soluble vitamins and the bioavailability of carotenoids [1,2]. It also contributes to the texture, flavor, and palatability of foods and may increase satiety as fats can take longer to digest compared with other macronutrients [3,4]. Nutritional guidelines on dietary fats have changed in recent decades [5]. In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, the focus was on limiting fat and choosing low-fat

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To learn more about the MCURC--and take advantage of our vast portfolio of resources for research, education, and innovation in support of healthier, more sustainable food choices--please visit:

moccollaborative.org

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