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Cooking as Commensality for Chatham University's Food Studies Students



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Introduction

Let's peer into the love of Monday dinner nights in the kitchen of three of my cohort-mates. The groceries were picked up an hour earlier for our meal of potato hash with peppers and onions, toast, a pile of 16 over medium eggs, waffles (from a box), and leftover crispy pork and Chinese spicy sausage. My partner brought over a large George Foreman-type contraption that makes 4 waffles at a time to help speed up the waffle prep. A cohort-mate who doesn't normally cook for herself was cutting and cooking potatoes for us while monitoring the waffle iron. Another person and their partner were assembling the rest of the meal in the kitchen, around the corner where those of us at the kitchen table couldn't see them. Five of us, those not cooking, were around the table, thinking about schoolwork and laughing at the blasé joke cracking that only comes when you've grown closer with someone. We guffawed at our intentional act of eating meat after watching Babe the night before, helped clear the table of our laptops and re-set it with plates, napkins, drinks, and the accoutrement of condiments and toppings that pair with any regular breakfast, even when it's breakfast-for-dinner. We ate, we laughed, we focused on flavor and talked about our days. We cleaned the table, did the dishes, and tried to leave their home in a way that left no remnants but the laughter of our family dinner.

This is what commensality means to me – not just the act of eating together, but the before, during, and after. This includes the mise en place that transitions into cooking, asking people what they want to drink beside their meal, the togetherness during our feasts, and the cleanup. These are the moments that make everything worthwhile for me. My classmates and I have created a beautiful community of friends, because of the serendipity of us choosing our graduate program at a specific point in time. The people who deliberately chose to study

something so essential to human life (food, in this case) are the kind of people I want to surround myself with forever.

Our cohort has endured learning in the time of COVID-19. We came to a new place, wondering what school, connection, and our roles with food would look like. My fond memories of cooking with others persist, and are found mostly within the setting of someone else's home or my own, although some of our courses also involved crafting historical world cuisines or recreating Edna Lewis' recipes in a group of two or three in our campus' newly renovated commercial kitchen. In either setting, I connected with those who were in the school or home kitchen with me. We were doing something collectively, for the love of our program, to meet deadlines, or for the love of the food we were bound to eat. While this experience is unique, I wonder if others in similar situations feel the same way about connection interwoven with the creation of food. Or do others feel they are lacking connection to those around them from the busy-ness of school or the limitations of the global pandemic?

With these thoughts in my head, I came to wonder about social interactions among my classmates both on and off campus, and how those interactions influence students' experiences in school, in this case in the Food Studies program at Chatham University. While I have strong memories of bonding with my classmates by making dinner with them off-campus, and while students often socialize with one another more easily and organically off-campus, is there a role for creating more intentional experiences of connection on campus? For students who may not have a spacious kitchen at home, or the tools required for multiple cooks or the friends to invite over, is there a case to be made for using university space to create these kinds of opportunities? These ponderings led me to the main questions I am focusing on for this thesis: What does

commensality mean for students in a food focused program? How does the act of social cooking and eating impact students personally and communally, outside of their classroom setting?

Chatham University's Food Studies Beginnings

To start to think about these questions, it is helpful to provide some context around food sharing and togetherness in the Food Studies program at Chatham University. The Master of Arts in Food Studies was started in 2010, and is situated within the larger Falk School of Sustainability and the Environment. At its conception, classes were split between the Shadyside campus in Pittsburgh, PA and the Eden Hall Campus (EHC) in Gibsonia, PA. This campus, where almost all program classes are now held, is roughly 40 minutes north of Pittsburgh. Other programs exist at EHC, such as the Bachelor's and Master's of Sustainability, a Bachelor's of Environmental Science, and most recently a Bachelor's of Food Studies (Chatham University, 2022a). This new campus includes many learning spaces like an old apple orchard, farm and garden spaces, a communal bread oven, a Kitchen Lab, and more. This campus is relatively remote, though, and only a few buildings are utilized by students as community spaces, such as in Orchard Hall (the singular dorm at EHC), the Esther Barazonne Center (the dining hall/makeshift student union), and the Lodge. While there are other locations that could provide students gathering space, these are the most frequently used for all students, across areas of study.

In an informal interview during Spring 2022, the director of Food Studies, Dr. Alice Julier, told me that the program was designed to bridge the relationships between agriculture and culinary education. This ideology still exists within the program, which also seeks to connect theoretical and complex analysis of the food system with hands-on experiential learning opportunities (Fazioli, 2016). Student driven ideas were the catalyst for variations within the

program, catering to student interests through opportunities available both within coursework and outside of school. Each professor that successively joined Food Studies offered a wonder of multi-disciplinary foci, with interests in things like nutrition and food access, culinary skills and gastronomic applications, tree care, policy, and livestock, and agroecological understanding and pedagogical practice. While the number of students who join this program fluctuates annually, the range of interests that our professors hold helps to inform and build upon students' diverse range of interests (Fazioli, 2016).

Curricular opportunities have continued to include attending conferences, having communal meals, engaging with dining services on campus, and connecting the farm and garden to cooking. As an example, some students had interest in hosting community lunches several years back, leading to collective community lunches for the campus. Similarly, the utilization of the bread oven has provided the opportunity for students to create a single meal, like pizza in a made-to-order style, while providing access to community engagement. Potlucks have also been a key component of building community and enjoying food communally, something that Dr. Alice Julier holds near to her heart and area of study (Julier, 2013). These concrete examples represent a multitude of ways that community engagement within this program is blended with the enjoyment of meals. Dr. Julier emphasized that while no program exists without bureaucracy and pushback, extracurriculars have continuously been something that students feel empowered to pursue.

While these communal meal opportunities have consistently occurred in the past, they somewhat fizzled out in 2020-2021 – understandably so with the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, while potlucks were held regularly and almost universally attended, in the wake of COVID, they have become less frequent and less well-attended. But do these kinds

of changes, in turn, create an opportunity to think more broadly about campus spaces and their potential role in connectedness and social relationships among students?

The history of the Food Studies program has shown a care and attentiveness to student desires or needs. Whether it be for learning in class or learning novel skills, there is deliberate effort made in helping students reach their goals, if the professors are made aware of it. And while all of the existing community engagement opportunities have been lovely and served multiple purposes and needs, I've become increasingly curious about a few things: Is there potential to have the Lodge Kitchen Lab space be used more openly by students as an informal gathering place at EHC? Is there a way to accommodate social and community goals, say, at different times or in different ways than the current primarily educational and classroom goals of the kitchen space? And relatedly, is there more that can be done at this current moment to promote consistent communal creation of student meals in ways that also help build community?

I see the Kitchen Lab space as an incredibly opportune location, one that already does and could perhaps increasingly offer a space to gather, create, and connect. This space is currently designed primarily as a teaching kitchen, which typically are culinary spaces that offer skill-building about food safety, nutrition, health, and more (Eisenberg and Imamura, 2022). The Kitchen Lab maintains certification with Allegheny County and maintains all safety protocols and regulations required of a commercial production kitchen. In addition, it was recently renovated with a grant that required space for creating value added products and for holding demonstrations for classroom use. In other words, there are certain requirements that need to be adhered to when thinking about any possible additional uses for the space. In Spring 2022, for example, students here worked on needs of the teaching kitchen, such as in streamlining food safety practices and experimenting with value-added production. This group of students held

kitchen office hours, designed to be accessible to students, although they were not necessarily advertised as “open cooking opportunities,” per se. And yet, I think there is great potential for additional student engagement in offering this kitchen as a common meeting and cooking space for more students.

This particular kitchen, as compared to other kitchens at Eden Hall (such as the smaller ones in the Mueller house or Morledge house), is: well equipped with a wide variety and quantity of kitchen tools; offers opportunities for creative food innovation, including producing value-added products; has a large area to allow for teaching and experiential learning; is a central space for students of all areas of study at EHC; and is a great entry point to operating in a commercial kitchen if someone has not done that before. There are several reasons why I believe more students don’t utilize this kitchen space, gleaned in part from what students have said in passing – such as lack of knowledge about open hours, not knowing how to use the space, feeling kept from the space, or the office hours falling during non-mealtimes (when they might have less obvious need for or interest in being in a kitchen). Keeping all of this in mind, I wondered if this kitchen space might be a good one within which to experiment with various formats of or opportunities to cook together, in ways that could speak to some of the social connections I had experienced with classmates off-campus but in ways more formally created, to include a wider array of students than just my friends. I wanted to use this space to think about community building and experiential learning outside of a class time setting, but still in a space with tools and adequate space for larger student gatherings. I wondered about the potential contribution of non-class related cooking in a centrally located space, especially for new students.

Chatham University’s Food Studies Students in Fall 2021

In the 2021-2022 school year, Chatham University added an undergraduate Food Studies cohort and curriculum. Eight students declared this major, and a number of other students have also made Food Studies a minor. This not only means adapting and crafting this sort of education for a younger audience, but also finding ways to engage them that may be different from those of the graduate students that have historically populated Food Studies. Some highlighted areas in the undergraduate curriculum include focusing on food production and consumption, food access and policy issues, global food systems pathways, and allowing for breadth and depth in chosen interdisciplinary electives like sustainability, business, English, and history (Chatham University, 2021b). Whether choosing Food Studies as a Bachelor's degree from the start of a college career, or coming into these classes from other schools or majors, individual students' places in their Food Studies education may differ based on their interests and involvement. Regardless, they are all newly coming to Eden Hall Campus to learn more about these areas of study.

I remember being an undergraduate student and wanting to become involved on campus, not only to build my resume, but to meet friends and do something fun. I was yearning to find a place that I fit in. Is this how students in Food Studies are feeling, too? Right now, a majority of undergraduates are only at Eden Hall two days a week, which is notably 18 miles further north than the main campus in Pittsburgh, PA. Yet, the home of Food Studies lives at Eden Hall. As such, I wondered if it was hard for new undergraduates to acclimate both into college and also into the Food Studies community – for reasons of distance, transportation, time constraints at Eden Hall, and the fact that most other Food Studies people are graduate students. I thought there may be some eagerness for undergraduate campus involvement within Food Studies (which I had already seen in increased undergraduate participation in Food Studies' extracurricular

“Fermentation Club”). As such, I was hoping students would be eager for this proposed project – cooking sessions to be held in the teaching kitchen in Spring 2022.

Similarly, a relatively large cohort of 25 Food Studies graduate students started school in Fall 2021. I had the chance to meet with nearly all of them, starting with orientation week in August 2021. I became friends with a few people within classes and through extracurriculars. Notably, one of the new students, who I had had great conversations with, left school mid-semester because of deteriorating mental health issues, overwhelm with schoolwork and an inadequate work-life balance, among other things – like not feeling a fit within this program and her own personal interests. Another student contracted COVID-19 and never came back to the program, again because her own personal interests did not fully fit here. Another graduate student, who I see every week at Fermentation Club, said that she lives alone and really missed the opportunity to cook with friends in a kitchen. I asked if this was something that she felt she needed, as well as why she felt like this couldn’t happen. She said she didn’t know people enough to ask them over, not to mention that her apartment was small and in the city. Overall, she really wanted the opportunity to get more involved with hands-on cooking and workshop opportunities with those around her. Recently, a different first year Food Studies graduate student reminisced about how she hasn’t cooked in the kitchen with others since she’s been in Pittsburgh, something which used to happen often in her life pre-pandemic. This expression of need for community made me remember the others who had already chosen to leave this program. Could the idea of instituting some sort of communal cooking opportunities, if implemented sooner, help some students? If there were an opportunity to connect with others via cooking, how might that be fostered more systematically? Why not try to create this, where there may be potential to foster positive mental health, relationships, and community connection?

Food Studies and Experiential Learning

Food Studies is inherently an interdisciplinary field. Amy Trubek (2019), an anthropologist and chef who spearheads the University of Vermont Food Studies program, notes that Food Studies scholars might utilize (but are not limited to) anthropological scholarship, quantitative research methods, historical research, and analysis of things like food production, culture, nutrition, consumption, and more in their research and educational approaches (Trubek, 2019). In Trubek and Carabello's work, *Teaching to Cook and Learning to Sense in Food Education* (2018), they discuss how cooking is a great pathway for helping learners understand the social and tangible aspects that food brings to human livelihoods. Similarly, Van Esterik (2017) discusses the need for food praxis as a way to help educate students about the theoretical components of Food Studies while being able to participate, engage, and become advocates for food systems issues. These scholars thus suggest the utilization of a diverse range of hands-on methods to comprehend food. To me, this translates into using a kitchen as a method to not only teach cooking but also provide a place to analyze how humans do what they do – in this case, eat and socialize in tandem.

This emphasis on learning through work in the kitchen (or on a farm or garden or with animals or in any number of food-related contexts), falls into the category of experiential learning, which utilizes praxis as a mode of learning. A common understanding in experiential learning theory is that we can learn from the experiences we have, given the opportunity for feedback, observation, and reflection (Kolb 1984). A curriculum that focuses on experiential learning or hands-on learning suggests courses are taught with a focus not on direct learning methods (like straight lecture) but rather on ways to promote practical, real-world skills that engage a learner's ability to problem solve and increase overall learning performance (Baker and

Robinson, 2016). A quote by Dr. Alice Julier on the Chatham University B.A. website states, “Food and sustenance are one of the most important sectors of human life and experience and require a broad range of knowledge in order to work and thrive in the modern world” (Chatham University, 2021b). Being able to harness this capability relies directly on an experiential learning or hands-on focus on food in the context of the everyday.

While there are lots of opportunities at Chatham for this kind of learning, there is little publicized on the Chatham website about ways for students to get involved other than providing general information about Chatham’s Eden Hall Campus and all that it has. During Spring 2022, Chatham added a video about the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen Lab as an opportunity for student engagement, which (to me) is an improvement in terms of clarifying outsiders’ perceptions of our experiential education opportunities. While I personally know there are avenues that exist to utilize the Kitchen Lab space, it may be challenging for a prospective or incoming student to know these opportunities exist or feel connected to them. Through this research, my goal is in part to increase accessibility and knowledge about Chatham’s Food Studies program and the opportunities it provides, in this case via a set of extracurricular cooking sessions. My goal is not to teach other students, per se, but rather to offer cooking as a method of experiential learning outside of the classroom, one which may provide a more casual way to prepare new foods and contextualize cooking with peers at the Eden Hall Kitchen Lab. The goal of these sessions was to use a central yet formalized commercial kitchen space, like the Kitchen Lab, to collectively create student-suggested dinners, while possibly increasing togetherness and peer connection. This proposal was based on the idea of using food and the experiential learning needed to create it to potentially provide a number of commensal and student benefits.

Current co/extra-curriculars

Currently, Chatham University's Eden Hall Campus has a number of organizations or "club"-like extra and co-curriculars, including, but not limited to, learning and growing in the Agroecology Demonstration Garden (ADG) and Elsalma Farm, helping cook for community lunches, testing fermentation in Fermentation Club (FC), taking care of goats and chickens with the livestock team, sharing food with the Food Sovereignty Community Council (FSCC), and more. Currently, all of these groups utilize the kitchen space in some capacity. Given the amount of produce grown on campus, some students create value-added products in the kitchen. FC is held in the kitchen spaces and creates a new fermented product during every meeting held. The Livestock Team has made chicken or duck dishes, post-slaughtering. FSCC stores their food from the growing spaces in the kitchen's walk-in coolers downstairs. All of these groups may not always cook in the kitchen space, but there is constant use of the Kitchen Lab and thus a foundation for building increased familiarity in the space.

There are also numerous opportunities for students to eat together at bakes at our wood-fired bread oven, community soup swaps or potlucks, workshop days held at the Center for Regional Agriculture, Food and Transformation (C.R.A.F.T), and more. Whether it be creating pizza dough for the bread oven or prepping food for a potluck, cooking is nearly always associated with these extracurricular events. But while there are a wide range of opportunities to prep or cook food, there is a caveat to this. Lots of these organized events or uses of the kitchen are based on student paid work rather than voluntary participation. Every single thing listed here has been or is associated with a student's paid position. FC and FSCC have more voluntary participation than other opportunities listed, but still, they have their own foci on fermenting and food sovereignty respectively – where cooking is seen as a secondary act. Alternately, some of

these organized events are ones where students are required to participate as part of their coursework. In other words, nearly all opportunities to utilize this kitchen in some capacity are accessed through participation in organized extra curriculars, work, or coursework.

In all these examples of more formal access, learning and joy are still created when using the Kitchen Lab. I've never spatchcocked a chicken before, nor have I dehydrated and made black garlic salt, for example, but I did both of those things through Livestock Team and ADG work. I also never would have made a paratha from scratch or made over 30 pizza dough balls if it wasn't for my classes or extracurricular events. I did all of these things with other people using the kitchen, and they strengthened my feeling of connection to others, even if I did them through work hours or class-time. I've seen other students feel this kind of joy in the kitchen, too; during my time observing undergraduate Food Studies courses, the students lit up when they were able to have a cooking component to their coursework. I thus began to wonder about broader possibilities for experiences in the kitchen and the connection and joy that I see people exuding when they cook. In other words, I wonder about the possibility of opportunities not specifically related to work or class, and I have come to think that access to use this space should go beyond both. Do students feel they can create meals together? Do they feel like they can learn how to use the space? Is this only accessible to Food Studies students? What ways can we create involvement and the magic of cooking together outside of these limited opportunities? This project is designed to think about cooking as an extracurricular activity, as a place where students could make meals together. My interest is especially in the joy that comes from cooking in situations like I described in cooking with friends in a home kitchen. I wonder if that kind of connection can be fostered in an environment where more students, and students who may not be

as close with one another, can gather and create meals, especially without the constraints of class, work, or other hierarchies.

Problem Statement and Purpose

With Chatham University's first undergraduate Food Studies cohort, as well as one of the larger cohorts of graduate students, over 33 people started in Food Studies in Fall 2021. Yet, college dropout rates can be as high as 40%, for reasons like lack of social connection, mental health issues, and financial stress (Hanson, 2021; Leshner et. al., 2021). These struggles have exacerbated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Lederer et. al, 2021). Knowing this, I wanted to help integrate a group of food-curious students into the campus community via planned events that facilitated community cooking experiences. This research looked at commensality and student involvement, as well as the benefits of social cooking and eating in terms of personal and communal well-being. Throughout Spring 2022, I spearheaded the development and implementation of "cooking sessions" which I called *Cooking as Commensality*, designed to help students feel connected to their program, create community, and build commensality with one another (Kuh et. al, 2008). These opportunities were available for graduate and undergraduate students at Chatham University to attend and make dinner together. Through participant observation and informal interviews, I wondered if and how the opportunity to create meals outside of class-time helped students connect to one another, learn or practice new skills, and deepen attachments to campus, program, and peers in ways that are perhaps different from and yet complementary to already existing experiential learning work structures. My goal for this research was to capture a picture of these structures and opportunities at this specific point in time, one during which most of us have had our education during a global pandemic, while also still feeling the effects of transitioning to college (regardless of being a graduate or

undergraduate student). This research can inform future student-driven efforts in creating meals with one another at Eden Hall Campus.

Literature Review

Personal Influences

Recently one of my dear cohort-mates told me that building community is “what I do.” She said she thinks I do it because I want people to feel welcome, comfortable, and accepted in a space. My friend asked whether this could be due to my queerness, how holding an identity that in heterosexist society is alienated, I try to bring people together inclusively, no matter how they identify. This was one of those things that you only learn about yourself because other people are around you, seeing you be yourself. This got me thinking about what I am doing with this thesis, and what I bring to the table when attempting to cultivate community.

When looking at LGBTQ+ identities and their activisms, Ghaziani (2022) suggests that part of LGBTQ+ identities and activisms involves coming together to create space, or as Ghaziani (2022) puts it, “make space,” for their existence. When I read this, it resonated. As I see it, this kind of social goal and application is what I am aiming to do in creating cooking sessions. As students, we have a shared identity. And within this shared identity, I want to bring people together, especially via food, to offer some semblance of peace during the calamity of a global pandemic. Even outside of a pandemic, the communities we make and share with one-another are beneficial for our social selves (Antonsich, 2010).

COVID-19 and Students' Well-being

To be *socially connected* means to “reflect subjective awareness of interpersonal closeness with the social world” and is fundamental to human existence (Lee and Robbins, 2000; pg. 484). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social connection has been limited, considering the governmental closures that began in March 2020 in the United States (Marler et. al, 2021). The Centers for Disease Control recommended universities of higher education to limit social gatherings; to require wearing masks if with others; to social distance (i.e., keep physically separate from one another) at least 6 feet apart to limit exposure, and more (CDC, 2021). While these factors were, and still are, guidelines to prevent more people from contracting COVID-19, the social implications that this has on students in university settings is just as important to comprehend. Navigating something as novel as a global pandemic is no easy feat, and universities were met with a need for quick and responsible actions. William Rowley, a former Dean at Seattle Pacific University, discussed the ways a university may approach issues that come because of COVID-19, those being closures and an impact on university finances; a decrease in enrollment numbers; the need for technology and virtual learning; an increased demand for library services; and the unknown social impacts this can make on a student’s collegiate experience (Rowley, 2020).

For the 2020-2021 school year, Chatham University set out a number of new guidelines to improve the safety of students, staff, and faculty. These measures included: self-isolating prior to coming to campus for the school year and after breaks, daily temperature screenings if you were to come to campus, seats spaced out in classrooms and dining facilities, increase in surface sanitation practices, publication of close contact protocols, and more (Chatham University, 2021a).

Research conducted by Marler et. al. (2021) asked questions about psychological well-being for undergraduate students participating in web-based learning after the start of the pandemic during 2019-2020 school year, and found that students' sense of belonging, social engagement, and motivation was negatively heightened by the pandemic. Stressors, especially new ones like the COVID-19 pandemic, can also perpetuate students' feelings of loneliness and confinement, relating to behaviors like "laziness" which in turn can lead to lack of healthy activities (Popovic and Lim, 2020). Lack of "healthy activities," like maintaining healthy diet and exercise, as well as removing students from their social communities and networks through social distancing and virtual learning, puts students at risk for developing or exacerbating mental health issues (Lederer et. al, 2021; Popovic and Lim, 2020). Similarly, food insecurity could prove another stressor to student well-being during COVID-19. According to the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness, 40% of college students at four-year universities reported experiencing food insecurity and 22% of students experience hunger (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016). These issues affect physiological and psycho-social wellbeing, and can affect learning and performance in school (USDA, 2020; GPCFB, 2017). During the COVID-19 pandemic, college student food insecurity has risen, which disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) students almost 19% more than their white counterparts (GPCFB, 2017; Conroy, 2020). Food security also mirrors other stressors, like the increased financial burden in affording school during COVID-19, causing less focus on schoolwork. Other stressors, like being in volatile environments during web-based learning, are risks that could also worsen well-being (Lederer et. al, 2021; Conroy, 2020).

Coming into the 2021-2022 school year, Chatham University required all students, faculty, and staff to be vaccinated or to submit vaccination exemption/status for COVID-19, and masks were still required indoors, but there was no longer a physical distancing measure in place unless you contracted COVID-19 or were awaiting a test result (Chatham University, 2021a). There was also an increase in community events at Chatham University during this year, both virtual and in-person, but I posit that the lasting feelings of social deprivation are still present, not to mention the stressors listed previously still being a factor in student lives. One way to somewhat help alleviate some of the issue's students face is by offering co-curricular and extracurricular activities. After all, college students' relationships and engagements with classmates and professors, both in class and outside of it, are necessary for their well-being and success (Peltier et. al., 2000), even in a pandemic.

Extracurricular versus Co-curricular

There are many moments in which students can engage and learn content related to their studies in places other than the classroom. The particular focus for this thesis was to design additional extracurricular cooking settings, separate from the learning environment already created in the classroom. According to Texas A&M's Department of Student Affairs (2019), defining the difference between extracurricular and co-curricular holds weight in terms of how we associate student life to learning. The prefix "extra" creates a word that situates involvement in activities as separate from a student's main educational focus. Things like study abroad, a campus job, or participation in campus organizations are then put into a box as something outside of the everyday classroom learning environment. Co-curricular, on the other hand, situates experiences as something that not only mirrors already established curriculum, but also

builds it and allows learning to happen in settings like those mentioned before. Some key features of a co-curricular design are to include leadership opportunities, mentorship, and/or community outreach, all of which are desirable for students who are trying to prepare for careers (Martini et. al. 2019; Taylor, Doherty and Parks, 2020).

In terms of this thesis, I have defined the cooking opportunities I created to be extra-curricular rather than co-curricular. The main difference being that while there may be components included that students have discussed in their classes; students are mainly here to engage and participate in an activity with peers. This is not to say that learning does not happen in these extra-curricular settings – it almost certainly does, especially where activities were things that people didn't already have experience doing. Rather, the intention behind these cooking sessions was not centered around mirroring coursework. Learning happens everywhere, and the hope was to help students see value in the opportunity to learn something new, together, in the Kitchen Lab, outside of class-time. Learning within Food Studies here at Chatham University is co-curricular most of the time simply because there are multiple areas to learn about food systems in the classroom and during activities, and so my goal was to think about this more in an extra-curricular manner, albeit targeted principally to Food Studies minded students.

Extracurricular Involvement and Benefits

Attending university is a transitional period for many students. In the United States, 40% of undergraduate students drop out of college, 30% of who are first years (Hanson, 2021). A variety of factors influence these numbers, such as financial stress, academic rigor in the transition from high school to college, trouble connecting with peers, and/or the development of mental illness that impacts academics and wellbeing, among a multitude of other things (Hanson, 2021; Leshner et. al., 2021). Graduate students in particular are typically older than the age of 25

and thus have external responsibilities like other jobs and family that make school challenging and mental health something hard to prioritize (Lederer et. al., 2020). New students to higher education are also expected to become independent learners and create a way to study successfully, though this transition can come as a challenge (Worsley, Harrison, and Corcoran, 2021). All student backgrounds are different, thus making it hard to predict what issues college students face when they begin the school year. Regardless, all students need support via their institution, whether that be socially, academically, or via face-to-face instruction (Adams and Corbet, 2010).

Given the range of issues that arose during COVID-19, such as limitation of in-person classes and dropping enrollment rates (Rowley, 2020), meeting student expectations such as providing more social, academic, and in-person opportunities may help increase retention at a university. “Student engagement in educationally purposeful activities” has shown a positive association to student grades and in continuing their higher education (Kuh, 2008; pg. 551). Kuh (2008) also discussed how providing cooperative activities for students outside of class could reinforce student learning and involvement in other activities, especially in terms of community building. Sims, Luebsen, and Guggiari-Peel (2017) conducted research at three universities in the UK and surveyed students to understand their motivations for joining extra- and co-curriculars. Their results found that those who participated wanted to, “broaden my horizons...make a difference in my programme...become more involved...” and more (pg 10). “Hard to reach” students, like commuters, disabled, and older students who did not necessarily participate in activities should also, according to these researchers, be provided opportunities for involvement (Sims, Luebsen, and Guggiari-Peel, 2017).

Higher education researcher Alexander Astin created the student theory of involvement. Hunt (2003) summarizes Astin's work, which discusses how important student involvement is to improving students' academic and social lives. Participation in and with academics, student peer groups, and faculty creates a student-oriented environment. This enriches student learning and improves their overall collegiate experience. Astin's theory of involvement helps situate the pertinence of a student-centered approach, especially for building community. I feel our Food Studies community is wonderful, but I hesitate in assuming that the transition to college is easy for new undergraduate or new graduate students. One way to address this transitional struggle is to create a plan to foster a positive environment, get to know students and build trust so they can communicate when they're struggling, and offer a way to help them participate in a co-operative social setting (Worsley, Harrison, and Corcoran, 2021). Several studies have also shown that co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are one way to foster community on campus, while building upon students' desires to create traditions and cultivate friendships (Cheng, 2004; Buckley and Lee, 2021). I posit that with my research, which relies on creating and observing a series of out of class cooking experiences, we can not only build students' connection as Food Studies-minded students, but we can also focus on helping students feel connected to their program, their community, and help them socially.

Meanings of Commensality

Eating together is innately human and historically has been the way that human societies are created and continued (Jönsson et. al., 2021). The practice of eating together, and the social behavior that results from doing this, has been defined and explored by numerous social scientists under the term "commensality" (Smith and Harvey, 2021; Abarca, 2021; Scander et. al, 2021; Jönsson et. al., 2021). Commensality can focus on multiple things, from eating together at

a table, to eating in a certain location, to religious and ritualistic context, and to focusing on familial ties and conversation that comes while eating together (Jönsson et. al., 2021). Studies have shown that for children and adolescents, spending time eating with their parents fosters positive mental health (Elgar, Craig, and Trites, 2012; Fulkerson et. al, 2006); this all goes to show the power of social interactions during mealtime.

This practice doesn't focus solely on the physical act of eating, but also on the development of deeper social meanings. Commensality has been said to further social hierarchies within groups, or draw lines of difference such as via segregation, creating taboos, or identifying suffering via isolation (Jönsson et. al., 2021). Abarca (2021) conducted oral histories as a way to analyze how everyday foodways can transform commensality, which resulted in her three categorizations of commensality as, "ancestral, embodied, and responsible," which helped her understand how people feel tied to their past, are able to comprehend commensality as a key component in their lives, or experience it as propelling them to become food activists.

Commensality, and the inclusion of research about production, consumption, and clean-up is also one way to view a "utopian" ideal of what foodways should be like (Madden, 2015). Similarly, and more tied to educational settings, a study of twelve schools in Copenhagen focused on the creation of commensality via food preparation, taste, teaching, and dining, and showed that food education and a focus on pedagogy had the potential to empower students and staff to be "critical food consumers" (Hansen et. al., 2020). Seeing all of these definitions, it is clear that there is not just one way to understand the multiple social pathways that food can help us create (Smith and Harvey, 2021).

Whether with people who are close friends and family, or people on the outer circles of our lives like acquaintances and coworkers, eating together can bring happiness, belonging, and

positive forces of “social and emotional well-being” (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014, pg. 918). Biggs and Haapala (2021) focused on the ways that commensality can improve ties between non-familial, inter-generational people, and found that these practices can help foster empathy, solidarity, and lasting relationships. Similarly, a *lack* of social eating also has an impact on people’s mental health. One study conducted in South Korea posited that eating dinner alone was related to higher rates of depression, which also coincided with other stressors like lack of finances or having no significant other (Lee, Kim, and Lee, 2020). Similarly, another study in South Korea looked at students eating alone and rates of depression at 5 universities, pointing to area of residence, finances, age, illness, and the pre-disposition of depression as factors influencing the act of eating alone (Kim, Lee, and Lee, 2019). Therefore, commensality has benefits not only for the way that it brings people together, but for how socialization around food helps with things like feeling a part of a community and alleviating the stressors of daily life.

While commensality is typically defined as the act of eating together, I hypothesize that the act of cooking and cleanup can also enhance togetherness, conversation, learning, and relationships as ways to create social cohesion. These parts are of interest to me as they influence the definition of what it means to cook and eat together, in this case, as Food Studies students at Chatham University (Jönsson et. al., 2021). Utilizing the Kitchen Lab on campus without the constraints of a classroom setting or syllabus may help constitute a different side both of learning and of commensality, a commensality which includes not just eating, but also cooking as a group.

Comprehending Cooking Sessions

In order to flesh out what it means to create a cooking session, I felt it important to look at other iterations or examples of cooking within school settings. Nearly all of the literature I

found, whether it was within K-12 or higher education, was based in nutritional studies and hoped to teach students kitchen literacy outside of the classroom setting (Thomas and Irwin, 2011; Luongo et. al., 2018; Classens and Systma, 2020). While skill acquisition and food literacy are things I am not specifically looking for in my research, it is clear that learning how to cook and navigate a kitchen space is a common theme in any educational cooking setting. This also shows that cooking can build agency, where students are empowered and feel empowered by collaborating, which speaks to the ways that social connection can happen while cooking.

In addition to social connection, I wanted to see if well-being, commensality, or other impacts had also been studied in student cooking experiences. Gatenby, Donnelly, & Connell (2011) discuss a program in the United Kingdom called *Cooking Communities*, where they highlighted other findings through their research, like improved cultural awareness and students' enjoyment of free food, and also mentioned the need to measure community connection from these events. Their cooking sessions involved utilizing different multicultural recipes to help teach students about different cultures; thus, organizers hoped using these recipes would improve connection between students from different backgrounds. There was no correlative evidence between the two, but one large takeaway from the study was simply that students enjoyed the act of cooking new foods and eating together. Another key study by Ball and Brown (2012) had interviews with students who attended "dinner groups" or groups that met at least 4 times a week to prepare a meal together. The ability to interact with peers was one of the larger draws to student participation, allowing connection to happen over food despite the large time commitment this created. In other words, social interaction and growing self-confidence was a clear part of these kinds of programs. Other components, such as learning how to cook in a more formal kitchen, and trying new kinds of foods were also draws to holding cooking sessions.

Cooking and Wellbeing

When trying to comprehend the needs of individuals while cooking, it is important to highlight what we need socially. I am someone who has a slew of neurodivergencies like anxiety and depression, and cooking helps me be present, even though I don't always feel confident if I'm learning a new skill around other people. My lived experience can be explained by research, where Bandura (1998) discusses the emotional benefit, and increase of personal well-being, when things like motivation and comprehension are embodied in a social setting. Farmer, Leonard, and Ross (2018) reviewed eleven psychosocial studies about cooking in groups and personal well-being. While their sample of studies was small, some key findings showed improved confidence and self-esteem, mood, well-being, and health (via nutrition). Part of their hypotheses for why cooking yielded these benefits was due to the social connections created; the act of learning with others is a cooperative, experience-based, and therapeutic practice (Farmer, Leonard, and Ross, 2018). Farmer and Cotter (2021) too showed how cooking together improved individuals' well-being in terms of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). This kind of work is groundbreaking in expanding what it means to study cooking's social role in a way that recognizes the individual impacts of working in a collective group.

Methodology

Given the benefits of extracurricular activities for engaging students, and of group cooking and eating for commensality, mental health, well-being, and belonging, I wanted to explore how opportunities for social cooking could benefit students at Chatham. This felt especially important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the slew of daily stressors

students may face. I felt that having an extracurricular opportunity to employ cooking as commensality would be a helpful complement to the current extracurriculars that are offered at Chatham University’s Eden Hall Campus. I wanted to create a series of “cooking sessions” at Eden Hall campus, ones that somewhat mirror how workshops are held but with more opportunity for group-led discussions, less pressure to follow the “rules” of a recipe, and more openness overall to enjoy being in a space cooking with peers. I thought that having cooking sessions could help me figure out what commensality means for students in a food focused program and how the act of social cooking and eating impacts students personally and communally, outside of their classroom setting.

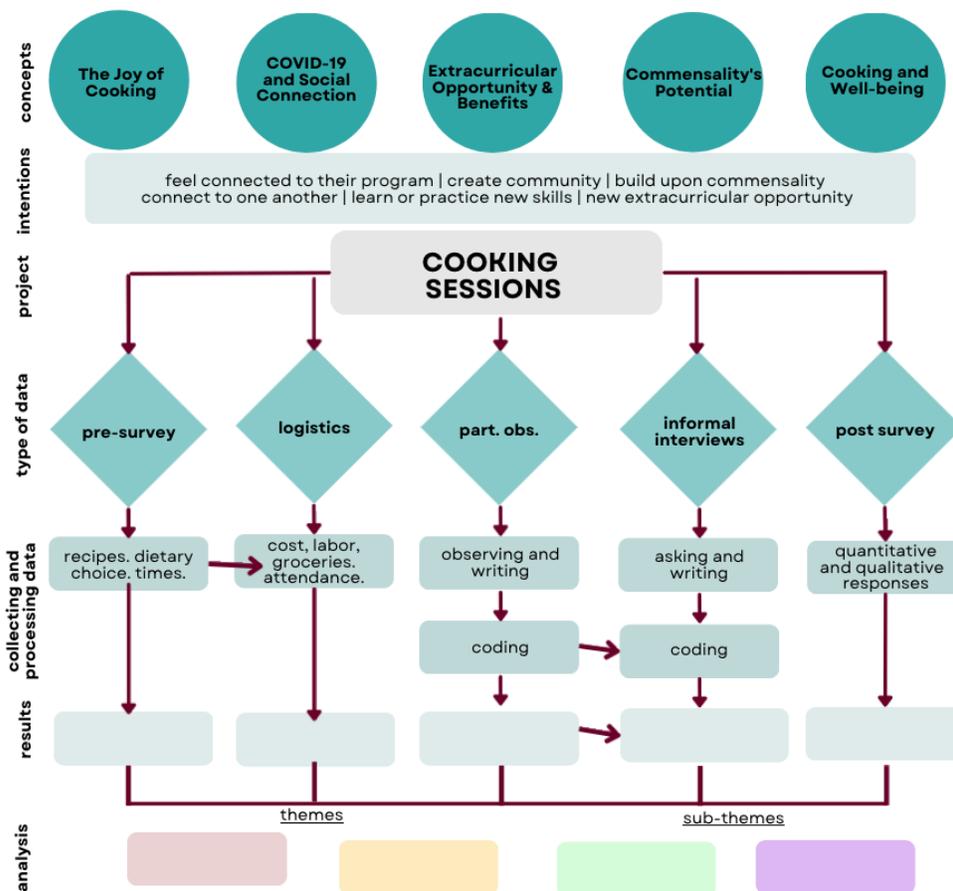


Chart 1 Data Analysis Breakdown

I did this through a number of methods. I used participant observation during the cooking sessions and conducted a few informal interviews after the sessions. There were also quantitative measures based on pre- and post-sessions surveys, as well as cost and logistical data around what went into putting on cooking sessions. My goal in using multiple methods was to unpack different components or find multiple avenues to the questions I sought to answer. I also thought that collecting each type of data provided an opportunity to paint a more holistic picture of the sessions themselves, with take-aways reflected based on multiple pieces of evidence, rather than say, my own speculation or interpretation of the cooking sessions themselves. This use of multiple methods also centered the perspectives of student participants alongside my own observations and notes.

All recruitment, consent forms, survey questions, participant observation and informal interview practices were approved by Chatham University's Institutional Review Board on January 10th, 2022.

Planning: Recruitment, Pre-Surveys, Scheduling, Logistics, and Facilitation

A. Recruitment

COVID-19 was still a present force during the Spring 2022 semester. Students, staff, and faculty were coming back from their winter breaks, leading to an uptick in positive cases. This meant a shift back to virtual learning for several courses, for two weeks. Recommendations to keep masks on indoors existed for the majority of the semester. The continual presence of COVID-19 meant fewer opportunities to have communal cooking in any shape or form. Therefore, the recruitment for this project (as well as the nature and design of it) was likely impacted by this pandemic reality. While one might argue that creating a cooking opportunity –

an inherently intimate act - was not the timeliest, I felt that the benefits of student engagement opportunities were in some ways even more important at this time. We kept CDC recommendations always in the back of our minds. We remained masked while cooking, only taking them off to try foods for flavor or take a few bites of the prepared meal. Most of the time, we packed food to-go, which was a shift from my initial plans to be able to eat together. Our behaviors around masking only changed when restrictions set by the university were lifted later in the spring. I was cognizant of the risks that cooking *could* have, so I was clear in my consent form about prioritizing group safety so we could enjoy a cooking experience together. The idea of removing this opportunity seemed to negate the purpose of it, in that during times of uncertainty, I felt committed to prioritizing ways to socially connect.

So, at the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester, I used multiple methods to recruit Eden Hall students to participate in these cooking sessions. The intention for this project was to attract Food Studies students, but the cooking series was also advertised to anybody who was interested in cooking so as to broaden the opportunity to a diverse population of students with differing areas of study but an interest in food. The recruitment was done informally, similar to snowball sampling (Thomas, 2007). I shadowed several FST lower-level courses such as FST 150 (Food, Farm, and Field) and FST 215 W (Global Foodways) in Fall 2021 and got to know some students personally who I spoke to about this opportunity. I also distributed several posts on social media – namely via my own Instagram as well as via @edenhallfarm (The Elsalma Farm at Eden Hall), @foodsovereigntyedenhall (Food Sovereignty Community Council), and @ehlivestock (Livestock Team). Recruitment also occurred by talking with others, sending out an email with flyer attachment to the Falk School and Food Studies listservs, and giving a five-minute presentation to two undergraduate Agroecology courses at the beginning of the semester. I

collected names and emails on a sheet to then email with further information. Anybody who learned about this on social media or via listservs had the option to email me directly with interest. In total, 32 students contacted me with interest in participating.

A. Pre-Surveys

In order to ask any further questions or survey students, I sent out a consent form to all 32 people who told me they were interested. A total of 18 students responded to this email with a completed consent form over three weeks. These 18 students were then sent a follow-up with the pre-survey ([Appendix A](#)) asking questions about their pronouns, age, area of study/year in school, what days and times they were available at both Eden Hall Campus and Shadyside campus, and how they learned about the cooking sessions. One student completed a consent form after the first cooking session occurred, so they did not get sent the pre-survey but I manually filled in their demographic information on an excel document I was using to track student responses. All student names were changed within my data so as to assure confidentiality.

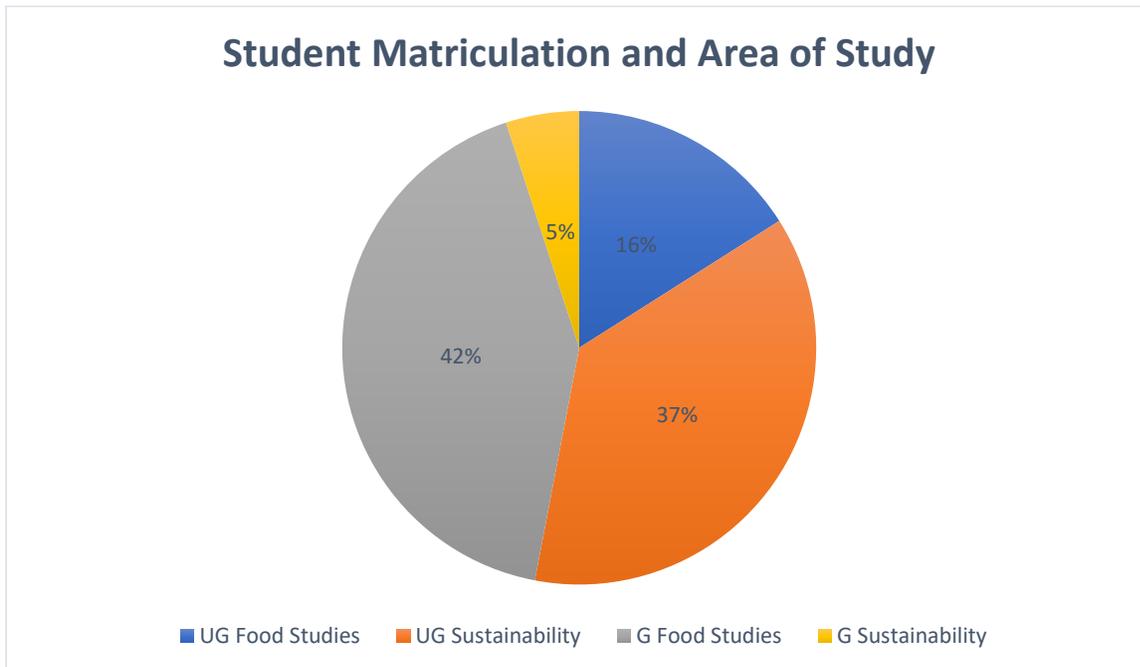


Figure 1 Students Matriculation and Area of Study, of the 19 interested student participants

Of the 19 students who contacted me as interested, 58% (11/19) were Food Studies majors, with the remaining 42% (8/19) being Sustainability majors. Similarly, 53% (10/19) were graduate students and 47% (9/19) were undergraduate students (Figure 1). Of the 7 Sustainability undergraduate majors, 4 specifically mentioned their declared track – 2 were in food systems and 2 were in natural resource management. The mean age of students who were interested, between undergraduates and graduates, was 24.5 years old.

A key component to this research was figuring out what days and times throughout the school-week people would be available. This meant a need to develop a survey to target a time that accommodated most people. Given that Eden Hall Campus has a commercial teaching kitchen, one which I am highly comfortable navigating, I asked if students would be available to have cooking sessions there. Tuesdays and Thursdays were the most popular days, with the majority of student availability being from 4PM-7PM. Tuesdays averaged 8.75 students being available, and Thursdays averaged 8 students available. At the beginning of this project, I had hoped to create cooking sessions at the Shadyside campus, as well. As the data showed, 65% (11/18) of the students wanted cooking sessions there. Fridays during 12PM-4PM averaged 6.5 students available to attend. Given that my hope was to have a minimum of 8 participants and a max of 15 for attendance at all regular cooking sessions, I decided to only hold cooking sessions at Eden Hall campus. This helped me logistically, for my own personal schedule as well as to utilize an already established kitchen space. Dietary restrictions were also asked about in the pre-survey, because they played a role in choice of recipes or changes to suggested recipes. 17% (3/18) of students were vegetarian, 6% (1/18) students were vegan, and 6% (1/18) stated a lactose intolerance.

Within the survey, I had also asked for student input on dishes they wanted to try making. While I offered up my own recommendations, ones which utilized grown foods from campus, I asked students to submit relatively cheap ideas that could potentially be sourced locally. Some ideas that students wanted to cook were: Moosewood Cookbook recipes, chili and cornbread, falafel, black bean burgers, curry, paella, and more. I compiled all student suggestions and sent out a recipe input survey asking students to rank their top 6 choices they wanted to cook. 58% (11/19) of students responded to the recipe input survey. Falafel, hummus and pita was the most popular suggestion, as 2 people recommended the idea, and was 46% (5/11) of students' top two choices. Pupusas and curtido also made up 46% (5/11) of students' top two choices. Empanadas or gyoza was the 3rd favored recipe at 36% (4/11). The 4th, 5th, and 6th recipe choices were all split between a variety of dishes.

I knew what individuals had dietary restrictions, so I chose recipes that were mainly vegetarian but had options to be vegan or dairy-free within them. For example, the gyoza recipe I chose only listed a pork filling, so I found a mushroom and tofu recipe, too. The pupusas had the option to fill with cheese but included other fillings like beans and/or chicharron. The options for dietary inclusivity were clear when I advertised an upcoming cooking session to students. This somewhat influenced how I decided the last three cooking sessions' recipes. I sifted through some of the suggestions that students submitted and decided which made sense to include given the amount of hands-on work they required and their ingredient flexibility. For example, if we decided to make chili and cornbread, the chili component would be fairly simple: a few people could cut vegetables, others could add ingredients into a pot, and maybe two people would work on the cornbread batter. While that would make a delicious meal, there would not be as much individual opportunity to dive into the multiple technical aspects of the cooking; instead, in order

to create a cooking session where people felt they were either challenged or learned something new, it would be nice to have some component requiring using your hands for a majority of the session. While learning new things was not a key aim for these cooking sessions, I did want cooking session to have new elements to keep students curious and engaged. Therefore, I decided to choose recipes based on: their amount of tactile work within the recipe; having multiple components that people could work on individually or in groups; the ability to make it vegan, vegetarian, or dairy-free; and overall cost of a dish.

When asking students about how they heard about these cooking sessions, a large majority got the information from the Food Studies list-serv, which is an email list with all people associated with Food Studies (current professors, staff, and students). I also sent information for interested students to a separate Falk School list-serv, which includes all of the majors and professors from every major within the school. Figure 2 below shows how students heard about this opportunity, where students could pick more than one response.

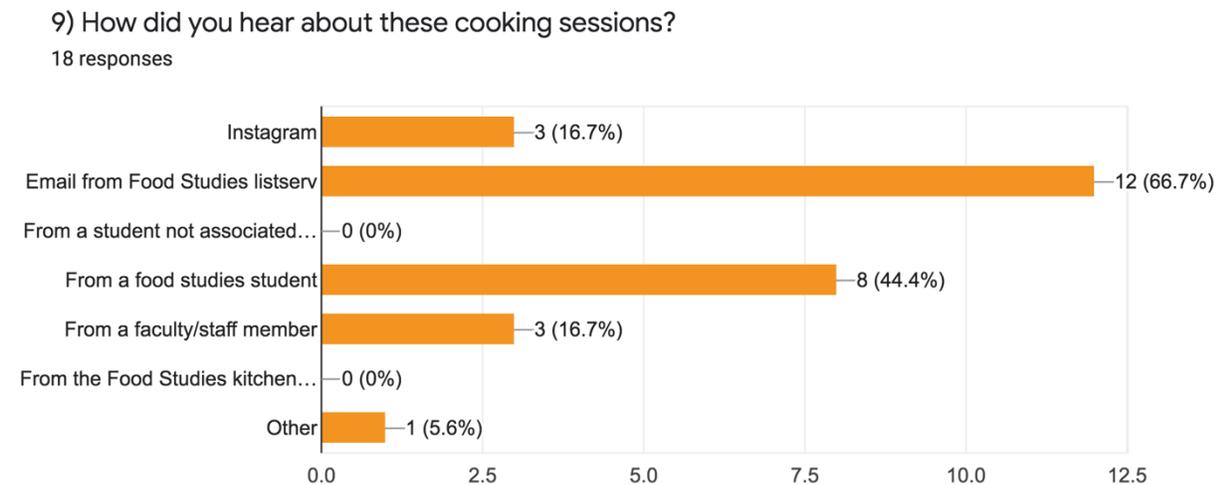


Figure 2 How Students Heard about Cooking Sessions

Scheduling and Logistics

Ball and Brown (2012) influenced me to have cooking sessions over dinner, both to provide a space to create dinner together but also provide a way for students to connect with their peers. With Shadyside campus being out of the picture for cooking sessions, I decided to reserve the times for all cooking sessions at the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen Lab as soon as possible come the start of the Spring 2022 semester. Survey responses for Eden Hall pointed to dinnertime on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 4PM and 7PM, which is when I scheduled all cooking sessions. While navigating the kitchen calendar, available on our campus platform Brightspace, and balancing what other clubs utilize the kitchen, I decided to book cooking sessions on varying Tuesdays and Thursdays. 6 cooking sessions in total were planned. Below are the dates, times, and dishes of the cooking sessions:

Tuesday, February 15th from 4PM-7PM – Falafel, Hummus, and Pita
Thursday, February 24th from 4PM-7PM – Pupusas and Curtido
Thursday, March 10th from 4PM-7PM – Gyoza
Tuesday, March 15th from 4PM-7PM – Black Bean Burgers
Thursday, March 31st from 4PM-7PM – Galettes
Tuesday, April 12th from 4PM-7PM – Pasta

Prior to each cooking session, I sent out an email to all 19 students with details. This included the day, time, and linked recipe we would be cooking. Linked in the email was a short RSVP survey for each cooking session so that I knew attendance and thus quantities of ingredients needed to purchase per person. I also asked students to optionally send me \$5 through Venmo if possible, to cover some of the costs of the cooking session, as it was paid for by me. Lastly, I asked students to bring their own container for leftovers.

I discussed details with other students who utilize the kitchen space, such as Graduate Assistants who have kitchen office hours, to make sure I was not overlapping with their tasks. Similarly, I thought it might be possible to utilize the campus bread oven as a space to cook some of our food. I frequently checked in with the campus firemaster to coordinate a cooking

idea that students suggested, but unfortunately there was not much crossover in our availability, so we did not go this route for any of the cooking sessions. In order to perform my cooking sessions, either I or another present student needed to have their ServSafe certification. ServSafe is a common training requirement for being able to safely work in a kitchen, and the training goes over things like proper storage of foods, procedures to keep a clean and minimally hazardous kitchen, as well as goes over other skills like washing dishes or handling knives safely (2022). I studied for ServSafe but did not hold my certification prior to these cooking sessions – but I also have worked in a number of food industry kitchens so was familiar with the practices. Even still, I crossmatched my cooking sessions with other ServSafe certified students to stay compliant to use the kitchen space properly.

To note, the kitchen has ingredients available for community use, such as flour, sugar, a variety of spices, and also some things that are made available through a number of classes (like cheese and butter through FST 609, Dairy: From Pasture to Plate). While these cooking sessions didn't occur during peak growing season, I tried to reach out to point people from campus growing spaces to see their projected harvest dates and availability of certain vegetables, and was able to utilize garlic and greens for some of the cooking sessions.

In order to keep track of things like recipes, labor, ingredients bought at different grocery stores, donations, and total cost, I created an excel document for each cooking session (see [Appendix B](#) as an example, with further information listed in the [results section](#)). I tried to keep costs to a minimum by utilizing as many available resources from campus as possible – which are notably subsidized by students, staff, and faculty in some way. I grocery shopped at places like Aldi, Giant Eagle, the East End Food Co-op, Oriental Market, and Harvest Valley. The most expensive cooking session was falafel, hummus, and pita because of the extra plastic containers I

purchased for people who forgot a container, as well as the two containers of tahini. The costs of cooking sessions were not told to the participants because I did not feel it necessary. All of this background work was meant to go without thought to the participants, so they had less to worry about and only had to focus on cooking and being together. Discussing financials may have also compelled more students to donate and/or created some sense of guilt for *not* donating, which are emotions I did not want to foster. Donating was meant to be something students voluntarily did, if they felt able to financially. The purpose of donations was to also help me cover some of the costs of the cooking sessions. This also separated the logistics from any other class, work, or curricular activities at Eden Hall so the work did not fall on other people.

I also felt it necessary to show the cost effectiveness of planning meals for students, by students. This concept is twofold: First, is so that the plans are driven by the curiosities and wishes of fellow peers. For me, to have student interests in mind when planning a meal feels more genuine than cooking dinner for the sake of cooking dinner. Say, I was to make spaghetti and meatballs for a cooking session. While that would be fun, cheap, relatively hands on, and more, this would be my own suggestion that students may not necessarily be that curious about making. Even though it would be fun, we would have conversation with one another, and questions discussed about making the food like every other cooking session, to me there would not be as much connection to the food itself or the deliberate care it may take to eat, make food, and learn alongside one another. Therefore, cooking sessions were deliberately and intentionally set out to strengthen those student-focused interests and connections. The coordination for cooking sessions provided multiple meals (dinner plus leftovers) for students, as well. Given this, a student's donation of money could possibly pay for not only several meals for themselves but also someone they're cooking alongside. While this information wasn't specifically stated,

donating \$5 either paid for the majority of your own meal, or in some cases such as the gyoza and galette sessions, \$5 paid for your own food and a slight amount of someone else's. In terms of student food access and preserving anonymity behind being food insecure, this model of "pitching in" perpetuates some semblance of care for other students being able to have an opportunity to cook meals together without worrying about finances or needing to give money to attend.

The second reason that the cost tracking represented student-centered coordination is so that the overall budget honored quality/kind of ingredients and feasibility of recipes. I have gone with students to purchase ingredients for extracurricular activities in the past, such as for Fermentation Club. In these circumstances, the presumption is that you're purchasing food on Chatham's dime. The ingredient choice might mean choosing the organic apples, the more expensive red wine vinegar, or simply purchasing an ingredient by measuring quality more than cost because cost is not so much of an issue. In this case, I was trying to be mindful to balance cost of ingredients and quality of ingredients so that the cost per meal would not be outrageous out of my own pocket. This is representative of trying to create a budget that is not only reasonable, but not too expensive, if recreated in the future. Also, using readily available resources from my own pantry or the school's community use items also means being resourceful and not over-purchasing things. While I realize these pantry items may fluctuate in availability, this still means that being attentive to already existing resources reduces cost. It may have been ambitious to make falafel, hummus, and pita, given that the cost of ingredients could have likely been expensive, but by using a recipe that students were interested in, and shopping mindfully, it was possible to create relatively cheap meals for a number of students that spoke to their interests. This idea, of shopping at multiple places, does require more time, but it means

that we can shop at places with cheaper alternatives like Aldi. As it stands, many Food Studies food purchases go through Giant Eagle because we have an account there (making billing costs easier to manage). But the ease of purchasing at Giant Eagle undoubtedly increases the cost of ingredients. This also means that while during class time, the desires to make certain recipes may seem open-ended because school budgets, to a student, might feel limitless, I wanted to honor student suggestions and make them feel that this space, too, can allow for recipe creativity while also being relatively cheap.

B. Facilitation

The image attached here is the Eden Hall Kitchen Lab. This particular section of the kitchen is a great location for facilitation, demonstration, and workshops because of the open space and direct view of whatever instruction occurs. The Kitchen Lab was used in this project largely for the amount of counterspace it offered, allowing all participants to get their hands dirty in whatever food we were making while also still being able to be in a peer group. The kitchen is also well-equipped, with induction stoves, large numbers of bowls, utensils, and more, which meant we were able to create any of the student suggested recipes with ease. This space was also used,

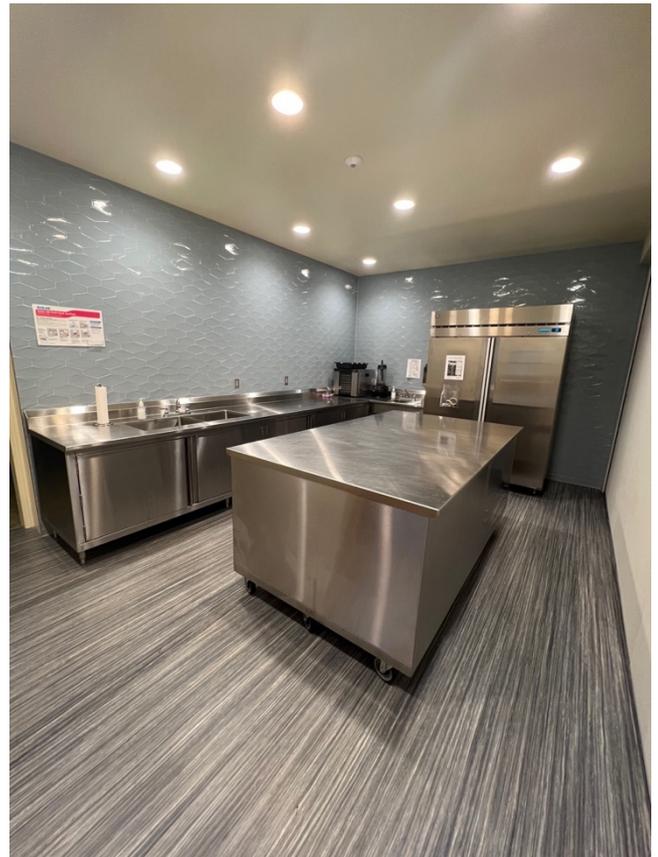


Image 1 Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen Lab

over other cooking spaces like those in a dorm, on a grill outside, or in a different kitchen on campus because I felt familiar with the space, and confident in my abilities to have multiple

cooking elements possible here. If we were at someone's house or the dorms, we would be more likely to fall short on needed tools or number of burners available for multiple people to cook. Or, if we were to grill outside, it might mean a one or two people at most managing a grill, making the environment more social but with little tie to the communal creation of food. Not only that, but it is important to remember the ways students feel able (or unable) to use spaces that exist on campus, and so opening up this particular space for students to engage with offered a way to experience communal cooking with other Chatham students in a relatively controlled, repeatable environment. While my interest was primarily in the social connections created through cooking, in a Food Studies program, having more interesting or more technical cooking projects that are easier to manage in this type of kitchen space was, I think, more likely to appeal to students' interests. Therefore, I felt this space both necessary and best to utilize for my research project.

At the beginning of each session, we met in the teaching kitchen, and I took attendance using the RSVP survey I sent out. Once all participants arrived, I reminded them that these sessions were part of a research project, and also went over the plan for the cooking session. For example, for the pupusa cooking session, I made salsa roja (red salsa) and curtido (fermented cabbage and carrots) the night before so that our main focus was making the pupusas. Physical recipes were provided for each thing we ate – so while we followed the recipe for making pupusas, the recipes for salsa roja and curtido were also provided. The layout of the space thus looked like a workshop, where each person had their own station, tools, and ingredients available on one table. If hot cooking was involved, the necessary tools (pots, pans, stirring spoons, induction stoves, etc.) were set up ahead of time to maintain the cooking momentum. After my brief introduction, we got into the cooking portion. This took up most of the time.

As previously mentioned, the structures of these sessions mirrored workshops, mostly because I have experience attending, planning, and leading workshops. I was comfortable orienting the space in this way, where stations were set up for individuals to make food together. One clear difference was that I was not at the “front” of the room, with my own separate tools. We were all around a table of the same height, with some individual tools in front of each station (like a bowl) but also with items we needed to share (like water, salt, and flour) within everyone’s reach. This, to me, created less of a hierarchical structure than exists during workshops, where the “leader” of the whole session is seen as the instructor or teacher. While I read and chose these recipes ahead of time, the recipes we made were submitted by participants, which I intentionally did in part to remove my “leadership” and create a collaboration-oriented session. Similarly, nearly each recipe we made was something I had never prepared before, thus removing me as the “expert” that would definitely exist during a workshop. These were all ways I saw to reduce the idea of this being a workshop, but rather it being a bunch of students cooking things they were interested in, with others, without someone they felt had to follow. I also purposefully constructed these in a way that tried to balance our ability to stay engaged creating the same or similar foods, while also facing one another to promote conversation and a more intimate connection. This could have been approached as an even more informal cooking experience, but the focus on more semi-formal sessions and more elaborate recipes provided a draw to bring in students who might not have already known each other and yet wanted to cook together in a group. Because I wanted to see if my perceptions around cooking as a way to strengthen social connections - held in a setting that could be established by a program or institution - I wanted to make the sessions more structured and drew from a diversity of students

including those who would be more attracted to workshops as well as those attracted to more informal cooking “hang-outs.”

There was not usually a dedicated time to set up space as if we were dining formally together, both for COVID safety purposes and to account for the time commitment of the sessions. The elaborate creation of some of the meals already took two hours, and some students had class or had to catch the bus, so trying to set up a full sit-down community meal was not the main intention. In other words, I did not create a full circle dining experience, but wanted instead to offer students the opportunity to cook and enhance community through making dinner together. We did nearly always try the food we made and put enough in our stomachs to keep cooking or cleaning – in some cases just trying a few bites over a few minutes, and in other cases eating and talking while actively continuing the session over 30 minutes. Several people would leave prior to cleanup, but the food was typically always made in time for leftovers to be packaged. Cleanup took about 30-45 minutes each time, depending on the number of people who stayed to help.

Data Collection: Participant Observation, Informal Interviews, and Post-Survey

C. Participant Observation Write-Ups

Participant observation was the main form of research, so I was able to participate in the cooking but also take a back-seat role in listening to and participating in conversation. As part of participant observation, I utilized the Duke University’s Field Guide on Participant Observation (n.d.). With an interest in social connections and cooking, I focused on the multiple relationship dynamics that were at play verbally and physically, human traffic and spatial orientations in the space, and any moments that made individuals stand out (Duke University, n.d.).

What commensality is, and how it is interpreted, is different and everchanging (Jönsson et. al., 2021). Given that the context was the same for a number of people, i.e. we were all cooking together, I hoped that students would be free to express and interpret what they found purposeful from the act of cooking and eating. My participant observation also focused on unstructured, direct observation and note-keeping, which I allocated at least 2 hours to writing after each cooking session (Thomas, 2007). Some key things I looked out for centered around referencing commensality, community connection, and personal well-being. These key components of participant observation helped me comprehend the ways that students experienced cooking and whether participating in this experience translated or had students referring to commensality and to a fun, possibly necessary, extracurricular experience.

Participant observation also helped me answer my research questions based on the ways that cooking and eating did, or did not, create significance for students. For the participant observation analysis, I drew from pieces of social cognitive theory (SCT) to better understand the significance of cooking sessions for students. McAlister, Perry, and Parcel (2008) notably discuss self-efficacy and collective efficacy as ways students are impacted by social learning. In other words, the impacts of social learning can be seen via, say, skill development from observational learning in a group, but *also* in this case, learning can be about the positive impacts that cooking has on students like connections to one another, the recipes, or themselves. While this is just one way to think about learning and connection, I found it useful to help me parse through the interactions I saw.

When processing the participant observation data, I decided to code the information in order to develop a more systematic assessment of how students interacted, how self-efficacy and collective efficacy were exhibited (or not), and what students learned, said, appreciated, or

worried about. I read through all my notes until I was able to notice common themes that kept popping up. After identifying these themes, I re-read the data with those themes laid out and decided which sub-themes belonged in these broader themed categories. So, for example, one of the broader themes for my participant observation was “Figuring it out Together,” which consisted of smaller sub-themes such as tool troubleshooting, troubleshooting the food, asserting verbal knowledge, and communicating nonverbal knowledge. All of these pieces showed me ways that students were experiencing the cooking session, mainly by focusing on cooking and figuring out together the various pieces of how to execute a recipe. I then tied this data to other assessments (surveys, interviews, other notes) of how cooking together in this context impacted the experience of Food Studies students at Chatham.

F. Informal Interviews and Post-Survey

For each cooking session, I did one informal interview after-the-fact with one participant, utilizing the same list of questions for every interview. At the beginning of the cooking session series, I got a concussion, and for the first two cooking sessions specifically, I needed help from other people’s memories to retrace the layout of the entire cooking session. Sometimes this helped jog my memory, which was inevitably scrambled. While the inception of the informal interviews started out this way, I decided to continue doing them so that I could not only learn about the session and individual student perspectives, but also to learn about how to improve the next cooking session. One interview took around 20-30 minutes. I chose a different person every time for broader perspective. There was no particular reason why I chose specific people for interviews other than the fact that they attended a session. Similar to the participant observation, I open coded the interviews to find sub-themes that fit into larger themes to help me interpret

how cooking impacted students and visualize what student takeaways were from the cooking sessions. See interview transcripts in [Appendix C](#). These questions included:

1. What was your experience as a student participating in this?
2. Do you feel this improved community group togetherness?
3. Could you help paint a picture to what the cooking session looked like?
4. Was there anything significant you saw from the interactions that happened?
5. What's one thing that could be done to make the cooking more efficient/organized/improve community building?
6. What's one thing that went well?

In order to offer the opportunity to dig deeper into the purpose and aims of the cooking sessions, I also created a post-survey after the series of sessions (See [Appendix D](#)) which included questions relating to things that students learned, whether they felt this built upon community or personal wellbeing, and gleaned their input on how they saw or experienced or thought about commensality. The questions were made to include both quantitative and qualitative measures. These questions provided space for participants to answer with things that stood out to them on a personal level without feeling obligated to share it one-on-one with me (as in an interview), so anonymity was kept for honest review. Given that survey response rates are typically “low” for commensality research, I used Dillman’s total design method for multiple survey contacts to increase response rates (Dillman & Dillman, 2008). On 5/12/2022, I sent out a post-survey to the 19 students who had originally emailed me as interested. 5 students filled out the survey the same day. On 5/23/2022, I sent out a reminder to complete the survey once again, to which 4 students responded the same day. My final reminder for filling out the survey was on 6/1/2022, and one more student filled it out, totaling 10 responses.

Results

Cooking Sessions Broken Down

In total, 12 students attended the cooking sessions from the initial 19 students who completed their consent form. Here, you can see all of the students, their alias name and age, how many times they participated, and if/when they were informally interviewed.

Name	# Times Participated	Informally Interviewed
Kyle (Age 32)	3	Yes, 2/22/22
Yahaira (Age 32)	3	Yes, 3/15/22
Holly (Age 29)	1	Yes, 3/30/22
Julia (Age 20)	3	Yes, 4/9/22
Kim (Age 24)	2	Yes, 5/16/22
Quinn (Age 21)	1	No
Ireen (Age 27)	2	No
Anna (Age 18)	1	No
Hank (Age 18)	1	No
Daria (Age 30)	1	No
Alex (Age 20)	1	No
Rosalie (Age 20)	1	No

While I did participant observation and data tracking for each individual cooking session, I am not going to include the entirety of the notes and data that I took here. Instead, I include the recipe for each day, cost, ingredients list, and a synopsis of the participant observation that occurred. Most of the write-up includes key features from the cooking and people's movements, as well as the various topics of conversation.

❖ February 15th, 2022: Falafel, Hummus, and Pita

The recipe for falafel, hummus, and pita was chosen from Moosewood Cookbook, which was a suggested cookbook from the recipe input survey. The total cost for groceries was \$58.29. Donations from this session were \$15, therefore subtracting donations from the total cost came out to the meals total cost of \$43.29. The day prior to this, I suffered a concussion. Due to this, a lot of the information I took down was not as detailed as it would be in future sessions. I interviewed one of the participants, Kyle (Age 32), on 2/22/22 (see [Appendix C](#), interview A) in order to gather some more information, which also helped me recall some of the events of the

cooking session. This cooking session had 7 total participants, including myself. There were four undergraduate students (Quinn, Age 21; Anna, Age 18; Alex, Age 20; and Rosalie, Age 20) and three graduate students in attendance (Kyle, Age 32; Daria, Age 30; and Myself, Age 25). Two undergraduates were Sustainability majors with a track in food systems, and the other two were Food Studies majors. Each graduate student was a Food Studies student.

I arrived at the kitchen around 3:30 PM to set up. I turned on some music and got out a number of utensils I thought would be helpful – namely just bowls and measuring cups. At the middle of the metal table was a slew of these utensils accompanied by a stack of scanned and printed recipes. A few undergraduate students had already arrived while I was setting up. I asked Quinn (Age 21) what music she likes, to which she told me “girl rap,” so I turned on Megan thee Stallion. As



Image 2 Five students prepping pita dough

Ingredients	From Where	Cost
Green Onion	Aldi	1.3
Parsley x 3	Aldi	4.77
Yeast x 2	Aldi	1.78
Olive oil	Aldi	3.89
Garbanzo ca	Aldi	6.71
plain yogurt	Aldi	3.35
cucumbers x	Aldi	2.07
dill x 2	Co-Op	8
Tahini x 2	Giant Eagle	18.58
tamari	Giant Eagle	4.99
lemon	Giant Eagle	0.89
eggs	Giant Eagle	1.96
		58.29
flour 12 c	Community Use	
honey	my house	
turmeric	my house	
cumin	my house	
salt	Community Use	
pepper	Community Use	
cayenne	my house	
garlic 22 clov	community use	

Chart 2 Falafel, Hummus, and Pita Tracking

people meandered in, I grabbed aprons for everyone. At the beginning, I thanked people for attending the first cooking session. I gave a slight layout of what we would be making, but there was not a lot of structure or forethought to this given my concussion. I

had us go around the room and say our name as an “Ice Breaker.” Communally, we decided to

start making pita dough first, given that it needed time to rise. After this, I had everyone break off into pairs with someone they didn't know to tackle making one of the following: hummus, falafel, tzatziki, and cutting veggies. In the pairing of Anna (Age 18) and Kyle (age 32), there was less communication as compared to Quinn (Age 21) and Daria (Age 30). Another group of us were talking, and Alex (Age 20) stated her appreciation for having a cooking session like this, especially because of its connection to feeding people and her other food research regarding food access and student food insecurity.

As the evening went on, there was less structure to the cooking and people felt they could go check their phones, snack, or continue helping prep food. Laughter flowed in from different parts of the rooms, where people were

surrounded by their familiar peers. Daria (Age 30), Kyle (Age 32) and I went to check on the cooking pita dough. The pita came out hard as a rock. This was a point of curiosity for us, which we all chuckled at. Anna (Age 18) knew how to make tzatziki and did so without a recipe, with Rosalie (Age 20) standing and chatting with her



Image 3 Cooked pita scooped by Daria

while she cut vegetables and made the sauce. When she was done, she then helped me take over frying the falafel. Rosalie (Age 20) left early due to feeling ill. Once the food was made, and due to it being later than anticipated, students started eating the food and packaging it up into containers. Nearly all students left prior to cleaning up, so Daria (Age 30) and I stayed behind, chatting, listening to music, and ending the evening.

❖ February 24th, 2022 - Pupusas and Curtido

Ingredients	From Where	Cost
oil	Giant Eagle	3.99
refried black	Giant Eagle	2.19
refried pinto	Giant Eagle	1.79
pork butt	Giant Eagle	4.36
oregano	Giant Eagle	1.99
tomatoes	Giant Eagle	5.11
onion	Giant Eagle	1.05
green peppe	Giant Eagle	2.09
cabbage	Giant Eagle	4.39
carrot	Giant Eagle	0.37
		27.33
mozzarella	Community Use, Dairy class	
Maseca	my house	
white vinega	my house	
salt	Community Use	
pepper	Community Use	
jalapeno	my house	
garlic	community use	

Chart 3 Pupusa and Curtido Tracking

The recipe for this was chosen from [Tasty](#), which is a recipe development and cookware company. Their recipes, from my experience, are thoroughly explained in a simple way, which I thought necessary for legibility of this recipe given that I had no measure for participants’ cooking aptitude. This was also a recipe shared by a Salvadoran man, so the “authenticity” of this recipe (to me) seemed legitimate. The cost of groceries was \$27.33. The total donations from this session were \$5, therefore the total cost of the meal with donation included was \$22.33. Due to this being during my concussion recovery period, I similarly interviewed one of the participants on 3/15/22 (see [Appendix C](#), interview B) in order to gather

some more information, which helped me recall some of the events of the cooking session. There were 4 participants at this cooking session, being myself (Age 25), Yahaira (Age 32), Julia (Age 20), and Ireen (Age 27). One student was an undergraduate Sustainability student with a natural resources management track. All three other students were graduate students in Food Studies.

I arrived at the kitchen around 3:25 to start preparation. There were three stations set up for people to cook, including: induction burners, bowls for making the dough, measuring cups and teaspoons, a cooking pan, a towel, instructions, a cutting board, a grater, a little bowl with oil and water, and communal masa to measure from, oil, salt, cheese, black and refried beans, and chicharron in the middle. This was set up in a more workshop-style manner than the last cooking session. We played Spanish jazz music in the background. I started out saying thanks for those in

attendance, then we went around the room to introduce ourselves. The icebreaker question was, “Has anyone made this, or something like it, before?” Yahaira (Age 32) said yes, she made arepas, and I encouraged her to share some skills with us as a group. We started going over the recipe. I had pre-made the ingredients for the filling for the most part. I made the curtido, chicharron, and salsa roja, and I briefly explained how it was made to the group. We started making the masa dough. We were all kneading our dough out, trying to figure out the right texture. Ireen (Age 27) and Julia (Age 20) talked quietly with one another, examining the texture of the dough on their hands and requesting utensils to stir. There was lots of looking at other people’s dough to see how everyone was doing, to feel the right texture, etc. Collectively we prepped some other filling ingredients, including seasoning two kinds of beans (black and pinto), and shredding fresh mozzarella made in the MAFS Dairy class. Most conversation was about the skills to make the pupusas, saying things like, “How does this look,” or us remarking at how hard it is to form them and not have the inside/filling pop out. Communication revolved around food preparation rather than conversations about our personal lives. To try to push this kind of conversation I asked questions about plans for spring break, and we went around the room sharing what we were planning on doing. Yahaira (Age 32) discussed her travel plans to Washington D.C. and Julia (Age 20) discussed the search for an internship related to her major. Julia (Age 20) then went into discussing seeing her parents, and trying to search for summer

jobs. She and Ireen (Age 27) then started talking about jobs, what jobs Ireen (Age 27) has held, and Ireen gave Julia advice on things to look for related to sustainability.

We then set up the frying stations, filling the pans with oil and heating them up on the burners. I started with one of Julia's (Age 20) pupusas to show everyone how to do it, then handed the cooking off to everyone else – who all had their own induction burner and pan. While



Image 4 Filling pupusas



Image 3 Cooking pupusas on cast iron

people were cooking, I got out the spicy and regular curtido and salsa roja. Everyone finished cooking their pupusas but me because I didn't set up a frying station for myself. We all ended up trying a few while the rest was cooking. Julia (Age 20) brought up a story about how the bus driver once left her and some other students in the rain. I got out some plates for us to put the finished cooked pupusas on. Everyone forgot to bring containers, so I went to get the quart containers I bought (for this specific reason). We all got a plate with curtido and salsa and were eating them together while finishing cooking. Everyone

was commenting on how good they tasted. Then, after we ate a few and my pupusas were done cooking, we started to clean up. Julia (Age 20) helped a bit then had to leave for class. The rest of us talked a bit and laughed, then turned on some upbeat music to finish up cleaning.

❖ March 10th, 2022 – Gyoza

To continue utilizing “authentic” recipes, I decided to use [Just One Cookbook’s](#) gyoza

Ingredients	From Where	Cost
Ground Pork	Aldi	3.29
Mushrooms	Aldi	3.58
Gyoza Wrap	Oriental Ma	\$11.96
Rice vinegar	Oriental Ma	4.99
Onion	Oriental Ma	0.94
Rice flour	Oriental Ma	1.79
miso	Oriental Ma	5.19
carrot	Oriental Ma	0.57
ginger	Oriental Ma	0.57
firm tofu	Oriental Ma	1.85
cabbage	Oriental Ma	2.11
		36.84
soy sauce	Community Use	
sesame oil	my house	
oil	my house	
green onion	my house	
garlic 4 clove	Community Use	
white peppe	my house	
cooking wine	my house	
chili oil	my house	
salt and peppe	both	

Chart 4 Gyoza tracking

recipe, which includes both pork and vegan fillings. This website was started and is continued by a Japanese chef to showcase Japanese recipes to home cooks. The total cost of ingredients for this session was \$36.84. This cooking session accrued \$15 in donations, coming out to \$21.84 for total cost with donations subtracted. To maintain consistency with informal interviews and their paired cooking session, I conducted an interview on 3/30/2022 (see [Appendix C](#), interview C). There were 5 students at this cooking session, including Holly (Age 29), Julia (Age 20), Kim (Age 24), Hank (Age 18), and myself (Age 25). Two were undergraduate Sustainability students with a natural resource management track. The three graduate students were Food Studies students.

Everything was set up by 3:45 PM. 6 stations were set up for everyone, including a small bowl of water and a little container with gyoza wrappers covered with a wet paper towel. Within reach to all participants was: a bowl with the pork mixture, another bowl with the tofu mixture, spoons, measuring spoons, two parchment-lined

trays in the middle, and 2 induction burners plugged in and ready at the side. A few students were there early and were sitting and talking. Holly (Age 29) and I decided we should play a food playlist that the Chatham library created. Once a few more people arrived, I asked everyone to gather around to get started. I reminded folks about this being thesis work and thanked them for coming. For this cooking session, everyone worked with a partner. Similar to the prior session's icebreaker, I asked if anyone had done this before. Hank (Age 18) had tried making them this same day for class, and Holly (Age 29) regularly makes gyoza with their partner. Holly (Age 29) also brought a wooden steamer for us to use. When we were washing our hands, I asked everyone to introduce themselves because I forgot to ask people to share names. Holly (Age 29) asked Julia (Age 20) to repeat her (real) name, and I asked about its origins to which she shared that her mother is an immigrant from Eastern Europe who arrived here at 21. After this, we began. Holly (Age 29) instructed us on how to fold the gyoza. This cooking session was particularly lively: there was discussion about video games, family who live in different time zones, and our living situations. There was lots of laughter, silliness, and ease of conversation. Everyone chimed into these conversations at one point or another, but the conversation was dominated mostly by Holly (Age 29) and Hank (Age 18). We were folding and talking when several of us had to troubleshoot where to put more completed dumplings, and to keep track of the fillings we were using. While we were folding, we had group conversations about food and consumption. I talked about a book I'm reading that's a dystopian book about cannibalism becoming normalized and federally regulated. I thought it interesting about the ways that we validate meat consumption, or flesh consumption. Holly (Age 29) then discussed the Dairy class that she and I (Age 25) were in together, which was a class of all women. Breastmilk was a large topic of discussion in this class, so she talked about this being a similar concept, how contentious

it can be to normalize consuming a product of a human body. This conversation created lively, inquisitive conversation from everyone, with Hank (Age 18) and Kim (Age 24) chiming in to ask questions or bring up pop culture references of these concepts. Julia (Age 20), who attended the pupusa session, pulled me aside to tell me she re-made them for her family, but they didn't turn out as good. I told her to try again! We all talked about where I got the gyoza wrappers, restaurants in the area, and trying new foods. The undergraduates, Julia (Age 20) and Hank (Age 18), discussed their summer plans. Then we started cooking.



Image 6 Holly and Kim preparing to cook



Image 5 Putting folded gyoza into a steamer

I executed one round of pan frying to show people, while Holly (Age 29) executed one round of steaming. While the dumplings were cooking, a number of people started cutting ingredients for the dipping sauce. Julia (Age 20) showed Hank (Age 18) how to use a spoon to peel ginger. We started concocting dipping sauce with a slew of ingredients that were ready. Holly (Age 29) asked if we should we eat the dumplings that were done already. We started

eating, dipping, and commenting on the flavor combinations while continuing to cook. The pork gyoza were eaten quicker than the vegetable ones, though there were more vegetable ones made. We then talked about open hours for cooking with the Eden Hall Lab teaching kitchen and some discontent about the kitchen situations that undergrads have right now. Julia (Age 20), for example, had never used the kitchen before because she thought it was a Food Studies space, but she has thought about wanting to make a hot lunch on her long days up at Eden Hall. Hank (Age 18) had only used the kitchen because of class but was dissatisfied with the kitchens in his dorm. Holly (Age 29) and I discussed these points of contention with the undergraduates to come up with questions about cooking as an option for them, such as *if* the kitchen were open, would students think about bringing ingredients themselves to make a meal or not? What days would be best to use the kitchen, and would people need help doing so? This conversation rounded out the end of the cooking session. Julia (Age 20) left for class, stopping to personally tell Holly (Age 29) and Kim (Age 24) that she was happy to meet them. Hank (Age 18) stayed and asked what he could help clean. A lot of the dishes at this point had already been taken back to the dishwashing room during idle cooking time, and Holly (Age 29) and Kim (Age 24) were both working on them, chatting in the back. I cleaned up the Kitchen Lab space and delegated tasks to Hank (Age 18) until all of the cleaning was done.

❖ March 15th, 2022 – Black Bean Burgers

This recommended recipe was a relatively cheap and easy one. Not only that, but I utilized this [Tasty](#) recipe a lot during my own undergraduate years as a vegetarian, and thought it was a great recipe to showcase how to make black bean burgers stick together rather than fall apart. However, there were no attendees (besides myself) at this session. There were two Food Studies undergraduate students who signed up, but they did not attend. Therefore, the total

donations for this session were \$0, making the total cost stay at \$15.51. This day was particularly busy on campus, especially for Food Studies undergraduates in the Agroecology course, so this could have been a reason why students left Eden Hall early and did not attend this session.

What I *did* do was make everything and set it up. The beans were taken out of the cans and rinsed, measured out into three bowls for me and the two supposed attendees. I got there around 3 PM once again to prep and cook things, including onions, carrots, and garlic for the burger mix. Stations also included measuring spoons and cups, a towel, a cutting board and knife, and measured-out oats and seasonings in separate bowls. The only person around the kitchen was Daria (Age 30), who had attended a cooking session in the past, but she was busy with other things. I asked if she wanted some of the burgers, and she did! Amidst her business, she would pop in, but I was just constructing burgers, having fun listening to music and using my hands to cook. Here is my musing from that

evening: *Maybe that's what this has been more-so than anything else. I find joy being in the kitchen, and I've found joy in the times when classwork takes place in the kitchen. So maybe this whole project was just me wanted to re-create some semblance of joy and try to give that joy to other people?* The amount of ingredients I had purchased ended up making about 15 patties or so. They had to be frozen for 30 minutes prior to frying them. In the time that I was waiting for the burgers to freeze, I cleaned up. I put all of the stuff away that wasn't used, and I started on the dishes. I got most of them done, so decided to sweep and mop. I also had enough time to prep

Ingredients	From Where	Cost
oats	Giant Eagle	2.19
cheese slices	Giant Eagle	1.89
3 black bean	Giant Eagle	\$3.00
chili powder	Giant Eagle	3.99
carrots	Giant Eagle	0.45
slider buns	Giant Eagle	3.99
		15.51
soy sauce	Community Use	
onion	my house	
olive oil	my house	
cumin	my house	
coriander	my house	
cayenne	my house	
salt and pep	my house	
cooking oil	my house	
ketchup	my house	
mustard	my house	
mayonnaise	my house	
lettuce	my house	

Chart 5 Black bean burger tracking

the burger for Daria (Age 30), meaning cutting up lettuce and tomato and putting condiments on the bun. She came back into the Kitchen Lab after she finished eating the burgers I gave her, and we had a really in-depth life conversation about relationships and life choices. Daria (Age 30) and I (Age 25) had already had a relationship/friendship because of school, but I just thought it interesting that in this particular circumstance, we weren't eating the burgers together but *were* having a conversation about the trajectory of our lives, our past relationships, and were getting and giving advice on a number of things like marriage and relationships. Part of me thinks that it's moments like these, ones that are intimate and still somehow connected to food, that make connection something special. We started out talking about the burgers, which was something we ate separately, and ended up discussing "deep" things – to me, in this circumstance, existential questions about the future and life itself. Not all cooking sessions had these kinds of conversations, and the lack or presence of these conversations don't necessarily signify what it means to be close with someone. But for both of us, it's a type of conversation we enjoy having and that helps us feel closer, in part maybe because we like the vulnerability and trust involved. It was a very sweet moment, and then Daria (Age 30) ended up cleaning the rest of what was in the sink for me. We both ended up leaving the Lodge around 6 PM. Record time for a cooking session!

❖ March 31st, 2022 – 4 Types of Galettes

As I was sifting through all of the suggested recipe ideas, it turned out that not many of the options left had lactose free, vegan, and meat inclusive recipe options. Not only that, but the number of recipe suggestions with "hands-on" (or more intricate, skills-based) cooking was

Ingredients	From Where	Cost
zucchini	harvest valle	1.45
pizza sauce	harvest valle	4.69
sweet onion	harvest valle	\$1.83
green onions	harvest valle	2.98
pears	harvest valle	5.65
dijon mustard	harvest valle	3.99
shallots	harvest valle	2.74
blueberries	harvest valle	3.49
flour	giant eagle	4.99
tomatoes	giant eagle	3.02
		34.83
sugar	Community Use	
parmesan	my house	
onions	my house	
butter	my house	
garlic	Community Use	
ricotta	Community Use	
oats	my house	
lemon	my house	
salt and pepper	both	
heavy whipping cream	Community Use	
brown sugar	my house	
cinnamon	my house	
nutmeg	Community Use	
everything seasoning	my house	
honey	Community Use	

Chart 6 Galette Tracking

running low. Something I'd seen at school but had never tried to make were galettes. Holly (Age 29), a student who was a part of the gyoza cooking session, suggested creating some because they are delicious, have multiple kinds of fillings, and are hands-on enough for participants. One of the workshop instructors for C.R.A.F.T. at Chatham has a pastry business called [Le Beau Gateau](#), where I got a recipe for galette dough. Using this dough, and [Bon Appetit's](#) list of a variety of toppings, I decided to split up and make two savory and two sweet kinds of galettes with this cooking session. The cost of this cooking session started at \$34.83. The total brought in came to \$15, thus coming out to \$19.83 for the total cost of ingredients with donations. My informal interview for this cooking session was with Julia (Age 20), and took place on 4/9/22 (see [Appendix C](#), interview D). Julia (Age 20) was the only undergraduate student who attended. She is a Sustainability major with a track in natural

resources management. The three other students, Yahaira (Age 32), Kyle (age 32), and I (Age 25) were graduate Food Studies students.

Preparation started around 3:00 PM. There were four different stations set up for us all. Each one had different ingredients and toppings for the galettes. All of the dough was prepped and rolled out, ready in the fridge for whenever we needed it. I prepped about half of the ingredients (like cutting/slicing/etc.) for each recipe as well so as to save on preparation time per

person. Everything was laid out by 3:50. The oven was pre-heated. There were 4 different recipes: brown sugar+pear+ricotta+honey, blueberry crumble, “pizza” sauce with roasted zucchini, shallot, and tomato, and quadruple allium with parmesan and Dijon.

As soon as everyone arrived, we washed our hands and put aprons on. We started cooking at about 4:10. I gave my usual spiel about this being for my thesis so “thank you for attending and this is being used for my research.” I told everyone the different flavors we would be cooking, 2 of which had dairy and the other two which didn’t. I told everyone that I already prepped the dough, and that this setup was a bit of a test because we all would be doing our own recipes, which meant people might be moving around the kitchen a bit more than normal. Also, because recipes were different, questions were definitely welcome to help the process. Due to the baking time of the galettes, I was hoping to be done by 6. While the galettes were cooking, we were all going to be responsible for cleaning, so that cleanup would be easier later on. Hopefully we could all actually eat together, too, since that is something we hadn’t really done besides try things. There was soft French music playing in the background.

We all began by cutting up ingredients, talking about future prospects like jobs or internships. Yahaira (Age 32) was waiting to hear back from a couple places who she had submitted an application to. Kyle (Age 32) stated he had a potential full time job opportunity with a co-operative business, which he was excited about. I asked Julia (Age 20) about her future plans, and she brought up that she got into the Master’s of Sustainability program at Chatham. We all congratulated her. Due to the differing recipes, there was lots of uncertainty and inquiry about what individuals thought was “right” for the recipe, which took up most of the conversation during the first half of the session. I said, “Measure to your heart’s desire for all of these recipes” to everyone – mostly because there were ingredients, like the butter, that were not

in sticks which made measuring a bit challenging. Creating the individual fillings took about 30 minutes, except Kyle's (age 32) which took 40 minutes or so, and mine, which took about an hour. A lot of the talking was predominantly about how to construct each recipe, with Kyle (Age 32) and Julia (Age 20) asking most of the questions about their recipes. When most of the filling ingredients were prepped, I asked Kyle (age 32) and Julia (Age 20) if they wanted to see a video on how to fold the galettes. They both said yes. I already had a video up from the Bon Appetit recipe that showed how to cut slits into the galette dough. With multiple moving parts, and thus more ingredients strewn about the room, Julia (Age 20) was trying to configure where to place the tray of dough and the dirty dishes to leave enough room to construct her galette. Everyone sequentially started creating their own galette. When Yahaira (Age 32) was finished with her galette, she began washing dishes and I delegated to Julia (Age 20) what other things to pick up and organize. Kyle (age 32) and I were still working on our galettes since our fillings had taken longer.



Image 7 Quadruple allium galette made by Kyle

Once all of the galettes were in the oven and things were pretty cleaned up, we all stood around and talked. I asked how everyone was doing, and if they were excited for the semester to be done. Everyone said yes. We discussed what we looked forward to reading (outside of schoolwork, of course). I asked everyone if they would want some salad in the waiting time for the galettes. There was kale in the fridge, so I made a simple kale salad with salt, pepper, and optional balsamic vinaigrette as requested by Julia (Age 20). As this was happening, Kyle (Age 32) and Yahaira (Age 32) were racing one another in the classroom area on rolling chairs. They



Image 8 Julia cutting slits to fold blueberry galette

did this for several minutes while I made the salad, and Julia (Age 20) laughed quietly at them. As we ate salad, we were talking about how excited we were for the blueberry galette. This was the first one in the oven, and notably the first one done. Then Kyle (age 32) and I asked, “If you could be one fruit or vegetable what would you be?” to which we all round robin-ed our answers and why. We then recommended a restaurant for Julia (Age 20) who recently moved to a different neighborhood in

Pittsburgh. We let the blueberry galette cool

a little then cut into it. We all ate our slices, and everyone remarked that it was delicious! The pear galette was ready next, so this was cut and divvied out on plates. We finished eating and trying, then took out the other savory galettes and cut them. We folded up some tin foil as little

trays to take some home because everyone, including myself, forgot containers. Julia (Age 20) swept the floor before she left because her shoes got the ground a bit dirty. The rest of us divvied food up and continued cleaning, with Yahaira (Age 32) listening to music by the dishes. I left some of the galettes in the fridge for community use. We were done at 6:45.

❖ April 12th, 2022 – Pasta with Pesto and Homemade Red Sauce

To finish off the cooking sessions, I decided to make another student-recommended idea: homemade pasta. Why not make homemade sauces to go with homemade pasta, too? So, given this, I went with none other than Chef and flavor extraordinaire Samin Nosrat’s recipes for [Pasta all’Uovo](#), [Basil Pesto](#), and [Red Sauce](#). The initial cost of ingredients was \$32.63. \$10 in total donations came in for this recipe, bringing the total cost with donations to \$22.63. The final

informal interview for this cooking session happened on 5/16/22 with Kim (Age 24) ([Appendix C](#), interview E). Four total graduate Food Studies students attended this cooking session, including Yahaira (Age 32), Kim (Age 24), Ireen (Age 27), and I (Age 25).

I arrived around 2:45 to start prepping because I hadn’t thought through how I was going to set things up the night before. There wasn’t a lot of prep-work as far as cooking goes, which was nice. I was a bit lackadaisical. One student and friend in the program let me borrow a hand-crank pasta maker for this cooking session, and she stopped by to wish me good luck. There were 4 stations with the measured-out flour, eggs and egg yolks, and semolina flour. Then there were two

Ingredients	From Where	Cost
flour	Giant Eagle	3.79
semolina flo	Giant Eagle	4.79
crushed tom	Giant Eagle	\$2.59
tomato paste	Giant Eagle	1.09
5 onions	Giant Eagle	5.91
parmesan	Giant Eagle	5.78
pecorino	Giant Eagle	5.99
shake parme	Giant Eagle	2.69
		32.63
Olive oil	Community Use	
red pepper fl	my house	
eggs	community use	
basil	my house	
garlic 6 clove	Community Use	
salt and pep	both	
pine nuts	my house	

Chart 7 Pasta and Sauce tracking

stations in the middle of each pair for each pasta sauce – pesto and red sauce. Placed in the middle were communal things like flour, water, oil, salt and pepper. There were other students in the kitchen working on other classwork. The air smelled sweet, like sweet cookies and milled grains. The other students had music playing and were making coffee right as 4 PM hit. Yahaira (Age 32) and Kim (Age 24) arrived, but we noticed Ireen (Age 27) was missing. We started maybe 10-15 minutes after 4 PM, when Ireen (Age 27) arrived. When we began, Ireen (Age 27) and Yahaira (Age 32) were on one side of the table with the pesto. Kim (Age 24) and I were on the other side by the tomato sauce. I gave my spiel, then asked if anyone had made pasta from



Image 9 Ireen hand-cranking pasta dough

scratch before. Ireen (Age 27) hesitated and eventually said yes. I asked if she could sprinkle any tips or tricks along the way. Then I asked if everyone knew each other, to which I received a glance from someone in the group that said “No, please help,” so we went around and said our names. There was attention to the details of the recipe for this cooking session, where everyone tried to read and go exactly by the recipe’s directions. We started off with a well in the center of our flour, put the eggs and yolks in, and started mixing. There was talk about texture and consistency of the dough, causing people to

knead at different paces and times. While this was happening, we talked about how people felt at this point in the semester. We were all honest with how much dread we felt from classes,

professors, or from larger food systems questions. We then wrapped up our dough and got started making our sauces. Kim (Age 24) and I each started cutting onions. The other group started pounding basil and garlic. Given that we are all in the same Master's program, but at different points within it, Kim (Age 24) and Ireen (Age 27) asked about our experiences and takeaways overall. Yahaira (Age 32) and I (Age 25) chimed in that while the dread is a real feeling, it is also one of the best takeaways we have each had from the program; there's something amazing about taking the time to think about complex issues even if they feel overwhelming at times. There was lots of communication about cooking interspersed with conversations about personal life and interests. Yahaira (Age 32) and Ireen (Age 27) talked about future research goals and Kim (Age 24) and I talked about our parents' divorces. When the sauces were close to done, we started chatting about summer internships and COVID's role in our education, how those of us second years had to focus solely on school while the first years felt challenged by the opportunities of restrictions lifting. At this point, we figured it had been a ½ hour, which was the dough resting period. The next step was to push the dough into an oval about the width of the pasta roller, then roll it through from the largest to nearly the smallest size. We individually did this, troubleshooting the shagginess, patchiness, moistness, or smoothness of the dough along the way. As we took turns doing this, Yahaira (Age 32) started doing dishes and Ireen (Age 27) kept checking on the continuously cooking red sauce.

After several bundles of pasta were made, we got out an induction stove and started to boil water. Ireen (Age 27) had specifically asked me about the purpose behind these cooking sessions, which I honestly responded with the need for some kind of community creation because of COVID, and my own found love of cooking with friends. I had asked about our personal lives, things like living alone, jobs, favorite things to cook, and more to pass the time. For the most part, questions like this were brought up in the moment because of my own curiosity about my peers and their lives outside of school. Once the pasta was boiling and nearly done, we got out bowls and forks to try it together. While this was happening, others still did dishes or were rolling out more of their dough. As I was tending to the boiling noodles, everyone grabbed a bowl of pasta and tried some of both sauces. I kept asking people what they wanted to do with the dough they didn't roll out, and most people opted to leave it behind with me. Kim (Age 24) decided to take it home to roll out for ravioli, but otherwise, I had a lot of dough left over! As people were continuously cleaning – bringing dishes back and wiping up – I kept rolling dough. Some people took leftovers of cooked pasta and sauce. Eventually everyone left because this was a really long cooking session. I ended up doing most of the cleaning on my own. It felt natural for the last cooking session of the semester be left for me and only me to finish and clean up. I have had a lot of fun doing this project. It's just nice to be



Image 10 Fresh homemade pasta and pesto

around people. The discussions here really made me feel connected to people more, even if not necessarily the school.

Overall Cooking Session Take-Away's

83% (5/6) of the cooking sessions had attendees, with the Tuesday, March 15th session having nobody other than me. Including the cooking session where I was the only student present, the average number of students per cooking session (myself included) was 4.6 students. This number is significantly lower than my anticipated attendance falling between 8 and 15 students, but many factors contributed to lower attendance. This particular March 15th date had already been busy up at Eden Hall, including things like a food-share being set up to distribute fresh produce, as well as a seed swap taking place in our campus dining hall. Due to multiple events being coordinated in one day, as well as other factors like time commitment, time of day, waiting for the shuttle if a student didn't have a personal vehicle, and not a large enough pool of students who completed the consent form, attendance varied at each session. Figure 3 shows

other key data points regarding attendance, such as numbers of new or repeat attendees for cooking sessions.

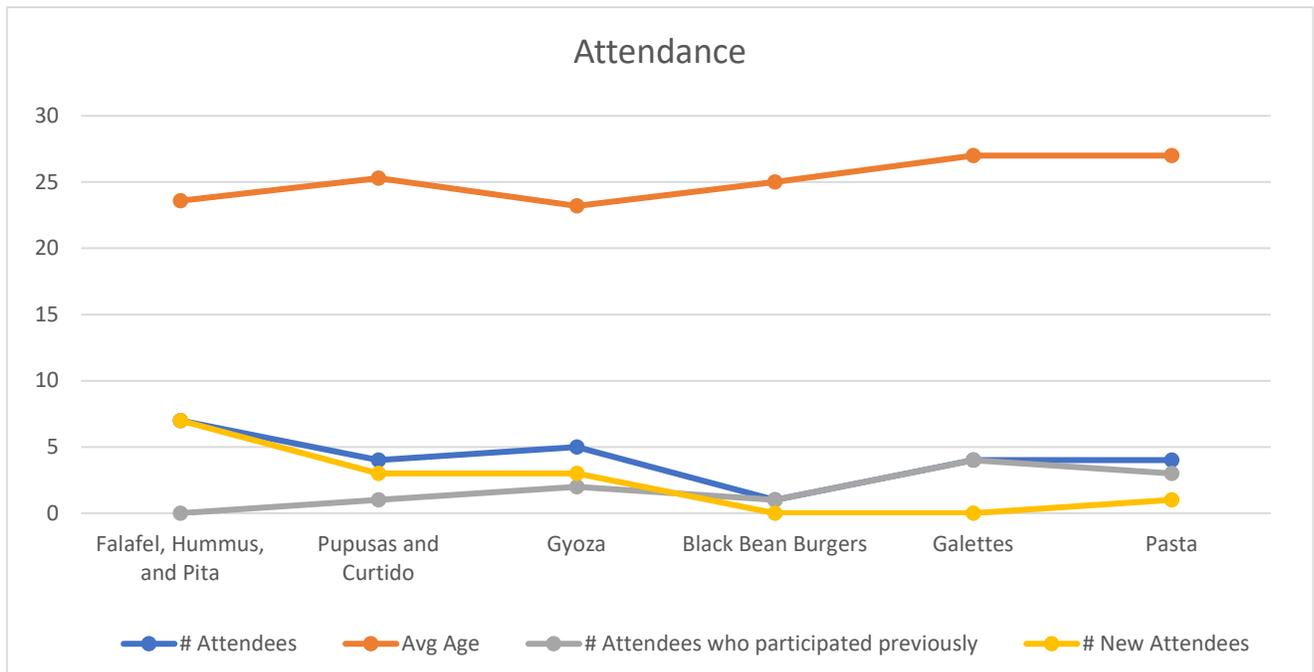


Figure 3 Attendance of Cooking Sessions

Labor is an important factor for thinking about the feasibility of extracurricular programming such as cooking sessions. Tracking the hours it took to plan, shop for, set up, and execute all 6 cooking sessions totaled 40.25 hours. Seen in Figure 4, you can find how many hours each component of the individual cooking sessions totaled to be. The longest cooking session was Pasta Making, specifically because I decided to stay to finish rolling out all of the pasta prior to leaving. If I had postponed this to a later date or pooled it with a different activity outside of cooking sessions, Falafel, Hummus, and Pita would have been the longest total labored cooking session given the multiple components it needed. The average cooking session

took 6.7 hours to create.

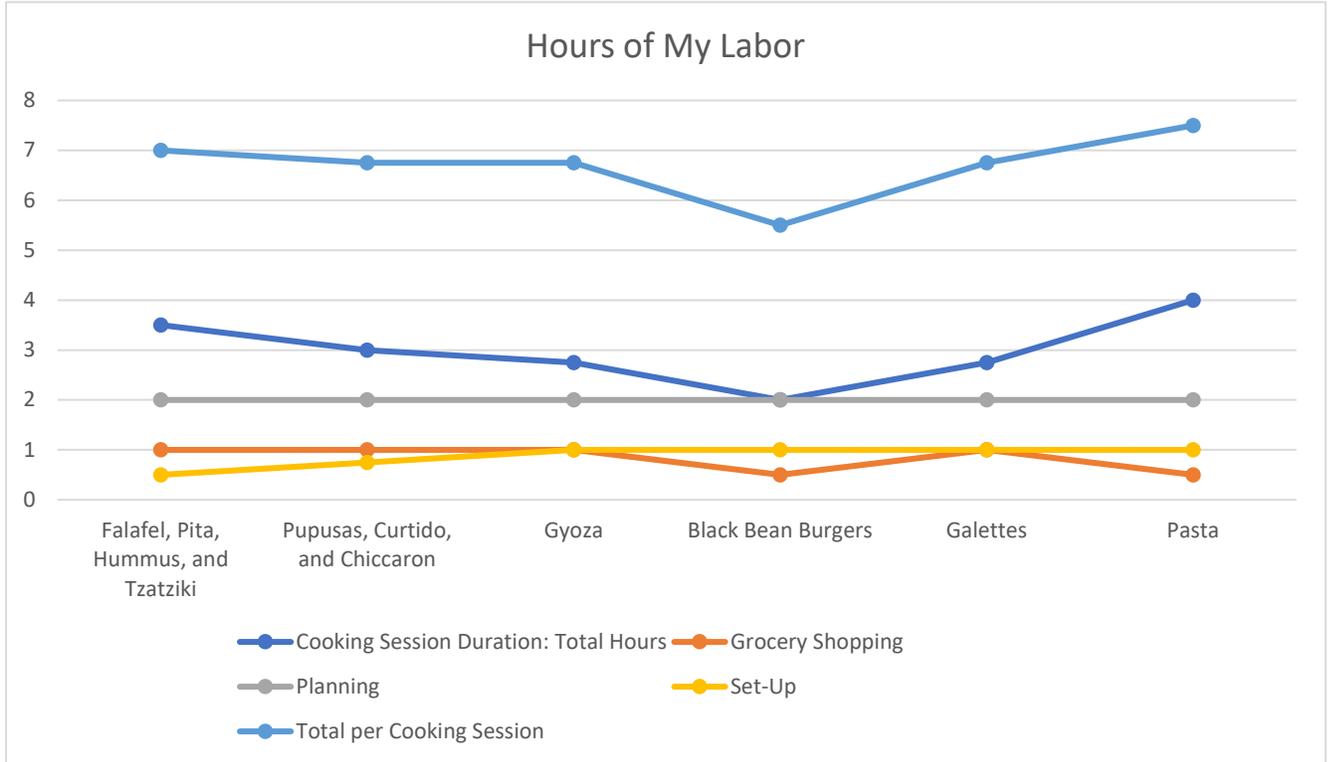


Figure 4 Hours of Labor Broken Down

It is possible to have cooking sessions that last less time, but this would mean more planning on the back-end. This could be desirable for students given that one of the biggest challenges to attending was the time commitment, but would mean closer to 10 dedicated hours to coordinate each session. While I planned purchases based on number of student attendees, and knew that I would need to go to multiple stores to reduce costs, the amount of groundwork for grocery shopping and set-up did not take up much time. Rather, most time went to actually executing the cooking sessions. What this shows is that the front-end work for each cooking session was not as time consuming as I had guessed it might be. While this amount could arguably be significant enough to either become its own student worker position or be absorbed by another student work position like a GA-ship to be a part of normal kitchen operation, it does not have to be. This could be feasible for a student who wants to take on creating cooking

sessions for other students, even voluntarily, knowing that planning them (though it does take time) has the possibility of taking up only 10 hours of your time. Having the opportunity to use the kitchen and not dedicate a lot of time from your week might be a driver to creating an extracurricular opportunity outside of the realm of student work.

Cost is as much of an important factor when considering the viability of a project like this happening long-term (Figure 5). The reason why I asked for donations for this project was because the cooking sessions were not funded by the university. There were subsidized items used from the kitchen shared pantry spaces or communal produce, and subsidized items like tools and the kitchen space itself. While I do not know the cost breakdown of student tuition and fees, my perception is that a portion of these costs subsidize items for the kitchen and the space. If this is the case, then perhaps utilizing the kitchen space and resources available is a cost that students are already, unknowingly, buying into, thus making it a space that we should be able to use.

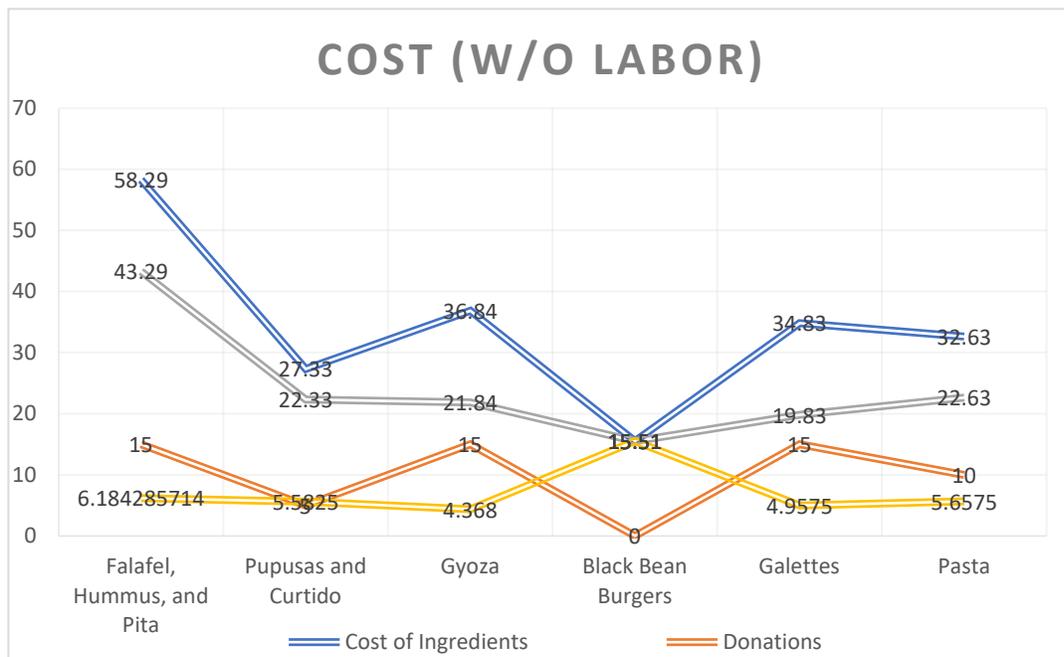


Figure 5

Cost of Meals Without Labor

While Falafel, Hummus, and Pita was an outlier in terms of cost and total cost, it was one of the most requested recipes. In terms of interest, this meant more students attended, making the

cost per person for this recipe relatively small (\$6.18) for the highest cost of ingredients with donations (\$42.39). While the most expensive meal per person here was black bean burgers, this was due to me being the only person attending. If the other students had showed up, this would have made this meal \$5.17 per person, *but* that made 5 burgers per person! The total average cost per cooking session with donations was \$24.24. The average cost of meal per person came to \$7.04, which is a number not inclusive of leftovers/another meal.

As a comparison, C.R.A.F.T. workshops are assisted by student workers. These students are paid \$15 per hour, but are responsible for grocery shopping as well as have to dedicate at least 8 hours of their time to be present at the workshops. The planning does not fall on them, but the amount of time they dedicate is equitable to the amount needed for these cooking sessions – but the costs of the meals are presumably cheaper. All this suggests to me that while this kind of extracurricular *could* be a paid position, creating meals for students does not *have* to be something tied to work.

Detailed Results

A. Participant Observation

When analyzing my participant observation notes, several things stood out to me. Most of the activity that I saw revolved around three different themes: first was how students worked together to figure out components of the cooking as a collective, how they maintained a flow of activity during the cooking sessions, and how they engaged in conversation during sessions.

Even though my intention for creating cooking sessions wasn't to focus on skill building or learning new recipes, most of the time that *was* a main focus to those around me. Recipes were oftentimes new for most of us participating, and with that new-ness, we had to figure out how to prepare the dish as a group. So, while some students had individual tasks at certain points

during the cooking sessions, the meal itself was for the group as a whole, and only by being around other people and asking questions of one another were we able to successfully make the meals. Sometimes individuals would ask about what things to do next or would hint at needing help nonverbally. Other times, figuring out the meal together encompassed trying to figure out how tools worked – tools that needed to be used to assist with the cooking process. This included trying to smash the chickpeas to make the falafel with numerous tools (bottoms of jars, large spoons, a fork, etc.) because there was only one bean masher available, or trying to figure out how the settings on the pasta roller worked.

We as a group would ask questions of one another or watch those around us to figure out the questions we had about the food – questions like, “How much butter needs to be melted for the crumble topping for the blueberry galette?” or, “How do you test when a freshly rolled pasta noodle is done?” One of my favorite examples of this happened during the pupusas cooking session. Several members of the group found it challenging to figure out the proper texture of the dough, and we would feel one another’s dough to make sure the consistency was right. *Then* we were struggling to figure out how to get the pupusa filling to stay in the dough as we patted them into patties. There were multiple methods used to constructing the pupusas as Ireen (Age 27) and Yahaira (Age 32) showed us, both of which meant using your hands as tools in different ways. This entire process was mainly us relying on one another to troubleshoot many components of the pupusas themselves, in order to make them successfully.

This also mirrors how verbal knowledge sharing happened throughout the cooking sessions. A lot of the time, people would share something they knew in regard to constructing or tasting the food, whether or not the question was prompted. When seasoning the beans for the pupusa filling, I needed to know how it tasted, so I asked Yahaira (Age 32) to try it and let me

know what it needed. She said it tasted good, which reinforced my own needs for reassurance when figuring out the flavor of the beans. Another time, during the falafel, hummus, and pita session, Rosalie (Age 20) forgot a step when making the pita dough. Alex (Age 20) noticed this, but only stated the mistake quietly so most of the group didn't hear. At other points, I observed students communicating skills without vocalization, or asking for help through body language or expressions. When teaching us how to fold the gyoza, Holly (Age 29) demonstrated more than told us how to do it, as she put a little spoon of filling in the center of the wrapper, then wet the outer edge of the wrapper and folded it closed by creating pleats. Similarly, when I went to cook the gyoza, I shared how I fry then steam them, and showed people how to do it, as well. I also pointed at the oil's sheen in the hot pan, signifying the readiness to fry the gyoza.

This kind of visual learning happened throughout the cooking sessions in many ways, such as when one student would watch another student's food preparation to see what they were doing. There was a lot of overlap in comprehending the ways that we figured the food out together. As an example, when preparing the pita dough, we had to preheat the oven. The oven has a pilot switch that you have to turn to a certain setting prior to preheating. Kyle (age 32) and I had asked Daria (Age 30) for help with it, since she has had more experience using the oven than either of us had. We verbally asked her for help, but were also trying to fiddle with the oven to understand how to use it. She thought she told us the proper way to turn the pilot switch on. Then, after some time, Daria (Age 30) shared with us that she told us incorrectly before and proceeded to show us the proper way to turn the switch. This instance, and many more that occurred during the cooking sessions, represented the many ways that we socially were able to work together to understand how to prepare a dish, through tools and forms of communication.

Another theme that I observed during my participant observation, though not occurring as often as figuring out the food, was continuing the flow of cooking. The natural flow of cooking and eating was usually something like: ingredient preparation/mise en place, construction and cooking, eating, cleanup (with the last two possibly switched dependent on the participants and their preference). Some ways I observed that participants assisted this flow were by paying attention to the environment, helping transition from one component of cooking to the next, and offering words of encouragement to a peer.

I find the environment of a kitchen can really make or break a good cooking experience. That can come from the literal orientation of things (like access to tools or ingredients) as well as the energy that those in the kitchen try to bring. Given this, I tried to be intentional with the ways I created a cooking session. Typically, at the start of every cooking session I either chose music to listen to aloud or asked others to help me figure out what music to play in the background. I like music when I'm cooking, and thought that it might help other students cook, or if anything, ease any uncomfortable silences or lulls in conversation. I also arranged the Kitchen Lab to have stations set up, with tools we needed and ingredients readily available, in order to help students pick a "spot" at the table for organizational purposes. Even with foresight and preparation, sometimes I forgot a tool or ingredient that we needed, which may have hindered the flow of cooking. This meant I had to try to describe where a tool was that I forgot to put out, and someone had to go get it if I didn't have the capacity to get it myself. This happened a few times, with Yahaira (Age 32) going to get plastic wrap from the counter in the other room, or Kim (Age 24) finding a spoon in the third or fourth drawer by the cabinets.

While I don't think this dampened the experience, it made it clear to me that many people verbally and nonverbally helped with transitions. Most of the people who did this were graduate

students, but this could be due to pre-existing relationships and recognizing how certain people cook together. Yahaira (Age 32) and I have cooked together in a number of kitchens before, so our dynamic may have subconsciously been developed over time, which could mean anticipating our own typical flow of cooking. An exception to this predominance of graduate students in anticipating and guiding flow was during the first cooking session, where Anna (Age 18) stepped in to make tzatziki, then transitioned to continue frying the falafel, and started preparing to-go containers once everything was cooked. That same session, she also said she usually cooks for her family, which showed me that her comprehension of a “flow” of cooking meant having experience doing so at home. Other people (Holly, Age 29; Yahaira, Age 32; Ireen, Age 27) usually helped move from the cooking to the eating part, or started cleaning while cooking was still happening. There was clearly some inherent knowledge of this process among people who were comfortable cooking, whether that be due to age or knowledge and comprehension of cooking processes, among other things.

What delighted me the most was seeing the occurrence of words of encouragement in my notes. This usually happened during the cooking process or afterwards when trying food. One example of this was during the gyoza session, where Hank (Age 18) was learning how to use a spoon to peel ginger which was to be used for the gyoza sauce. He accidentally cut off one of the nubs on the ginger and said, “Uh oh!” but I quickly reassured him that this happens and that the ginger would still be usable. This also happened during the galette session. Kyle (Age 32) was trying to find a spoon to spread mustard on the galette dough, and I thought I had forgotten it. Yahaira (Age 32) pointed out that it was just behind other ingredients. Then she told me I think of everything. I said, “I try,” and she said, “No, you don’t try, you actually do it.” This eased my worries and let us continue cooking without having to fetch something else. In order to complete

various cooking tasks, words of encouragement were one way to not only confirm or uplift a person's hesitations surrounding their cooking ability, but also somewhat propelled the activity forward rather than getting bogged down by needing to troubleshoot any errors. No matter how the flow of cooking was expressed, it signified how important being conscientious is when creating a welcoming environment for others.

The last main theme that stood out from my participant observation notes was the amount of conversation that took place during cooking sessions – which was a lot! Depending on the cooking session, a majority of the conversation that happened was either initiated by other students or initiated by me. Both the gyoza and falafel sessions had groups of students at different levels of familiarity with one another, and I saw lots of conversation started by other students in some capacity. For a portion of this session, I had students break off into pairs to make a component of the meal. I noticed the pairs of graduate and undergraduate students all talked with one another, even if some felt more forced than others, but the undergraduate pairs who knew one another already were lively with conversation. Even though there were many side conversations, there was also fun group conversation that happened at times, such as when Alex (Age 20) shared that when cutting an onion, you can prevent your eyes from burning if you hold a lit match inbetween your lips.

The gyoza session was a particularly group-oriented talkative session, still mostly started by other students. I keep thinking about how Holly (Age 29) asked if anyone had ever heard anything about the number of pleats that should be made for dumplings – nobody had. She thought it might be something superstitious of some sort. These seemingly random tidbits kept coming up in conversation, where we talked about Australia and emus, and cannibalism and meat consumption. In both of these cooking sessions, there were clear side conversations

happening between people who were already familiar with one another, but at times, group conversation was just as lively with people who did not know one another well. Most of the time nothing was prompted by me in either of these sessions, except when we started cooking.

In contrast, there were equally just as many conversations in my notes that were essentially started by me. I differentiated the two to help me track what things other students organically talked about, without my own intervention, to keep conversation going. This also meant that I could see when I perhaps forced conversation rather than let it be carried by others. This happened in the galette and pupusas cooking sessions. A lot of conversation in the galette session was initiated by me, because Yahaira (Age 32) and Kyle (Age 32) already knew one another well and I wanted to learn more about Julia (Age 20). I brought up questions about school, breaks, aspirations, and things that we could all relate to, being students. In the pupusas session, none of us really knew one another either, so anytime I brought up a topic, it was intentionally about our personal interests. Some side conversations occurred between Ireen (Age 27) and Julia (Age 20) about work. For the most part, though, the conversation in this session was about the pupusas themselves and comprehending the dough. Clearly, conversation topics differed because of many things, from personality differences, gender performance, pre-existing relationships, and more. I also think that it depended on extroversion and comfort of the groups as a whole, or how cooking was more of a focus than conversing with others. Overall, conversation definitely fills space when cooking, and regardless of its nature, still affects the cooking atmosphere. While I previously related closeness with conversation, I realize this is not necessarily always true. Personal information divulgence is *one* way to become “closer” with someone. The act of being with others, talking or not, could also be a way to grow closer with people and create connection.

B. Informal Interviews

Nearly all of the themes found in the participant observations existed within the informal interviews as well. This means that the things that I observed about figuring out components of the cooking as a collective, maintaining a flow during the cooking sessions, and conversation were things that students reflected on, too. There were also a few new themes that I saw within the informal interview responses, such as a reflection on group participation, defining community, and talking about food. Therefore, for this section, I am going to focus on those new concepts rather than reiterating the ones before. I partly think that the informal interview questions offered students reflective space for critical thinking outside of the physical act of cooking. In lieu of utilizing praxis as method, I thought including some of these questions would be helpful to bridge the divide between thought and action. See full responses to informal interviews in [Appendix C](#).

A number of concepts popped up that I deemed part of group participation, including talking about cooking as a group, communicating with others, and feeling encouraged by communal cooking. I found it interesting to hear what students discussed about the cooking experience after-the-fact. Some words were really positive, such as Holly (Age 29) saying, “There were two bowls of tofu and pork, which were separated for vegetarians - though Kim was excited to try the pork!” She reflected on the way we oriented the space and were accommodating of dietary needs, but she also was excited for her friend to try something new – being pork gyoza – during this cooking session. Not all aspects of the cooking were positively remembered though, as seen by Yahaira (Age 32) stating, “I felt guilty about the suggestion to shred cheese for Julia... In the moment I felt it came from assisting with [her lactose] intolerance, as a form of protection, but realized how it sounded.” In that moment, both Julia

(Age 20) and I were puzzled at her suggestion, even though we knew it came from Yahaira's caring nature. Regardless of how someone found their experience, these reflections show the emotional connection that can happen when cooking with others.

Similarly, the communication that happened during cooking sessions was discussed a few times in interviews. Some graduate students, including Holly (Age 29), Kyle (Age 32) and Yahaira (Age 32) referenced the conversations they had had with the undergraduates present for their cooking sessions. Though there wasn't any depth given to what they discussed with undergraduates, bringing up the memory of talking is one way to show that the group was comfortable enough to have discussions with relatively new people. Julia (Age 20) was the only undergraduate student I informally interviewed, and her response stated the same except she positively referenced her connection with graduate students. She said, "I didn't know a lot of the Food Studies people before this, and especially the Master's Food Studies people. It was good to meet others and it was nice because people would say hi to me when they saw me up at Eden Hall."

The encouragement that came from cooking with others was also referenced several times. Kyle (Age 32) mentioned that the collective effort of everyone made the food not only happen, but also taste good. Kim (Age 24) similarly offered her reflection by musing, "We were all very willing to ask questions, help each other out, and give advice. It was collaborative and kind." Overwhelmingly, much positive reflection came as a result of having the opportunity to cook within a group setting.

This positivity was also represented when students attempted to define community after their cooking session. There were a variety of new connections that people made, such as Holly (Age 29) connecting with Hank (Age 18) for a project making Canadian donuts, or Julia (Age

20) stating, “I felt I became more included with a new group up at Eden Hall”. It was great to see that people feel this helped expand their connections, but even then, Food Studies sometimes does exist in a bubble. From my personal perspective, Food Studies has their own little community separate from the other areas of study in the Falk School. There is not much crossover between Food Studies Master’s students and Sustainability Master’s students, except for the occasional person who decides to take a course outside of their area of study. When we have class at Eden Hall, it is rare that we see other students besides those in our program, except maybe some students in the dining hall area. The activities that we as Food Studies students set up mostly include other Food Studies students, intentional or not. The number of curriculars that Food Studies holds also usually draw in Food Studies students more than other majors. Sometimes it just feels like we have a niche that is unintentionally exclusive because of our interests. It was nice to see that a deliberate effort to include other students outside of Food Studies proved helpful for at least one student.

Despite there being new connections, several people mentioned the challenges that building new connections poses, like in pushing comfort. Kyle (Age 32) looked at this in positive and negative ways. First, he discussed that the community that exists kind of separates graduate and undergraduate students. Whether or not this is intentional, it’s just the way it is. Cooking sessions were one way to bridge that gap. To end off this thought, though, he stated positively, “I’ve worked in different social environments so I feel I can break ice pretty easily, but not everyone is like that. So, it’s good to force/push people a bit into discomfort. That’s healthy.” Not all people are as apt to understanding the social dynamics that exist, and being able to recognize the disparity between different matriculation levels is one way to push towards a more inclusive campus community. Yahaira (Age 32) discussed hesitations because she gets anxious

when in new, uncomfortable environments. Not knowing, or even knowing, who would be attending something could sway people's opinions on showing up. As with anything, though, there are to be hesitations when trying new things with different social circles. It was still fascinating to see students feel included in this but also tousele with what it looks like to create a community that includes more than the people we are naturally comfortable around. Having the kitchen setting as a neutral environment to be able to do that could be helpful for continuing to expand and include others.

Last, one of the most common things discussed in the informal interviews was food. As a majority of those interviewed were Food Studies students, we had to appreciate the food we made. Even Julia (Age 20), who was the only student interviewed not in Food Studies, still admired the food that was made. When asked to recall the galette cooking session, she said, "There were 4 stations with 4 different types of recipes which was a cool way to make and try new flavors," which goes to the excitement many students felt in being able to try making and tasting new foods. Actually, everybody referenced the food being delicious in some capacity! This is encouraging, as food can be an experiment and may not always turn out well. There was also discussion of this being a dinner process. Both Yahaira (Age 32) and Holly (Age 29) discussed the ways we not only got to eat the things we made, but we worked together to pack things away and clean up. These cooking sessions intentionally were meant to provide a meal but also have the family-esque act of constructing the food, eating a bit, then cleaning afterwards. We all participated in cooking, but referencing those other components of the flow of cooking let me hear (rather than observe) that these pieces were comprehended by students as part of the cooking sessions as a whole. This also showed that creating food was a stable variable given the other activities and thoughts students had.

Post-Survey Data

Similar to the informal interview, the post survey created space for students, participants or not, to: anonymously discuss their reasons for attending (or not); reflect on the experience; and figure out what these cooking sessions bring to the greater Chatham University Eden Hall Campus community. A total of 10/19 students responded to the post-survey, which is a 52.6% response rate. Of the 12 students who were attendees of the cooking sessions, 67% (8/12) completed the survey. Therefore, this met my goal of a 50% response rate. The results for this are broken down in order of question asked. For fill in the blank questions, I coded each answer individually. Otherwise, percentages or fractions of responses are given.

Section One - Attendance

Section 1 of this survey inquired about students' initial interest and/or attendance at cooking sessions. 10 students total completed this section. 8/10 students who completed this survey were people who attended sessions, therefore only 2/10 students completed this who did not attend any cooking sessions at all. Students who signed up as interested did so because of wanting to learn new skills (2/10), learn new foods/recipes (3/10), spend time with others (9/10), utilize this environment (3/10), have free food (1/10), support me personally (5/10), and have a space to cook as an enjoyable pastime (5/10). All 5 students who stated they enjoyed cooking mentioned the desire to cook with others specifically. 10 students also replied to the question inquiring about why they did or did not come to cooking sessions. Every single person mentioned scheduling issues. There were issues of location, time, and personal bandwidth with schoolwork. Only one person said that this was a convenient location or time for them. Otherwise, 5/10 people stated they were into the sessions for the food, 3/10 explicitly stated they wished they attended more, 2/10 people mentioned wanting to help with the project, 2/10 people

mentioned wanting to meet new people, and only one person mentioned that attending this was a learning experience.

Section 2 – Experience at Cooking Sessions

Section 2 of the post-survey was created for people who actually participated in the cooking sessions. 8 students completed the entirety of this section. 50% (4/8) of respondents only attended one session. 25% (2/8) attended 2 sessions and 25% (2/8) attended 3 sessions. What exactly drew students to attending more than once? Of the four students who attended more than once, 3/4 stated they had fun and enjoyed it, as well as liked being with others. 2/4 explicitly stated a desire to keep going, and these same two were people who mentioned their enjoyment in going. 2/4 said the taste of the food was good, and 2/4 students said they liked the recipes that were going to be created. While I personally had pre-meditated ideas about what students would get out of this, I wanted to learn what they actually desired from any cooking session, generally (not specific to these). 4/8 stated they wanted to learn new skills, 3/8 wanted to try new foods, 2/8 wanted to improve a dish they already knew how to make, and 2/8 said they wanted good food. One person mentioned wanting to work with their hands, while another person mentioned the desire to learn from others and share their own knowledge. 75% (6/8) of these people stated that given their own desires from a cooking session, attending one cooking session during my created series met those stated expectations. 25% (2/8) of people said these sessions only partially met their expectations.

With hopes to get at other possible benefits these cooking sessions had for students, I asked if any new connections were made. Connections could be with other people but also the location, our school, food, future interests, and more. 1 of the 8 initial people did not respond to this question, so only 7 people responded to this. 4/7 students clearly affirmed there were

connections, and 3/4 of those people elaborated, while one person did not. On the flip side, 1/7 people said they had no new connections at all. The other two students used examples of what connections happened – including having connections to the Kitchen Lab itself (1/7), feeling an affinity to the Falk School and Food Studies (1/7), and the food we ate (2/7). 4/7 people said they enjoyed the connections they had with other people, whether it be undergraduates, graduates, or just people in Food Studies in general. While the idea was that connections can be anything, that doesn't mean that those connections were the best thing that happened for students at cooking sessions. Therefore, when posed the question, “What was your greatest takeaway?” there was an allowance for people to consider “takeaway” however they want. Half the students (4/8) said connecting with people can happen while cooking, regardless of if you know people, have nothing to say, or prefer cooking alone. 2/8 people referenced that cooking is variable and there are many tips, tricks, and alterations that can happen during or because of it. 1 person felt a personal affirmation of being there, stating that, “All of the imposter syndrome and fear of ‘not finding the right path’ flew away” because of these cooking sessions. Similarly, 1 person mentioned that they feel more comfortable in the Kitchen Lab as a space on campus. While takeaways could be physical or emotional, I wanted to somehow quantify what significant memories were made during these cooking sessions. Every single person mentioned that the food, whether it be preparation or consumption, was their favorite memory. 4/8 people mentioned that their memory came from enjoying the food specifically with others. 3/4 of these people mentioned that, not only could people enjoy the food they made, but that it was also a part of collective effort. 4/8 people mentioned their favorite memory being related to the physical, tactile sensations of preparing or tasting the food, such as pulling pita apart with their hands or referencing the clumped noodles we made. One person mentioned a hyper-specific preparation

error that a few of us laughed at during the cooking session. One person also mentioned their memory of hunger, that being able to eat together made the food more delicious because of the hunger they felt.

This research was meant to think about cooking as part of commensality. Commensality is defined as "the act of eating together." While we sampled food and occasionally ate the foods we prepared, we didn't create a sit-down dinner experience for our cooking sessions. I wanted to know if this impacted students' experience at the cooking sessions. 5/8 people said that sitting down for dinner could have enhanced the cooking sessions, but would have created a different experience. 3/5 of those people then mentioned that even if that was the case, that would be too much of a time commitment. Funnily enough, one person said that eating at a table would take away from the conversation, and another person said that eating at a table would have deepened conversation. 2/8 people mentioned that the flow worked well to eat and hang out, so having a sit down didn't matter too much. Similarly, 2/8 people mentioned that we as a group still got to connect to the food without a sit-down experience. Regardless of having a sit-down experience, 4/8 people then said that within the context of the cooking sessions, we did get to have a meal together. Given that most of commensality focuses on the eating aspect, I wanted to ask students how *they* define commensality, whether it be the same definition as "the act of eating together," or something else. 2/8 people stated that this definition still stands for them. Interestingly, 1/2 of these people said that having some sort of benefit from an experience with food is also part of commensality, whether that's cooking and eating together or not. 6/8 people said that commensality means being with others while sharing food, whether that be through preparation, eating, or cleanup. 2/8 people built upon this definition by including present-ness as a necessity within commensality, with one person stating, "I think people can eat at the same table without

really being with each other. It's an active attempt to be present with the other person while having this shared experience of food.” 3/8 people separately built upon their definition of commensality being with others around food, including that conversation is a necessity. Given these definitions, I then asked respondents if these cooking sessions were a way of creating commensality. 100% of people (8/8) said yes.

To glean more information about the student experience, I proceeded to ask how these cooking sessions affected their experience as a student. 7/8 students completed this question. 3/7 students stated that they felt more comfortable within the kitchen space. 4/7 students said they were glad to meet other students. 2/7 said they were able to contextualize their place within Food Studies, either by bringing “further nuance,” to their experience, or by bringing them out of the “Food Studies bubble.” Similarly, I wanted to know how student opinions may have shifted about the presence of experiential learning within a cooking session. A lot of our program has experiential learning but that happens mostly within curricula, not as an extracurricular activity nor with lots of opportunities within a kitchen setting. 5/8 students said it is an invaluable way of learning, with one student emphasizing that, “...there is so much conscious and unconscious learning that you get (when you) think with your hands first and let your brain follow.” One student said experiential learning didn’t change much for them in this context, *but* it was nice to apply it to a new setting. One student said they prefer this kind of learning even if it induces anxiety, while another stated it’s fun because it feels more low stakes. Lastly, one student said that this kind of format makes sense in the context of Food Studies’ learning objectives. I don’t know if this was from the perspective of a Food Studies student or not, or if there was a positive or negative connotation to it – but they’re right! To finish up this section of the survey, I wanted to learn if there was a positive association between cooking sessions and well-being

improvement. While well-being is subjective, not defining it for the question meant that students could freely interpret how cooking sessions impacted them. 5/8 people stated that these cooking sessions offered the opportunity to socialize, whether it be with friends or new people. To build on this, one student stated, “The social aspect, especially after not having that for so long, was really good for my well-being.” 4/8 people mentioned that cooking sessions allowed for people to simply focus on the food. 2/8 people felt an emotional revitalization after the cooking sessions. 2/8 people referenced this being a free meal, which lessened the immediate stress of grocery shopping or meal planning. Whether or not these questions show the full picture of the benefits of cooking sessions, I think this section of the survey provided a reflective space for each respondent to think about their own reality of being students. Finishing up this survey section, I asked if students wanted to add anything about their experience. Two people said thank you, the experience was great. One person said, “It was great and I hope Chatham invests in keeping this going,” which mirrored another person’s comment stating they wish they could have joined more. It is great to see how positive people’s experiences were!

Section 3 – The Future of Cooking Sessions

The final section of the post-survey was related to the possible future of cooking sessions. This section was designed for all students, regardless of attendance at cooking sessions. Therefore, the same 10 students who completed section 1 of this survey also completed section 3. The first question of this section was, “Would you come to cooking sessions if they were offered in the future?” and 100% of respondents said yes. To follow up, I asked everyone to explain their reasoning in more detail. If there were any responses who said no, it could offer an anonymous space to explain why. The responses were positive and posed questions that I have personally been thinking about, such as creating accessible cooking opportunities, especially

given the location of Eden Hall. 5/10 people discussed wanting to go in the future, if time permitted. 2/5 of these people mentioned that having these at Eden Hall can be a lot for students taking the shuttle, but this space also allows the opportunity to utilize tools they may not have in their dorm or apartment. 4/10 people mentioned that cooking with others is a reason they would continue attending. 4/10 people also said that it was overall an enjoyable or fun experience for them. One person mentioned that the opportunity to have good food and relieve stress is also a plus for these cooking sessions to continue. Three people discussed what they perceive as needs for Food Studies, being the need for fellowship and connection between everybody, and the lack of cooking opportunities that currently exist within the program. To afford cooking opportunities to more students, I wanted to figure out multiple locations for these kinds of sessions. The access to a cooking space is relevant to Eden Hall because the Lodge kitchen is a commercial kitchen and has a learning space attached to it, but it is distant from Shadyside, where nearly all undergraduate students have courses. It would be ideal to have cooking sessions at both campuses, but that requires logistics beyond the scope of this paper. I asked what locations students would want cooking sessions to happen, to which 70% (7/10) said at both Eden Hall and Shadyside, and 30% (3/10) said only Eden Hall. This could be dependent on where students currently live, and what locations feel accessible for them.

I believe that everything needs critique from various stakeholders, so I asked students what should be done to improve cooking sessions. That is to say, the sessions I created are replicable, but in no way a concrete model for the future. Instead, what things should be built upon to keep student's needs and wishes in mind? 7/10 students completed this question, but one person had no recommendations for improvement. 4/6 students recommended building in further assistance for whoever plans the cooking sessions, in terms of prep, cleanup, marketing the

sessions, and overall logistics. Some interesting ideas sparked from this, such as the recommendation for including a dining/eating experience with future cooking sessions if time allows. Similarly, to cut down on the workload for one person, someone suggested letting participants either choose a recipe or a skill that they wanted to share so they could plan a session. One person mentioned having more prior instruction. I did send out recipes prior to cooking sessions, but maybe having a timetable of what we were going to do, and who would do it, would be more beneficial for structure. Lastly, one student stated that they hope for Shadyside residential kitchens to be improved (maybe with hopes for cooking sessions to happen there). This same person also suggested integrating cooking sessions into curriculum, in a way that helps people “live life.” While these were purposefully extracurricular options, it might make sense for some curriculum to bring in participation as a requirement.

Community building was a key reason for creating these cooking sessions. In order to learn about students’ perspectives on community building, I asked a few questions about this. First, I asked, “Prior to these cooking sessions, was cooking a way you built or felt part of a community?” 60% (6/10) of people said yes, 30% (3/10) of people said sometimes, and 10% (1/10) of people said no. To see if cooking sessions made a change in this, I asked, “Do you feel these cooking sessions were a constructive way to build or become part of a community outside of the classroom?” 80% (8/10) of students said yes, 10% (1/10) of students said partially, and 10% (1/10) of students said they didn’t participate but they assumed yes. Community is an ambiguous term. While in this case, we are all students within Chatham University’s Falk School, I was unsure if all people surveyed perceived community in the same way I do. Therefore, I asked survey respondents to write what they perceive community to be for cooking sessions specifically. Nearly all responses were different, but were coded into a number of

categories. First, there was some semblance of this being for students as peers or friends (6/10 responses), but also for meeting new people (2/10 responses). 3/10 people mentioned school specific terminology to define community, such as the Chatham community, a Food Studies community, or the Falk School community. Community was also not person-specific, but ideology specific. 4/10 people stated community revolves around collective interest. 2/10 people said community was something that transcended the cooking session, particularly through interpersonal communication that you choose to engage with. Lastly, 2/10 people referenced mutual support as a marker for community.

Once community was defined by students, I wanted to understand if these cooking sessions brought about any change to community building for students at Chatham, specifically within the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen. Given my interest in the Lodge Kitchen as a potential gathering as well as teaching space, I asked the hypothetical, “Imagine that these cooking sessions had not happened. Do you feel that cooking at the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen is an accessible option for students to create community outside of the classroom?” There were 9 responses to this question, shown in Figure 6. Three people, totaling 33.3%, landed somewhere in the middle. Only 2 people definitively said yes, and 4 people definitively said no. A majority of respondents landed in a position that was hesitant or unsure that the kitchen was accessible more-

so than being sure of the space's accessibility.

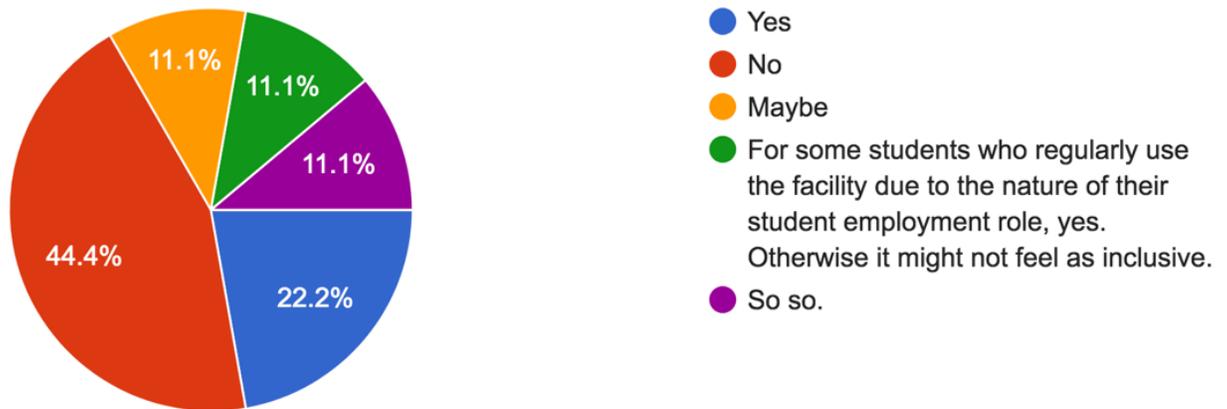


Figure 6 Accessibility of Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen

This was to some extent a loaded question, and people's responses could differ for a slew of reasons. Therefore, I gave space for the 9 students to explain their reasoning for the answer they gave. The topmost answer (5/9) related to feeling gatekept from the space. These students felt access to the space was not only restricted and strict, but that it was a place only for education rather than community. 4/9 people explicitly mentioned that the kitchen itself is intimidating, whether or not you have experience in commercial kitchen spaces. This could be due to the confusion around booking procedures (3/9), never using this space before (2/9), or feeling gatekept. ServSafe certification was brought up here, where 3/9 people said they support the training, because it makes using the kitchen safer and easier. This certification should be a part of onboarding curriculum when coming here, though, says one person, rather than an additional or voluntary activity. As a follow up to this question, I asked if students felt that because of these cooking sessions, their feelings of accessibility to use the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen to create community outside of the classroom improved. 40% (4/10) of students responded yes, while 60% (6/10) of students replied maybe. There were no "no's." Similar to the last question, I asked students to explain their reasoning to understand their choice. Two people

didn't attend any sessions, so they didn't know how to answer. One of these people led on to say they knew people who attended, and felt community was in fact built, which two other participants reiterated in their response. Two people both stated they now feel they could tackle organizing something in the space, but they both also were uncertain that other participants would feel as comfortable as they do. 3/10 students mentioned that their comfort in the kitchen space improved because of these cooking sessions, and 2/10 students said these sessions helped with student access to the space. These same 2 people, along with one other (3/10), then led on to say that it would take active work to create community engagement opportunities within the kitchen space. Finishing up this survey section, I asked if students wanted to add anything once again. The five students who wrote something thanked me, which warmed my heart. It was lovely to put these together and create an opportunity for students!

From Analysis to Discussion

When analyzing my results, I looked at all of the data collected and aimed to find themes. While much of this analysis is interpretive, I attempted to use a combination of student responses from the post-survey and informal interviews to uphold (or provide counterpoints to) the themes I observed from participant observation. This was to ensure that the data I found, and the ways that I answered these questions, were both using my observations and also falling on the lived experiences and survey data from students. While it may not have been entirely necessary, I wanted the depth and interplay of looking at qualitative data next to quantitative measures. As seen in Chart 7 below, I traced the various kinds of data collected and how they related to one another. During the analysis process, I was able to draw conclusions that mirrored the entirety of the types of data used.

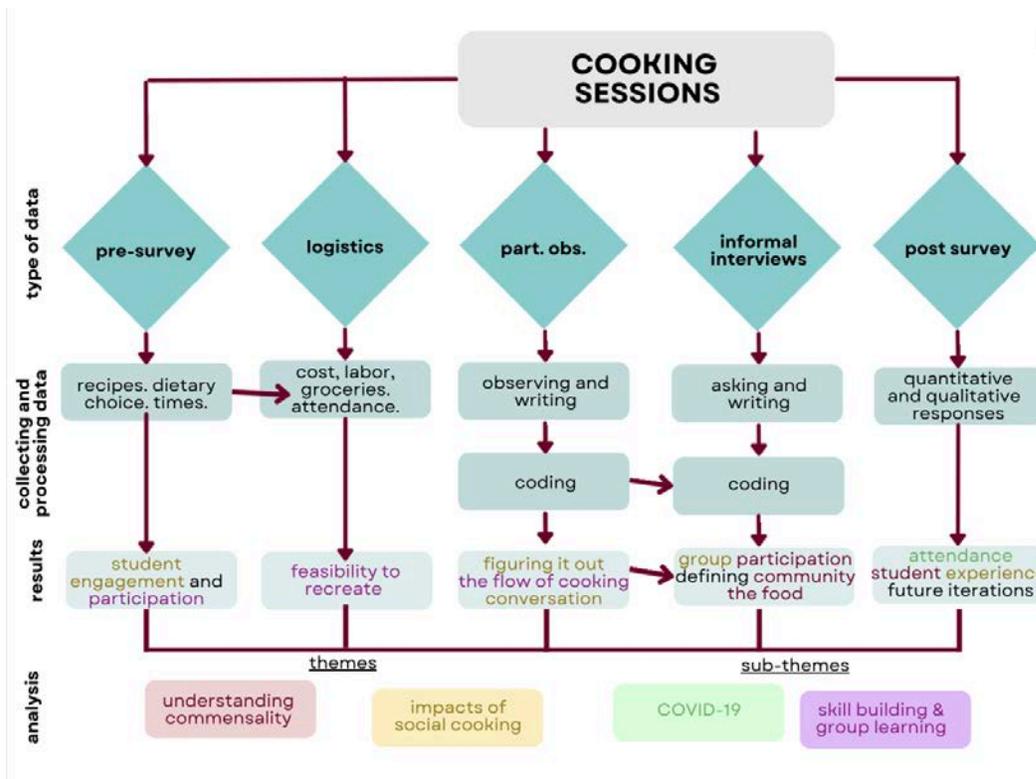


Chart 8 Data Analysis completed

Discussion

This research pulled together a range of data, both quantitative and qualitative. The results highlighted findings pulled from each method separately, so I want to take the time here to refocus around the questions I set out to answer. This way, there is space created to discuss the key takeaways I have found for the two main questions of this research, as well as other findings from this study.

What does commensality mean for students in a food focused program?

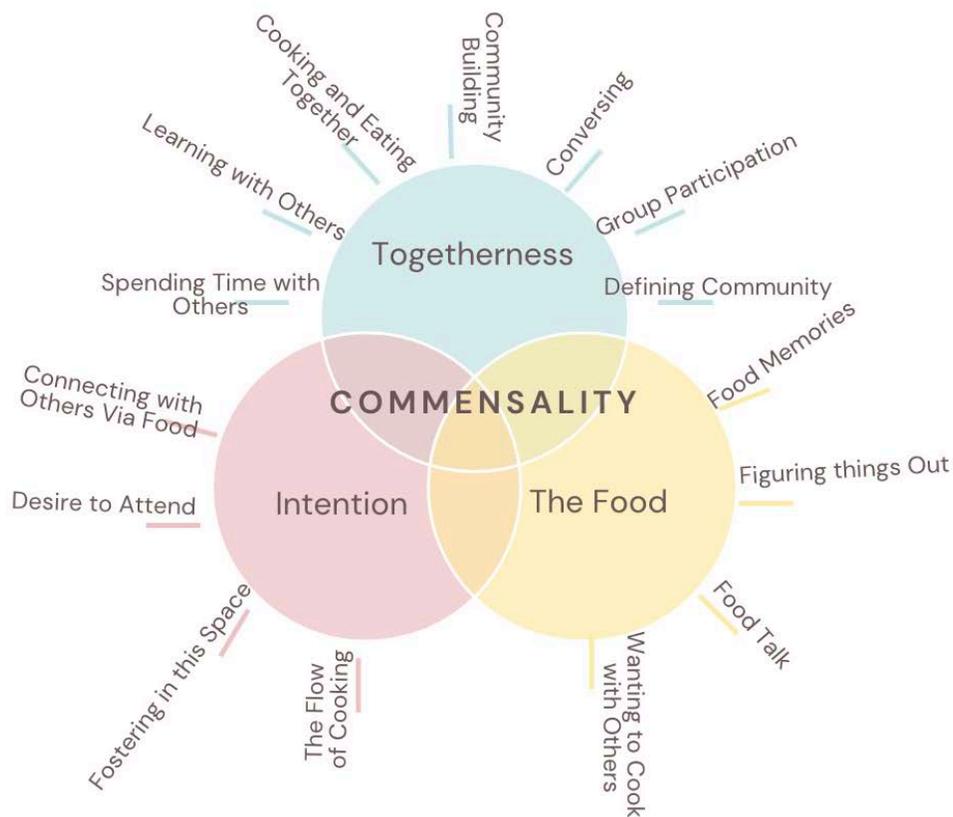


Diagram 1 - Commensality as Defined by Students

Commensality holds benefit for us as social individuals when eating in groups, as seen via Sandstrom & Dunn (2014). The act of eating together, or commensality, is more than just that, though; the process of cooking with other people, enjoying and emphasizing food

preparation, and the intentionality of being with other people to prepare and enjoy food is also a part of commensality as seen in this research with students. There is togetherness that occurs during food preparation outside of the commensality that comes with eating together, which is why I found it important to contextualize cooking as a component of commensality. While 100% of survey respondents (8/8) said that these cooking sessions, were for them, a part of commensality, I wanted to learn what pieces of student experience specifically created commensality.

Togetherness

One of the biggest, common recurring takeaways I found that falls under the definition of commensality was “togetherness,” which was, in my data, represented through any reference to being with people in fellowship, where food is the setting. From pre-surveys to participant observation and informal interviews to post-surveys, there was a clear explicit mention of togetherness as a key part of commensality. Viewing the spokes outside of togetherness in Diagram 1, there are a number of places where we can see students’ reference what it means to cook with others and gain camaraderie with their peers. When looking at participant observation notes, the group dynamics were different from session to session. But regardless of whether the group was talkative or more focused on creating the food, I saw togetherness in commensality. Yahaira (Age 32), Ireen (Age 27), Julia (Age 20), and I were trying to troubleshoot the texture of the pupusas, and while there were videos online that I watched prior to making these, the literal feeling of the dough would have been difficult to create correctly if we had not had someone present who made them before. The attentiveness that Yahaira (Age 32) gave to everyone in the room when they asked questions during this process was patient and supportive. Similarly, if someone needed encouragement, such as times when Kyle (age 32) and Julia (Age 20) were

unsure of their galette, other people were present to help them pursue their creation. To me, these examples represent the ways that students utilized one another's presence to not only figure out cooking, but also enjoy doing it around peers, which is something that may not have occurred without the presence of others.

More explicit references to togetherness were gleaned from the informal interviews. While creating new connections and being able to communicate with new people was a positive association to commensality, there are also larger social dynamics that come from being around people you may not be familiar with. Kim (Age 24), talked about her experience as a student participating in this, stating, "I met some new folk and learned new things about people I already knew. I feel more comfortable saying hi and engaging with these people outside of the classroom now" ([Appendix C](#), Interview E). Simply being accepted in a group of students you're not familiar with, and then feeling able to learn personal information enough so that you can interact with them later, shows connection. On the opposite side of this, Yahaira (Age 32) asked in her informal interview if it was possible to learn who would be attending prior to the cooking sessions. She wondered if a student didn't know any other attendees personally, would this deter them from going? While this concern was brought up by only her, it was a legitimate question in comprehending what togetherness means. As personalities differ, so does comfort level with new situations. In this case, the nervousness that can come from assuming that togetherness is natural and easy means that sometimes people may feel forced to attend, share, or purposefully build connections. This resonated with a particular instance during the pupusas cooking session, where Yahaira (Age 32) offered to shred cheese for Julia (Age 20) because Julia tries to avoid consuming dairy. Yahaira reflected on this, stating, "I felt guilty about the suggestion to shred cheese for Julia (Age 20)... In the moment I felt it came from assisting with intolerance, as a

form of protection, but realized how it sounded” ([Appendix C](#), Interview B). Despite the hesitancy that Yahaira held for being in a new group, her caring nature still shined by offering to help someone, even if it was unnecessary. Togetherness *does* happen even in the smallest ways.

While not necessarily a given, new relationships and fellowship were created during cooking sessions. For those who completed the first section of the post-survey, 90% (9/10) of respondents stated that they were interested in these cooking sessions in order to spend time with others. Therefore, togetherness was something people sought out when they showed initial interest in these sessions. When asking if new connections were made from the cooking sessions, students responded by saying things like “Yes!” or “I think I felt connections with people I already knew strengthen” or “It definitely made me fall in love more with...the people I learn beside.” Connections between students were made, and it seemed that our time cooking with others helped foster this sense of togetherness, forming a bond between students by being in an environment focused on food. When describing commensality to be cooking and eating together, most students emphasized the *togetherness* – whether during preparation, eating, or cleaning. This challenged my initial conception that communication and conversation were key components to create connection – while conversation helps, sometimes simply being around others while cooking is in itself a way to connect and spend time with peers.

Intentionality

One vital takeaway I found in tandem with the mention of togetherness was intentionality. Similar to Astin’s theory of involvement (Hunt, 2003) and Abarca’s comprehension of commensality via foodways (2021), one key reason why people can feel connected to something is because of the ways we see our social identities supported by the actions we carry out. Intentionality here is not only a mindset of dedication and an outlook when

entering and being a part of a cooking session, but also the ways that students find meaning in the environment around them. In the pre-survey, the 19 students interested were intentionally hoping to cook with other students, and submitted recipes specifically to be cooked with a larger group.

This somewhat translated into action, where students were intentional during their time at cooking sessions. Holly (Age 29) arrived early to the gyoza session and not only helped me pick out music related to food, but she was also the student that had submitted the idea to cook gyoza. When we talked during her informal interview ([Appendix C](#), Interview C), she mentioned that her participation in these cooking sessions thus started early during her recipe input. She then noted that, “Dumplings are communal which is why I love them; they’re easily something to do with others.” Examples such as this one were mirrored within the participant observation and overlapped with the display of togetherness. When we were discussing Julia’s (Age 20) major, future goals, and summer plans, she shared with Kyle (Age 32), Yahaira (Age 32) and I that she got into the graduate Master’s of Sustainability program at Chatham University. She was going to do this through the Integrated Degree Program (Chatham University, 2022b) which is when a student has the opportunity to start their graduate degree while finishing their undergraduate degree, typically with some benefit like earlier admission, or less prerequisites required. Kyle (Age 32) asked me what IDP meant, which I explained. While this was a verbal inquiry, it was a representation of active listening and the intention of comprehending what it was that Julia was setting out to do. This kind of display happened non-verbally as well, where there were looks of inquiry between people during cooking, or an individual’s purposeful act to help transition from cooking to cleaning. All of these are ways that intentionality and awareness were displayed during the cooking sessions. I posit that people came to these sessions ready to either learn

something or experience something with others, and this was clearly displayed by the students' multiple acts of kindness towards one another, whether spoken about or not. These are but a few examples of how commensality manifests during cooking, in this case through displays of connection and care towards those around them.

What I found most interesting, though, was how students completed the post-survey. Commensality is typically defined as the act of eating together, but these cooking sessions did not have a sit-down aspect to them. While creating a dining experience could have helped build upon the togetherness or intention that occurred during cooking sessions, what really mattered was the recognition that this *was* a meal for people. What mattered more than the meal for these participants seemed to be a sense of present-ness during the cooking sessions; having conversation and being around other people, with people willing to be active in the presence of others, seems to me to the heart of commensality. This intentionality that was built before, during, and after the cooking sessions was meaningful in that it allowed us as people to feel cared for, both with those around us and in the food we made and ate.

While a number of students did typically use cooking as a way to be a part of a community, there was hesitation in acknowledging that this space itself was a place to foster that. Therefore, a relationship with the environment, and the purpose or intention of its use, was something I wanted to gather student feedback about. I asked students in the post-survey about the use of the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen Lab and whether or not that space felt comfortable as a way to create community with other people. While it was clear that students can be intentional in wanting to collaborate and cook together, having comfort within a space to be able to do so is also important, but was not always happening for the sample of students in this research. 56% (5/9) of respondents elaborated that they felt somewhat gatekept from the kitchen space, and that

the kitchen felt more like a space for education rather than community building. Of course, the Kitchen Lab's intention is to be a teaching kitchen, so it is understandable that our Kitchen Lab space may not seem inclusive, because we don't necessarily offer it as a place for students to socially gather. Even knowing this, though, I feel there is potential for a more flexible understanding of what a teaching kitchen *can* be, especially in a program where commensality and experiential learning are underlying foci.

Certainly, questions about use and space in teaching kitchens are not uncommon, as teaching kitchens have expanded into a range of environments in recent years – beyond just culinary programs into broader university settings as well as in other institutions (hospitals, veteran facilities, grocery stores, museums, corporate worksites, etc.) (Eisenberg and Imamura, 2020; Black et. al., 2020). As such, teaching kitchens often bring out a number of challenges regarding how to prioritize and regulate their use – to what extent they should be profit-centers (or not); how the labor for provisioning, maintaining, and administering them should be managed; how liability should be addressed; and how to balance usage between teaching, outreach, research, contracted outside use, and other functions (Bonnet et. al. 2022, Heerman et. al., 2022; Eisenberg and Imamura, 2020). As such, proposing more informal student-driven social gathering through cooking in a teaching kitchen can be fraught. But at the same time, operating something like cooking sessions in a teaching kitchen can offer time for students to learn and gain confidence in the procedures of the space, but do so in a more relaxed setting. Given a program like Food Studies, where students typically spend only small amounts of class time in this space (as opposed to the level of repetition and practice one would encounter in a culinary school teaching kitchen, for example), there may be a different kind of opportunity here for thinking about the notion of practice and comfort in commercial spaces, while still

maintaining the requirements and mandates of a teaching kitchen space. In other words, I believe there is potential for giving precedence to things like classes, value-added production, demonstrations, workshops, and clubs, while also opening up times for students to cook with peers. This could be a great way to keep the ideals of a teaching kitchen at the forefront while still offering things like extracurricular learning and community building via cooking.

Thinking about these questions within in the context of these sessions and associated student feedback made me wonder about the ways that commensality is or could be promoted more intentionally at Eden Hall. I would argue that feelings of commensality happen in the Eden Hall Kitchen Lab during class-time, or at other locations like the bread oven during more formal events or classes. But even with these events, and other kinds of community gatherings and food sharing up at Eden Hall, there may not be an active fostering of commensality in this particular kitchen space, particularly with multiple people from different areas of study, or outside of class-time. While it could be that this space should remain primarily educational, I wonder about the possibility of changing some of the practices that happen here in the future. While there should always be parameters to utilizing the space – such as following proper reservation procedures or having someone present with ServSafe certification – it may also be useful to build in additional layers of support and flexibility that would allow students to more easily foster a cooking club, or cooking sessions, or simply the ability for students to cook and/or eat with others in the space during “off” times on campus. As we can see, students’ desire to attend some iteration of cooking sessions in the future, and the benefits that seem to come from this kind of activity (both in my work and in the literature), suggest the importance of creating an environment where students feel welcome and able to be together. I would love to see students better able to foster a present, intentional, and positive environment with one another via the kitchen.

The Food

At the heart of commensality, whether cooking, eating, or both, is the food. While community can be hard to define, the way that food brings people together is one way to comprehend the social relationships that individuals bring to a group setting. From the ways people remember a shared experience via food memory, or the family-like aspect that can be created when cooking and dining together, food is transformative on the individual and social level (Sutton, 2001; Julier, 2013). At the very beginning of this whole process, I asked students in a recipe input survey about what they wanted to cook. 58% (11/19) of the students completed it, writing in information about dishes they wanted to prepare. 17 recipes in total were submitted by 11 people, with a few repeat ideas. This overlaps with the concept of togetherness. Being able to make a food that one submits an idea for, and is maybe curious about or has some relation to, is one way to connect with others via food. Thus, submitting a food is a way to share something meaningful with others, similar to how potlucks are in part about bringing an individually prepared home-cooked food to share with others (Julier, 2013).

While there are points of enjoyment that submitting this food idea brought, participant observation and informal interviews also showed a level of individual enjoyment of food alongside the social enjoyment. Even aside from the verbal mm's and yum's that happened while we finished and tried our food, students tended to reflect on the cooking more than I anticipated. A number of students in their informal interviews discussed how delicious the food turned out, and reflected on being able to prepare the foods successfully and enjoy them together. One of my favorite reminiscing quotes comes from Kim (Age 24) during the pasta making session, where she stated, "I was nervous going in, because I thought it would be really difficult and I wouldn't be able to do it, but we made a really tasty meal" ([Appendix C](#), Interview E). Creating pasta from

scratch was something she was fearful about, but the use of *we* emphasized to me that the enjoyment of the preparation happened because this was a group-creation.

The ways that students reflected on their ability to create the meal played out explicitly within my participant observations, as well; the central role of preparing food together was exhibited in the way's students learned how to figure things out together. Similarly, in the post-survey, students reflected on their individual enjoyment of the food as being a part of the larger whole of cooking. When asked about a favorite memory from the cooking sessions, everyone who answered this question (8 students) pointed to food. Students mentioned that their food memories came about by enjoying the food with others and the fact that the food was directly related to a collective effort. While some students also referenced the tactile sensations of food, there seemed to be some sense of commensality that came with collective memories of food being prepared and enjoyed together.

How does the act of social cooking and eating impact students personally and communally, outside of their classroom setting?

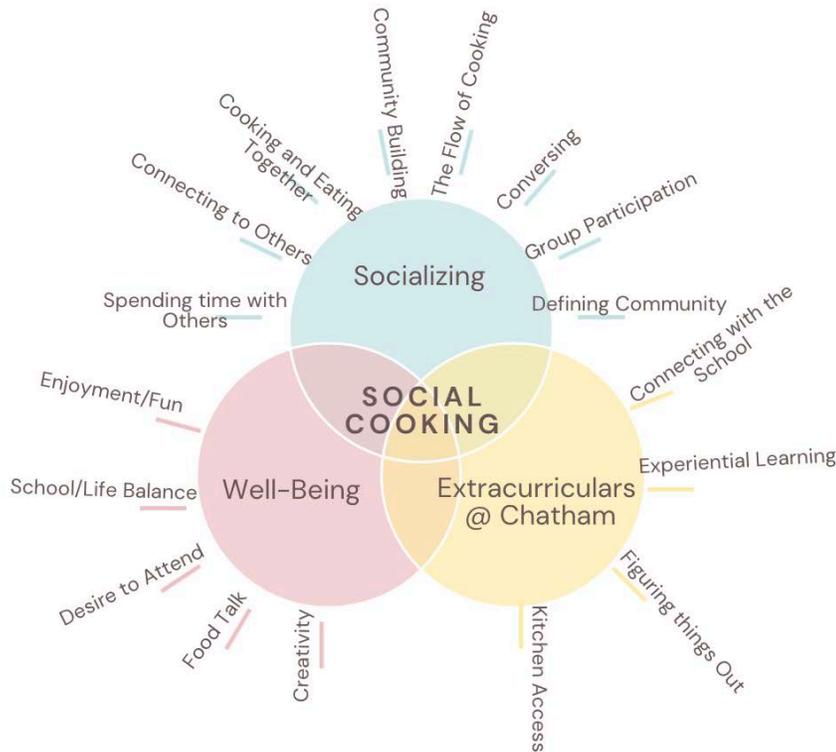


Diagram 2 - Why Social Cooking Should Continue for Students

Extracurricular involvement can positively influence a student’s collegiate experience because it focuses on student-centered community building (Hunt, 2003). One form of extracurricular involvement can come via cooking and eating meals together. As seen by Ball and Brown (2012), the ability to both cook and have dinner with other students, and the connections that took place because of socializing with peers, is one benefit that can come from a cooking extracurricular opportunity. Cooking, specifically, has been one form of mostly co-curricular involvement here at Chatham University’s Eden Hall Campus, but the cooking sessions I talk about here provided cooking as an extracurricular opportunity that not only offered a meal, but also a space to connect with peers and improve components of our individual well-being.

Socializing

While socializing may seem similar to togetherness, I found that socializing was more about being in the presence of other people in a group setting, mingling and such, and the reflection that came from doing those things. Diagram 2 shows many spokes around socializing, many of which involved ways that students engaged and defined what it meant to be in the presence of other students, only slightly mentioning the cooking components. First, the 19 people who completed all of the requirements to participate in this research did so with the idea that they would be cooking with other people. While recipes, times, and locations were all to be determined, the act of completing these first few steps was one way for students to tell me that they knew, coming into this, that there were to be social components to this cooking. The ability to participate in a group setting happened numerous times during the cooking sessions. One example I enjoyed was with Holly (Age 29) during the gyoza session. She was really great in the ways she conversed with everyone while making gyoza, having conversations discussing interests with undergraduates she had not known prior to this. This, alongside her patience in helping teach students how to fold gyoza, created comfort. Her extroversion and curiosity helped foster a connection with another student, the first-year Sustainability undergraduate, Hank (Age 18). This may not seem overly significant, but when looking at the post-survey results about students' expectations, a majority of them confirmed that coming into cooking sessions overwhelmingly centered around spending time with other people alongside having food. 4/7 students who attended the cooking sessions affirmed that connections were made with new students regardless of their year in school, age, or area of study. I intended these cooking sessions as a space for community building via cooking; even if community was not always created, students' participation suggests that they valued an opportunity that offered both socializing and cooking skill development together.

The larger components of group participation and defining community were things that I saw as people were trying to understand the social dynamics that occurred during the cooking sessions. As Kyle (age 32) pointed out in his informal interview ([Appendix C](#), Interview A) the social groups that attend cooking sessions are something that can be both observed and questioned. When we look at the larger context of Eden Hall campus, there are so many different groups that socially exist; there are students, staff, faculty, but also smaller circles of “groups” like those created by area of study, year in school, participation in certain groups like Livestock Team, or even those constructed via certain groups of friends. These cooking sessions were an attempt at not creating a new group, but instead subverting those social dynamics in order to be in the presence of other students, new or known, while cooking. This didn’t always happen, though, considering the ways that Kyle (Age 32) clearly saw the differences between undergraduate and graduate students who participated, as well as possible tensions of being placed into a new group setting. In other words, creating an environment where socialization is expected can be challenging. It might be hard to converse with people you don’t know, depending on your personality, gender, age, etc. It might also drive you to question your participation in things that involve putting yourself into new situations with new people. Still, though, as Kyle (Age 32) pointed out, it can be helpful to push people outside of their comfort, whether it be interacting with new people, or people of different social groups. The discomfort that may come from doing this can lead to new experiences, learning more about others, and feeling more welcomed in different social groups that exist. That is sometimes the purpose of extracurricular involvement; an individual’s choice to attend something new, with an interest in mind, means broadening their social circle if only momentarily. This is mirrored best by one

student in the post-survey stating, “Cooking and eating together is a great way to get to know people you've never met before.”

Well-being

Given that participation in extracurriculars can increase students’ overall wellbeing, I thought that these cooking sessions could help either reduce or distract from the number of stressors that students face (Kuh, 2008; Peltier et. al., 2000). This is because feeling a part of a whole, and having other students to learn alongside, is typically a benefit to our individual wellbeing (Farmer, Leonard, and Ross, 2018). As seen in Diagram 2, this was seen in multiple ways, like through fun/enjoyment, maintaining a school-life balance, expressing creativity, while also excitedly referencing the food we made and the desire to have something like these cooking sessions in the future. Comprehending individual ideas of well-being was hard to determine, so I tried to utilize the data to see what ways students expressed enjoyment or stress relief because of these cooking sessions. Well-being was definitely less explicitly mentioned as compared to other takeaways, so a lot of the information I gleaned here relied on individual responses.

The ability to cook something, and offer up a recipe, was one way that two students felt they could express their creativity. This mirrored references to holding cooking sessions in the future in the post-survey, where a few students mentioned hoping this could turn into a dining situation, or in that more students could lead and run a session with their own favorite recipe. While this kind of opportunity does happen in places like Fermentation Club, this kind of suggestion opens an opportune door for students to use a cooking space to connect with people and express themselves via food.

Not only that, but there were many mentions of having fun in the post-survey. 5 students mentioned their additional enjoyment in being a part of this, which was mirrored by the

enjoyment of the food and the attention to learning a new recipe that happened during participant observation. I found this kind of fun and enjoyment happening in multiple ways. For one, was the intense focus that students like Yahaira (Age 32) and Julia (Age 20) had when creating things. From pupusas to galettes, both of them were highly interested in learning the recipe at hand; these students particularly read through the recipes for the most part, and had questions about the recipes, more than others, which showed me they cared a lot about figuring out what they were doing. They also individually mentioned the accomplishment they felt from being able to learn or perfect these recipes. This emphasis on being able to learn something new was also reflected in being able to make something tasty. Sometimes self-satisfaction can lead to fun or enjoyment, but that all depends on the person and their own motivations. Food talk was also something that represented fun and enjoyment, something that happened throughout each component of my data from participant observation and beyond. The opportunity to “...make and try new flavors” (Julia, Age 20; [Appendix C](#), Interview D), or folding the gyoza and being impressed by everyone’s capability, are just a few examples of the ways that students discussed some of their more enjoyable moments from the cooking sessions.

It is possible that this kind of fun and enjoyment can happen at other kinds of extracurriculars, but when I explicitly asked how these sessions affected students and their well-being, the answers I got were raw. There was discussion about school/life balance and stress that comes with that. Anonymously, one student said: “I was very stressed at the time of both of the cooking sessions I went to, but I was able to put that aside for a while and focus on the food. it helped me to forget what I was stressing about for a short time and then I felt a bit more revived after the sessions.” This comment reiterates the daily stress that students face. Not only is there stress from school and homework, but there is mental exhaustion from having to focus on things

happening outside of school. While I personally could not tell who this was or what stress they were under when they arrived at the cooking session, it was clear that having something tactile like focusing on food offered respite even if only briefly. Another stressor mentioned a few times was student budgeting and meal planning. One student in the post-survey said, "...it alleviated the burden of planning a few meals because of eating at the session and the leftovers I got to take home!" Another mirrored this by saying, "...being able to eat together made the food more delicious because of the hunger I felt." Student food insecurity that we as participants may face was not something we talked about together. I understand there could be stigma attached to this admittance, but it is clear that students felt safe enough to discuss it anonymously. This shows the power behind offering a few free meals to students; not only does offering meals impact their day-to-day life (in terms of finances and food preparation), but the presence of a cooking session run by fellow students paves a way to creating a safe and welcoming environment while trying to address basic human needs like food access.

100% (10/10) of students who completed the post-survey stated they have desire to attend cooking sessions in the future. I like to think that, while all of the takeaways from this project were great, improving student's well-being is one of the most pertinent things, and showing that students hopes to attend in the future says that maybe it did, somehow. All of this is to say, how do you care for students? What things do they experience that you don't get to see, things that affect their daily life and their well-being? To try to alleviate those challenges, what opportunities are created to, if only slightly, help those who participate?

Extracurriculars at Chatham

This series of cooking sessions raised interesting questions around how to create extracurricular opportunities like this in the future. One of the biggest takeaways I saw was

students requesting more access to utilize the Kitchen Lab space. Students overwhelmingly mentioned making connections with other people to be their reason for attending, but they also mentioned feeling more comfortable in the Kitchen Lab and cooking in a group after the sessions. One student stated, “I feel as though I can navigate it better and have a bit more ownership in my ability to use the space, because I am more familiar with it now,” when asked about their feelings using the kitchen space. The reasons why students had discomfort in using this space revolved around seeing it as an education-only space, or that they felt gatekept from using it. Some reasons why students felt this way were many, from being intimidated in the commercial-style kitchen, misunderstanding the procedures to use or “sign-out” the space, having controversies arise when using the space, or feeling like it was not meant for communal opportunities. And yet, cooking with others is important to many students, and while cooking can be done individually or in other kitchens, it may not bring about as much confidence to use a production space or learn common practices as does cooking with a group. Being in the kitchen, and cooking alongside peers makes the space less intimidating and might offer a more comfortable opportunity to ask questions (or even make mistakes) and gain familiarity with cooking techniques and commercial kitchen standards. It could make students feel more comfortable during classes in the space, or even encourage students to take on a larger production-related project that would need to use the commercial/maker space. The requirement to have at least one ServSafe certified person in the kitchen space while it is in use can even act as a complement to this assertion. Not only does it mean that someone knows and can help others learn the space, employ common safety practices, and gain knowledge of where basic kitchen tools are kept, it also encourages group work within the space.

This finding is also important in terms of the themes I saw around experiential learning and “figuring things out together.” The main ways that we cooked in these sessions were via hands-on activities. This kind of cooking allows for students to learn while doing, such as through asking questions to one another, watching other students’ methods for cooking, and communicating about ways to make the food. Opportunities to do more of this could perhaps allow students more hands-on practice than sometimes they are able to get in a one- or two-hour class session. The value of experiential learning, though not as prominent as some of these other key takeaways, is a foundational piece to Food Studies education at Chatham. This form of learning is also highly preferred by the students I worked with. Not only does it show that you can gain, “so much conscious and unconscious learning (when you) think with your hands first and let your brain follow,” but it also connects the process to cooking to eating, which are necessary pieces of learning in Food Studies.

There were also references among study participants to feeling more connected to Food Studies, or the larger Chatham community because of these cooking sessions. Not everyone who attended cooking sessions were students of Food Studies, so creating the intention to meet with, interact, and complete an activity with other people regardless of area of study could be a wonderful way to build camaraderie here at Chatham University. Alongside students talking about their new connections with students in different matriculations, students also talked about how they loved their program. One student in the post-survey stated, “It definitely made me fall even more in love with the Falk school, the subject of Food Studies, and the people I learn beside. It was a relieving feeling to be so comfortable and happy with my college choices.”

Skill Building and Learning with Others

While these cooking sessions weren't explicitly tied to learning how students gained skills or learned in the kitchen, cooking with students typically involves some semblance of learning something new. It was no surprise that these concepts were thus seen directly in my research as well. Even if an individual student submitted a recipe they wanted to make with others, it was quite possible that those others had not made it before. This meant that, from the inception, students could possibly learn how to prepare a new recipe. With new recipes come new skills and techniques. Observing how people learned together was a large component of my participant observation notes. For the most part, my intention was for food to be a vessel for building community, but the food creation, and the skills and learning that came with it, were a main focus for many of those around me. For example, comprehending the texture of the pupusa dough, learning how to stuff and fold the gyoza, and figuring out how to roll out pasta without it sticking were some of the larger actions that we as a group tried to discuss and figure out together.

These kinds of experiences can be carried into future food preparation practice, as seen by Julia's (Age 20) excitement to tell me she tried recreating pupusas for her family during spring break. This demonstrates clear self-efficacy, where this particular student had developed a relationship with the food and learned a new skill, and attempted to recreate it because confidence was built to be able to do so. While I cannot prove that this was developed because of these cooking sessions, I do believe that creating a new food and being able to troubleshoot it with peers is a way to help students feel more comfortable cooking. Similarly, during an informal interview with Kim (Age 24), she stated, "We successfully made pasta!... I was nervous going in, because I thought it would be really difficult and I wouldn't be able to do it, but we made a really tasty meal." We did successfully make pasta from scratch together, but the worry

she had prior to this session was something I was personally unaware of. This hesitancy around being able to cook something new was eased by the collective effort in troubleshooting the food. Thus, collective confidence in learning something new is one way to bring about self-efficacy, which has the potential to influence the ways students learn and develop new skills.

These examples are sprinkles of the ways that these cooking sessions have impacted students. This kind of facilitation, which everyone contributed to, stemmed from a multitude of things. Talking about our lives, encouraging others, troubleshooting, or simply feeling like the people around you are there to help make the food is how we were able to create a fruitful cooking session. Similarly, we all were able to learn from one another, whether or not the learning was a conscious practice. We were able to watch others and learn from what they did, or try to feel what steps of the cooking would come next. This, along with reflecting on the experience of making food with peers (new or old), created a feeling of competence and confidence within the group. This shows me the potential of holding cooking sessions in the future, and the benefits of bringing experiential learning to community settings. While learning and skill building may not be consciously held by students as a reason for having cooking sessions, it is another layer of engagement that comes when a planner or educator seeks to foster learning in a collaborative environment. We live in a social world, and the dynamic that learning in a social setting brings can help how we learn, comprehend togetherness, and gain confidence in constructing something - with the end result being dinner.

Connection to COVID-19

Given that the context of this study was during COVID-19, I thought students would discuss or reference it more than they did. So many factors of this research could have been influenced by the changing regulations at school, or the role that the pandemic played in student

lives, among other things, but I only have speculation rather than data about any of these things. For example, COVID-19 could have been seen as a factor in the lower levels of attendance than hoped for, or it could be seen as a positive in creating a space where students felt able to experience cooking and eating with others despite the virus' potential spread in a closed space. Regardless, I found it possible to create these sessions in a COVID-friendly way. Cooking sessions during the beginning of the semester mostly consisted of us cooking while masked, then having some time to spread out unmasked to try food. As restrictions loosened and we were able to be mask-less on campus, we then had cooking sessions that mirrored that, and I was sure to ask students who still wore masks if they were comfortable without others having theirs on. I did not have any questions regarding well-being prior to the cooking sessions, so I cannot definitively say that there is a relationship between cooking as a form of alleviating the stress or isolation that comes from being in a pandemic, but presumably this is also a possible benefit.

During my participant observation on April 12th, two first year graduate Food Studies students (Ireen, Age 27 and Kim, Age 24) asked Yahaira (Age 32) and I (Age 25) about the impacts of COVID-19 on our education. I said that the pandemic somewhat forced our cohort to come together, which is why we are such a close group. Yahaira discussed the pandemic as a challenging time, but it meant that we had nothing else to do *but* focus on school. On the opposite side of that, Kim said that the ways that the pandemic's restrictions are changing has caused lots of hardship for their cohort, because they feel they are able to do more things so the perception of having to focus *only* on school is challenging. This conversation was one of the only explicit conversations that happened throughout my research where we talked about COVID-19, but it is clear by this one conversation that socialization, and how we as students had to navigate being sociable while balancing schoolwork, was affected by the pandemic. This

mirrors research around students' needs for social connection, and how, much like everything else during this time, navigating how to go about socializing brings about difficulty for our well-being and involvement.

There was one student who implicitly discussed the pandemic during their post-survey when I asked about cooking sessions' impact on their well-being, though, where the student stated, "The social aspect, especially after not having that for so long, was really good for my well-being." This statement reiterates the need for socialization and a way to connect within the university, especially in a time of fluctuations between virtual and classroom learning and curricular opportunity. While COVID-19 was part of the context in creating these cooking sessions, it was something that we as students had to live with and navigate just as much as anyone else. The pandemic was simply a part of the background of the context of our lives at this point in time.

Limitations

While the pool of initial interested students was relatively large (32 total students), only 19 students total completed a consent form. While consent is necessary for research, this could have also been a barrier to increased student involvement. In order to attend and get the initial pre-survey, you *had* to complete a consent form. If this had happened outside of the bounds of a thesis project, more students – and possibly students outside of just the Falk School of Sustainability and Environment, would get emails about cooking opportunities, and their frequency rate and attendance would have the potential to increase. Of these 19 students, only 12 attended the cooking sessions overall, and the average number of students attending the sessions was less than 5. Therefore, while a lot of the coding and data I've collected comes from these 12 people, this is a small sample size in terms of the population of students that utilizes Eden Hall.

Therefore, a lot of the findings I mentioned were from a *very* small pool of students. In the future, I hope there is more attendance, and if logistically the times (and possibly location) for the cooking session changes, this hopefully will increase.

In addition to small sample size, there are challenges in measuring concepts like community connections, togetherness, and closeness. I had hoped that these kinds of cooking sessions would bring students closer together. But I also used my own idea of what comfort and closeness means, and my experiences of cooking food with my cohort-mates in a home-based rather than a school-based environment as a model. To me, closeness tends to come in the form of information-sharing and “deep” conversation, but this is not necessarily the case for everybody. I might be comfortable sharing information with you, but you might feel comfort just by being in the same space as me, doing the same thing as me. In addition, while I expected more divulgence of personal information as a marker of comfort, this was not always something that participants engaged in, suggesting too that community connection is something built over time. This particular environment was not with the same people every time, so comfort for everyone might not have fully been there. In the future, it would be helpful to think more concretely about how people display and discuss how they perceive comfort and closeness prior to doing participant observation.

Conclusion

The results from this cooking session series, *Cooking as Commensality*, showed me how community can be built over time, and that it can be built with food as a focus that brings people together. While I hypothesized that cooking as well as eating together is also a part of commensality, that is not the key finding here, even though it was supported by participants. What we glean from student responses instead is that togetherness, presence and intention, and a

relationship to food is the context that *created* commensality for them. It was not necessarily about a meal, or having conversation while cooking, but the organic display of care that comes from being in the kitchen together. Commensality is a vital component to a Food Studies program and building environments that foster that is one way to expand the definitions and lived experiences of students – one which includes cooking and eating together.

Based on these sessions, I feel that cooking as a community building activity can, and should, play a role at this university as a continuous opportunity, namely for the impacts that it can have on student lives. From the basic principle of having a meal, students were also able to learn from one another, create food, feel comfort in an environment, make new connections, and build community. My intention going into this was to allow for students to generate any meanings they saw from these sessions, namely around community building with peers, but the other things that happened were organically student driven. Being able to observe and listen to the cooking sessions and hear the feedback that was honestly given to me, I was able to gain some insight centered around questioning and growing comfortable in new social settings, seeing ways we felt our well-being improved, and in having a desire to further extracurriculars like this in the future. It is also clear that togetherness and socialization might lead to connections, but connections might not always lead to community. The attempt to build community and break down already existent social barriers can bring a slew of new experiences, questions, and connections, though.

What this thesis research has overwhelmingly shown me is that there is opportunity to allow students to foster new connections, learn, and enjoy cooking together within the kitchen space. There is so much joy, experiential learning, and interest in being able to connect this way extracurricularly, which is notably different than the way the Kitchen Lab is currently perceived

by the students in my research. The space is mostly educational, utilized by classes, workshops, or specific work or club uses. As a teaching kitchen, it has by definition a certain formality of use, and thus is to some extent seen as a gatekept space, namely one that is for Food Studies only and for specific uses only. To me, the opportunity to have a kitchen as equipped as ours means it could also be a place to collaborate on campus and learn in a more relaxed way and even to practice in a professional space outside of class. In my opinion, as a central feature of the Lodge in a relatively small school, it shouldn't be perceived as a space only for certain people, classes, or certain majors, but for everyone. When we look at the number of spaces that exist at Chatham University's Eden Hall Campus, not many spaces let students use cooking as a way to build community. Not many spaces are as equipped as this one to be a kitchen where many people can gather, be engaged, learn or practice specific skills, and connect with peers while cooking. While arguably the kitchen space was built for the purpose of education, I feel it also has the potential to offer a way for students to build connections outside of class time.

The upkeep of programming like this could take on a number of forms. There could become a new, more publicized iteration of cooking office hours during mealtimes, ones which explain the parameters to using the kitchen but ease the worry of students trying to reserve it. This would mean making sure people are ServSafe certified or with a friend who is, but also creating or enhancing something like a kitchen map or kitchen orientation so students know where things go and what to do. This kind of work is being constructed by the current kitchen manager on campus, which is really exciting in moving granules of these ideas forward. This shows too that if we think about cooking as a potentially more consistent opportunity, it is possible for a student-funded position, or permanent kitchen manager, to also do some of this work – but this is not necessarily the only solution. The issues of scheduling and marketing could

also be remedied voluntarily, and one could separate these logistics from figuring out cost and labor. After all, if more students have knowledge about the days and times of an opportunity like this, they may want to come together and organically figure out the meals themselves. Who's to say a number of students wouldn't bring ingredients to make dinner every Thursday evening if given the opportunity? Do they want the space to submit a recipe or lead a group of peers in cooking a meaningful recipe in a workshop style? Or do they just want a space where they can live and forget the stress of life – by being with their peers and cooking a meal? If enough students feel enticed, a cooking or supper club could be formally made, but that is not for me (as a student already graduating) to say – that is for current and future students to figure themselves, to keep ideas like communal meal creation going. No matter the form of cooking that happens, I feel it important to hear what students have to say about what they hope to learn or gain from spaces like these.

I end by posing questions to people who create experiences for students as a whole: What does it mean to support students and to bring intention to that process? How does or can a food focused program offer spaces to cook, eat, and enjoy the company of their peers? Last, are there things that can be done to help foster community within the learning environments we are all a part of? It may be a personal belief held by me that bringing magic to a space truly does come with intentionality, but I do think that intentionality can be the piece that makes or breaks a caring environment. One beautiful closing comment from a student stated, “I really took away that I am in the right place. All of the imposter syndrome and fear of ‘not finding the right path’ flew away.” For me, *this* is what it is all for – offering an opportunity for student involvement via cooking, while helping them feel more confident to bloom where they are planted.

Appendix A – Cooking as Commensality Pre-Survey

Please state your name, preferred pronouns, and age.

- 1) What is your major?
- 2) What is your year in school?
- 3) Please mark an “x” in the box for the days and times you are available to attend cooking sessions at Eden Hall Campus. Please note, cooking sessions may take 2 hours or more (including prep, cooking, eating, and cleaning). Try to check off two-hour sequential time-blocks if you are available.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
12-1 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
1-2 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2-3 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3-4 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4-5 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5-6 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6-7 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- 4) For those of you who live at Shadyside Campus (or even those located at Eden Hall Campus), would you be interested in a cooking day at Shadyside campus? If yes, see question 5. If no, skip to question 6. Yes or No
- 5) If you marked yes to question 4, please mark an “x” in the box for the days and times you are available to attend cooking club at Shadyside campus. If you marked no in question 4, skip to question 6.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
12-1 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
1-2 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2-3 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3-4 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4-5 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5-6 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6-7 PM	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- 6) Do you have any ideas for meals that you want to prepare as a group? Please write your idea below, limiting to your two top dishes. These can be anything, from recipes you personally love, or ones you've seen in videos or read from cookbooks. I will collect ideas and send out a survey within the next few weeks so we can collectively decide what to cook as a group. Please try to think of cost effective, locally sourced recipes. Please insert links if you find something online, as well. Also note that some entries may not be used because of ingredients, time, cost, etc.
- 7) Please check boxes next to the following meal ideas if you are interested in participating in cooking them. To note, these are just some of my own ideas!
- Roasted garlic from the ADG with homemade pasta and salt cured egg shavings from fermentation club
 - Sourdough focaccia at the bread oven with spring vegetable salad from the ADG
 - Butternut squash soup and spring onion pancakes using chives from the ADG
 - Cheesy grits from the bloody butcher corn at the ADG with eggs from the livestock team
 - A recipe with lamb meat from the butchered lamb in Meats class
 - A recipe with masa (I have a lot of it)
- 8) Do you have any dietary restrictions or food allergies?
- 9) How did you hear about these cooking sessions?

- Instagram
- Email from Food Studies listserv
- From a student not associated with food studies
- From a food studies student
- From a faculty/staff member
- From the Food Studies kitchen calendar
- Other

Appendix B – Excel Document Tracking Example

Dish Cooked: Gyoza			
Recipes/Ideas from: Just One Cookbook			
Time: 4-6:40 PM			
Number of attendees: 4			
Number of attendees who participated previously: 1			
Number of new attendees: 3			
External labor involved? Grocery shopping 1 hr, planning 2 hr, set up with 1 hr			
Donations, if any.: \$15			
Ingredients	From Where	Cost	Attendees
Ground Pork	Aldi	3.29	
Mushrooms	Aldi	3.58	
Gyoza Wrap	Oriental Ma	\$11.96	
Rice vinegar	Oriental Ma	4.99	
Onion	Oriental Ma	0.94	
Rice flour	Oriental Ma	1.79	
miso	Oriental Ma	5.19	
carrot	Oriental Ma	0.57	
ginger	Oriental Ma	0.57	
firm tofu	Oriental Ma	1.85	
cabbage	Oriental Ma	2.11	
		36.84	\$21.84
soy sauce	Community Use		
sesame oil	my house		
oil	my house		
green onion	my house		
garlic 4 clove	Community Use		
white peppe	my house		
cooking wine	my house		
chili oil	my house		
salt and pep	both		

Appendix C – Informal Interview Responses

Informal Interview Questions

1. What was your experience as a student participating in this?
2. Do you feel this improved community group togetherness?
3. Could you help paint a picture to what the cooking session looked like?

4. Was there anything significant you saw from the interactions that happened?
5. What's one thing that could be done to make the cooking more efficient/organized/improve community building?
6. What's one thing that went well?

Informal Interview Responses

A. Informal Interview with Kyle (age 32) on 2/22/22

1. Bringing students together in a community is intentional. You can cook something and taste the fruits of your labor. It's also a break from the mental work of school, kind of like an "escape". I had conversations with Alex (Age 20)! There is a clear disconnect between undergraduates and graduates, but this is a smart way to kind of rid of that a bit.
2. As it is, I see a division between the different groups on campus, even though that's not probably the intention of the programming. There are just different age groups and majors, and that's how it goes sometimes. Community, though, is challenging. How do you build community, especially with people who many have dividing interests? Or are there people who participate in these who are interested in food studies? Cooking and eating brings together people of different communities in an intentional way.
3. I came in towards the end of the first part of the cooking. I think you initially made pita dough, and it was rising by the time I got there. I came in when you started the falafel. The kitchen has a lot of tools, but not a bean smasher, so we used different tools (bottom of a wide mason jar, spoon, fork, fists) to try to break them down. The hummus was relatively easy, because we put chickpeas and tahini into a large food processor (RoboCoup) with herbs and spices. Then, it stopped working, so Daria (Age 30) blended it the rest of the way. The falafel was fun and easy to make, which you wouldn't think. We brought the risen bread dough out to make pita. The oven wasn't working, which Daria (Age 30) and I cackled at. You (Lexy) had asked Daria (Age 30) about the pilot light switch, which was at a certain setting. She said it was on and should warm up. 20 minutes later, the temperature had not changed, come to find out Daria (Age 30) told you wrong. It was funny. We were just waiting. The first batch went in, but the color didn't change. The second batch was softer. You and Daria (Age 30) were trying to figure out why they were that texture, I said maybe the length they were in the oven (we put them in for 20-25 minutes instead of 10). Daria (Age 30) thought maybe it was from the flour we used, a lot of it was grains, and not super processed cheap flour. The falafel balls were floured and then pan fried. You started it, and Anna (Age 18), one of the undergrads, finished it. Anna (Age 18) also made the tzatziki while the hummus was being made. I chopped the veggies to accompany everything – extra cucumber and carrot. I had to leave before everyone cleaned up. I loved eating this, but I also rarely make this kind of food.
4. I don't know if I was feeling or overthinking it, but at first when I came in, I felt a bit of tension. The undergraduates don't know me at all, and I was the only male there. You made people pair off with someone they didn't know, so I was with Anna (Age 18) for a bit. Overall, though, I thought people seemed excited to cook together. People were helpful with others outside of their own pairs. Everyone had an attitude of "let's do this" – everyone pulled their own weight, which was nice because the food turned out good.
5. I think separate things could be cooked at a different time, which would have been helpful. It might help to have stuff set aside. Like, your own portion is here to work with,

rather than being confused and having to measure everything yourself. It might also be good to have tools and bowls in one spot, not everything needed them, and it took up a lot of space.

6. Making people pair up and have a different partner. This is different for an undergrad and grad to do. I've worked in different social environments so I feel I can break ice pretty easily, but not everyone is like that. So, it's good to force/push people a bit into discomfort. That's healthy.

B. Informal Interview with Yahaira (Age 32) on 3/15/22

1. It was good. I liked the pupusas. It was nice to see another way to make them. I knew what arepas were and this was similar. I was nervous because I was not sure who would be attending, but it was a chill environment. I had a question, could we know ahead of time who's going to attend? I know that this is about school and community building, but say, if you knew nobody there, would you go? I don't know. Overall, though, this was something nice to do with other people.
2. The process of cooking relates to community. There's steps to it, and it's nice to have people there to cook with along with the way. The pupusas are tactile, they require touching to form them. Looking at others process, and progress was helpful, especially when trying to figure out the heat of the pans when cooking the pupusas. It was engaging and active but there were also passive parts.
3. I was late so I felt a bit high strung from that. Especially because the only other person there was an undergraduate student. I tried to be quiet to let other people have the floor to talk. You (Lexy) then went over what we would be doing for the day, so everyone was on the same page. You talked about the recipe we would follow, and that it was chosen for how straightforward it was, and how there has been success with these kinds of recipes before. There were stations with plates and bowls set up. We started with the masa by scooping and weighing, then figuring out how to split the recipe in half per person. So, everyone worked with two cups of masa instead of four. We then added water to make the masa wet, but the amount of water we needed wasn't the same as the recipe. There were bowls with oil and water available to roll out the pupusas. Julia (Age 20) said she didn't eat dairy, so I offered to shred her cheese – to which Julia (Age 20) said no. The rest was a “journey” to figure out the texture of the masa dough, finding a balance between something that wouldn't fall apart or when it needed more moisture because it was cracking when stuffing with chicharron, beans, and cheese. Sophie did really well. But as time went on, things got better. There were three induction burners there to cook on. I finished cooking mine first, Julia (Age 20) finished next because she had to go to class. Julia (Age 20) told us a story about the bus driver leaving students out in the rain. You wouldn't let me cook you're your pupusas, but I did it anyway, and then you finished them on another burner. Then we (Ireen, Lexy and Yahaira) cleaned together. We did dishes, mopped, swept. Also, the Curtido was so good! I took some home and got to take some of the cheese from the dairy class. There was also music playing softly in the background which helped fill empty space because you were still concussed. Even with that, you and Sophie and I did a good job at conversing.
4. I felt guilty about the suggestion to shred cheese for Julia (Age 20)... In the moment I felt it came from assisting with intolerance, as a form of protection, but realized how it sounded.

5. A little video to walk through the steps on how to make the pupusas would have been helpful for visual learners. It might also help to assign cleanup tasks to make cleanup be more efficient.
6. I liked that there were fillings prepared ahead of time. There was still enough to do to make it feel like people were cooking. The stickiness of the dough and making the rest would be a lot. I liked the steps we did to make making them go smoother. I also liked that we were separated to get the cleanup done. Do you need help prepping for other sessions? Because it seems like a lot.

C. Holly (Age 29) interview on 3/30/22

1. Well, the dumplings were a survey idea of mine, so participation started early because of the recipe input. Also, I liked it because making the dumplings actually happened! This was a great way to have dinner after class. Dumplings are communal which is why I love them; they're easily something to do with others. The kitchen space in general and being around the table as a teaching space was nice, which allowed people to meet others and share knowledge. I felt I was cognizant of being around undergraduates for this cooking session. There was a good flow of cooking, tasting, eating, and sharing. PLUS, I had leftovers for Sam (Holly's partner)!
2. Yes! I enjoyed that we were talking about how to use the kitchen better, especially having the opportunity to connect with new people over food. There was creativity with putting things together, which was fun. The pace felt nice and this was something I could see happening in the future.
3. Kim (Age 24) and I were hanging out and people wandered in. There was music playing, you were prepping, and then I helped you find the food playlist on the library website. People came in and we headed to the kitchen. There were brief intro's and a share out of what I personally knew about making dumplings. There were two bowls of tofu and pork, which were separated for vegetarians - though Kim (Age 24) was excited to try the pork! We made then cooked them. I brought a steamer, so while we were steaming, we were tasting other already cooked dumps. We also were cooking the rest of the dumplings and cleaning at the end.
4. I liked meeting new people and interacting with others, especially undergraduates. It's cool, I've been working with Hank (Age 18) on his donut project from Canada and am helping him use the kitchen for this. We actually emailed one another, which was a great connection.
5. It was efficient, and I've done multiple sessions before! I think having intros and maybe an ice breaker before cooking is normal to do so that might help.
6. Hm. Making connections and meeting new people. Having dinner. The space was good. No prep meant getting into the cooking. Oh, the email with the recipe and knowing what to expect was good, too.

D. Informal interview with Julia (Age 20) on 4/9

1. This was a great experience, thank you for putting it on. It was lots of fun and, in your words, helped community building. I talked with others I didn't meet before. And I learned a new recipe!

2. Yes, it did. I didn't know a lot of the Food Studies people before this, and especially the Master's Food Studies people. It was good to meet others and it was nice because people would say hi to me when they saw me up at Eden Hall.
3. There were 4 stations with 4 different types of recipes which was a cool way to make and try new flavors. The dough was already made but we got to do a lot of the cooking on our own. I remember trying to do the math to cut all of the galettes so we could all try them but also have enough for leftovers.
4. I felt I became more included with a new group up at Eden Hall. I liked your (Lexy's) attitude in the kitchen, to be happy and not try to follow a recipe exactly but do what tastes good and feels right.
5. Nothing, I felt it was efficient. The community building was nice!
6. The blueberry galettes were delicious! Overall, the project was great.

E. Informal interview with Kim (Age 25) from 5/16/22:

1. I really enjoyed it. I am not on the culinary side of food studies, so it was fun to be in a professional kitchen to learn new skills and to participate in a different aspect of the program than I normally do.
2. I think so! I met some new folk and learned new things about people I already knew. I feel more comfortable saying hi and engaging with these people outside of the classroom now.
3. So, there were several stations set up around the island in the kitchen. Everything was premeasured, so we just needed to combine everything. It was very neat and organized. The pasta maker was set up on a table, so we each took turns running our dough through the pasta maker. Then we took turns boiling the pasta, checking the red sauce, and cleaning up. We all ate around the island while we continued to cook.
4. We were all very willing to ask questions, help each other out, and give advice. It was collaborative and kind. I never felt any judgment or like I was deficient in my cooking skills. I think that's very important in building community.
5. I felt like for the most part we were all doing the same thing at the same time...which is fine for learning! But I feel like maybe we could have more of an assembly line situation. People could choose what they are most comfortable doing or something they want to learn how to do. That way we maximize time, and we would have more time to eat together at the end and could all help clean up.
6. We successfully made pasta! And the sauces were so good. I was nervous going in, because I thought it would be really difficult and I wouldn't be able to do it, but we made a really tasty meal.

Appendix D - Post-Survey Questions

Section 1 - Thank you for your interest in cooking sessions over the duration of the Spring 2022 semester. Section 1 of this survey is to inquire about your initial interest and/or attendance at cooking sessions. Regardless of your attendance, please fill out questions 1 and 2. Then, if you didn't attend any cooking sessions, please move on to section 3. If you attended one (or more) cooking sessions, please complete questions 1 and 2, then move to section 2 of the survey.

 All responses to this survey are anonymous. Information will be used for research towards Alexaundra (Lexy) Baird's Master's thesis on commensality and cooking. This section of the

survey should take 1-10 minutes, depending on the detail of your responses. By completing this survey, you consent to your answers being used in this research.

- 1) Why did you sign up as interested in these cooking sessions?
- 2) Why did you (or did you not) come to cooking sessions?

Section 2 – Experience at Cooking Sessions

Section 2 of this survey is intended to dive into your experience attending cooking session(s). Please try to focus on your positionality and perspective. If you didn't attend any cooking sessions, please move to section 3 of the survey.

As a recap, here were the dates and dishes we made:

February 15th - Falafel, Hummus, and Pita

February 24th - Pupusas and Curtido

March 10th - Gyoza

March 15th - Black Bean Burgers

March 31st - Galettes

April 12th - Pasta

All responses to this survey are anonymous. Information will be used for research towards Alexaundra (Lexy) Baird's Master's thesis on commensality and cooking. The rest of the survey should take 10-30 minutes, depending on the detail of your responses. By completing this survey, you consent to your answers being used in this research.

- 3) How many cooking sessions did you attend? Select a number 1 – 6.
- 4) If you attended more than one cooking session, what drew you to going more than once? Leave question blank if you came only once.
- 5) When participating in a cooking session (in general), what are you hoping to get out of the experience?
- 6) Given your definition above, do you feel these cooking sessions met your expectations as an attendee? Yes, No, or Partially
- 7) Did you feel you formed any connections during your time at cooking session(s)? This can be with people, or also with the location, our school, the food/recipes, future curiosities, etc.
- 8) What was your greatest takeaway from these cooking sessions? It can be anything!
- 9) What was your favorite memory from the cooking session(s)? It can be anything!
- 10) Commensality is defined as "the act of eating together". While we sampled food and occasionally ate the foods we prepared, we didn't create a sit-down dinner experience for our cooking sessions. Do you feel this impacted your experience? If so, how?
- 11) What does commensality mean to you? It can be the same or different as defined above.
- 12) Did you feel that these cooking sessions were a way of creating commensality? Yes, No, or Partially
- 13) In what ways did attending one or more cooking session(s) affect your experience as a student, if at all?

- 14) In what ways did attending one or more cooking session(s) influence your idea of experiential learning, if at all?
- 15) In what ways did attending one or more cooking session(s) impact your own personal well-being, if at all?
Optional Question: If there is anything you would like to add about your experience participating in cooking sessions, write them here!

Section 3 – The Future of Cooking Sessions

Section 3 of this survey is to gather interest in the future of cooking session(s). While this format of cooking may not be replicated in the future, I am hoping to glean students' desire to cook. If you didn't attend any cooking sessions, please answer questions 16-18 then submit.

All responses to this survey are anonymous. Information will be used for research towards Alexaundra (Lexy) Baird's Master's thesis on commensality and cooking. The rest of the survey should take 5-15 minutes, depending on the detail of your responses. By completing this survey, you consent to your answers being used in this research.

- 16) Would you come to cooking sessions in the future if they were offered? Yes, No, or Maybe
- 17) Please explain your answer to the prior question in more detail.
- 18) Do you think the opportunity to cook together is an extracurricular that should be offered at Eden Hall Campus and/or at Shadyside?
 - Yes, at Eden Hall
 - Yes, at Shadyside
 - Yes, at both campuses
 - No
 - Maybe
- 19) Do you have any recommendations for the improvement of cooking sessions?
- 20) Prior to these cooking sessions, was cooking a way you built or felt part of a community? Yes, No, or Sometimes
- 21) Do you feel these cooking sessions were a constructive way to build or become part of a community outside of the classroom? Yes, No, or Partially
- 22) Please write what you perceive "community" to be for these cooking sessions.
- 23) Imagine that these cooking sessions had not happened. Do you feel that cooking at the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen is an accessible option for students to create community outside of the classroom? Yes, No, or Maybe
- 24) Please explain your reasoning for the prior answer.
- 25) Do you feel that because of these cooking sessions, student accessibility improved at the Eden Hall Lodge Kitchen to create community outside of the classroom? Yes, No, or Maybe
- 26) Please explain your reasoning for the prior answer.

Optional Question: If there is anything you would like to add about the cooking sessions, add it here!

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