

PAWS FOR NUTRITION FALL '24 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Georgia State University Department of Nutrition semester newsletter! Dive in to discover the latest updates, celebrate our outstanding alumni, and get inspired by the incredible accomplishments of our Nutrition community. Stay connected and see what's happening at #GSUNutrition!



Welcome new Coordinated Program *Cohort XXXV and PT IV*



Stay connected:



FNCE 2024

Minneapolis MN, October 5-8

Shani McLean presented her poster titled **“Availability of Halal Food on US College Campuses: An Assessment of Campus Websites”**

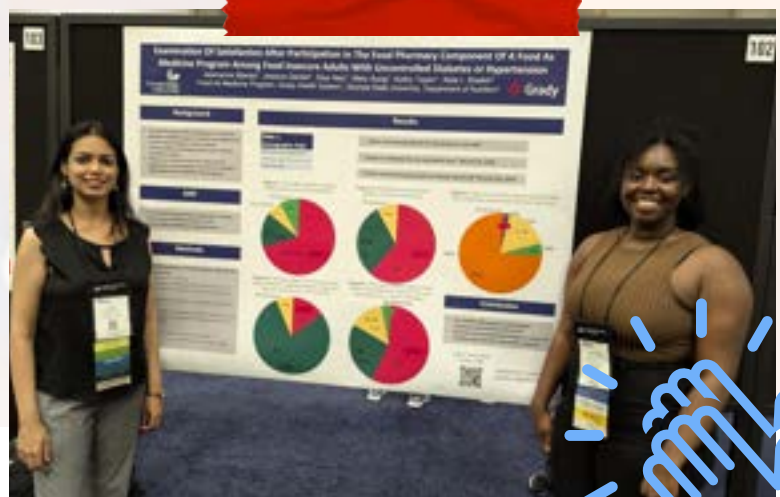
Co-authors: Darian Williams, Melissa D. Olfert, Dr. Nida Shaikh

Jasmyne Blacks, MS, RDN, LD represented Grady Food as Medicine program by presenting three posters:

1. **Examination of Satisfaction After Participation in the Food Pharmacy Component of a Food as Medicine Program Among Food Insecure Adults with Uncontrolled Diabetes or Hypertension**

2. **Evaluation of Dietary Preferences of Adults with Uncontrolled Diabetes and Hypertension following participation in a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Food as Medicine Program in Southeaster US**

3. **Evaluation of Food as Medicine Program in Southeastern US: Perspectives by Food Insecure Participants with Uncontrolled Diabetes and Hypertension and Program Providers**



American Society for Nutrition Conference: Chicago, IL, June 29-July 2

This summer, representatives from the **Georgia State University Department of Nutrition** showcased their latest research and innovations at the prestigious *American Society for Nutrition conference*.

Our faculty and students had the opportunity to engage with experts nationwide, highlighting our commitment to advancing nutrition science and health.

Keep up with great work, Nutrition Scientists!



Faculty Attendees:

Dr. Huanbiao Mo, *Dean*, Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions and Professor, Department of Nutrition

Dr. Desiree Wanders, *Associate Professor and Chair* of the Department of Nutrition

Dr. Rafaela Feresin, *Associate Professor*, Department of Nutrition

GSU Student Attendees and their research:

Eshan Shah, Hannah Lail, Huanbiao Mo, Desiree Wanders. *δ -Tocotrienol Improves Insulin Signaling and Decreases Inflammation in Neuroblasts.*

Rowan Lawrence, Hannah Lail, Desiree Wanders. *The Role of FGF21 in High-Fat Diet-induced Alterations in Brown Adipose Tissue Metabolism.*

Harita Yepuri, Sudip Agrahari, Nida I. Shaikh. *A Comparative Analysis of the Campus Food Environment of an Urban Multi-Campus Minority Serving Institution in Southeast U.S.*

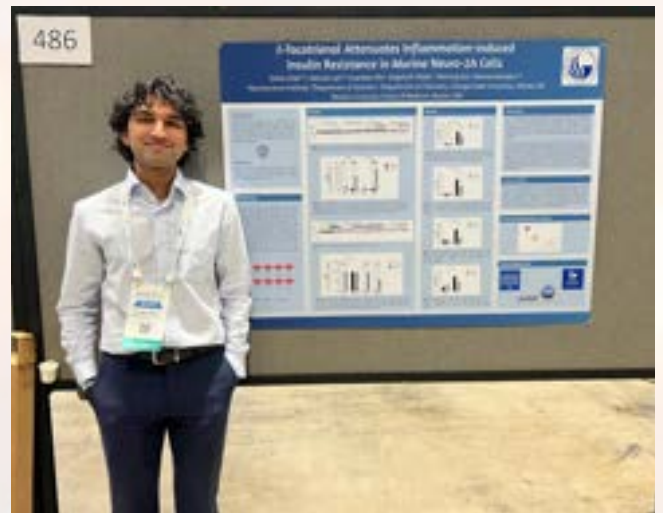
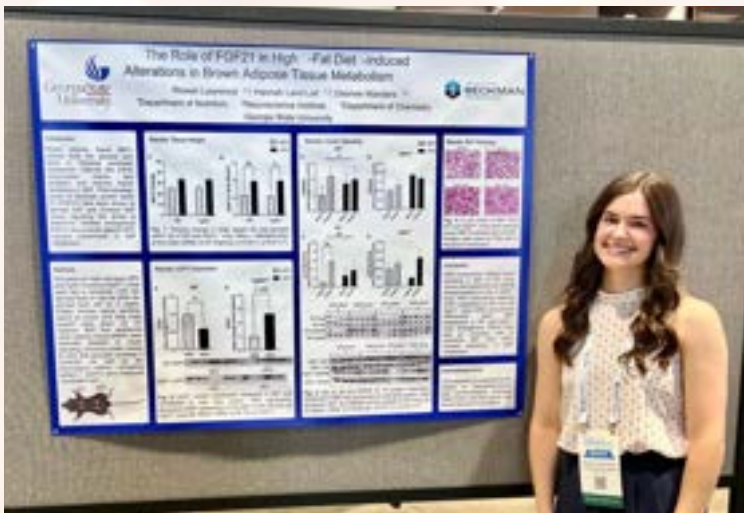
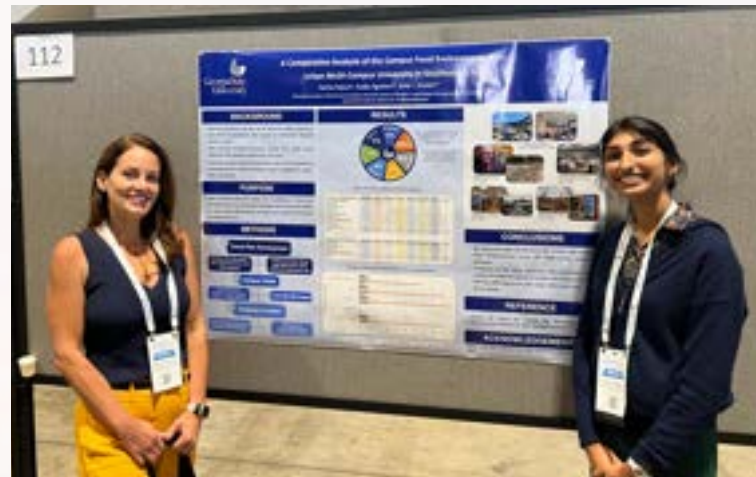
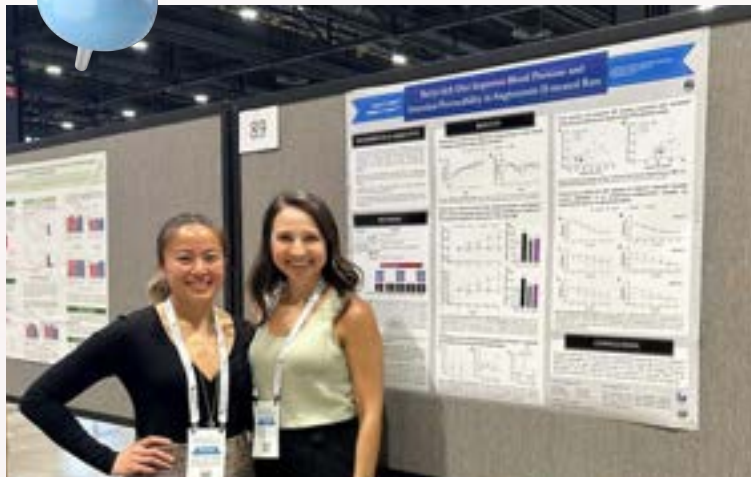
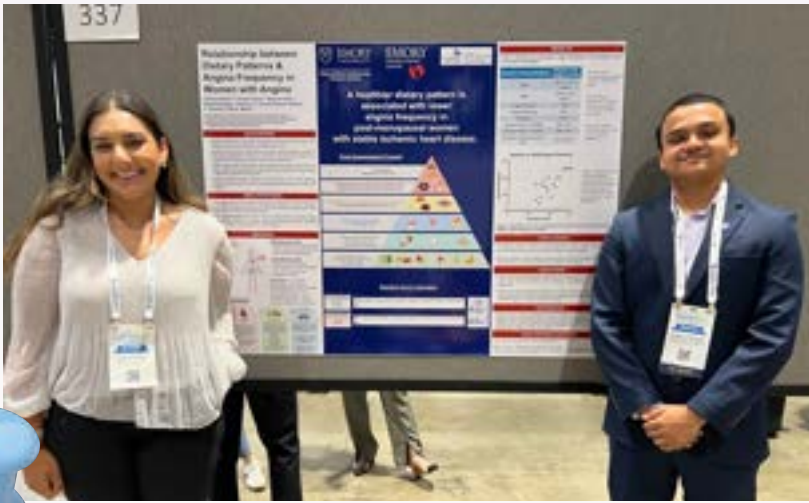
Wesley W. Grace, Ana Paula S. Siqueira, Wen Lu, Siming Wang, Rafaela G. Feresin. *Characterization of Polyphenols in Baru (*Dipteryx alata*) and Their Effects on Palmitic Acid-Induced Oxidative Stress in Rat Aortic Vascular Smooth Muscle Cells.*

Jessica P. Danh, Rafaela G. Feresin. *Berry-rich Diet Improves Systolic Blood Pressure and Intestinal Permeability in Angiotensin II-treated Rats.*

Stay connected:



American Society for Nutrition Conference: Chicago IL, June 29-July 2



Students, cont'd:

Jessica P. Danh, Benoit Chassaing, Rami S Najjar, Maureen L Meister, Joshua T Jones, Roya M Nabavi, Desiree Wanders, Rafaela G. Feresin. *Daily supplementation with blackberries and raspberries favorably modulates blood pressure and gut microbiota in Ang II-treated male rats.*

Ana Paula Silva Siqueira, **Wesley W. Grace**, Wen Lu, Simming Wang, Rafaela G. Feresin. *Jucara (Euterpe edulis) Polyphenol Analysis and Cell Viability in Metabolic Syndrome-Mimicking Compounds: First Stage of Investigation.*

Vishrut S. Thaker, Esha K. Dave, Nishant Vatsa, Audrey Lu, Rachel L. Dressler, Fauzia Rashid, Rafaela G. Feresin, Puja K. Mehta. *Relationship between Dietary Patterns and Angina Frequency in Women with Angina.*

Georgia Dietetic Foundation Scholarship



Michaela Cotner, MA

“I’m so grateful to be a recipient of this year’s GDF scholarship! This scholarship will help me fund the expenses of graduate school as I pursue my degree in nutrition. Their generosity will not be forgotten as I move through my future career as a dietitian.”

- Michaela

“Being recognized by the Georgia Dietetic Foundation for my work is honoring and reassuring me that I am at the right place and doing a good job! This scholarship will help me focus more on my studies and contribute to the field of nutrition and dietetics.” - Nadia

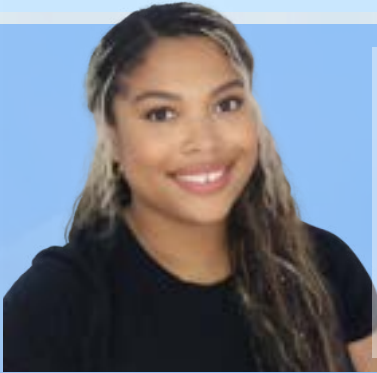


Nadia Varigina, NBC-HWC

The Lettie Pate Whitehead scholarship

recipients

The LPW scholarship program awards annual grants for the education of deserving female students with financial need at more than 200 accredited educational institutions in the Southeast. Most of the scholarship grants target education in the medical, nursing and allied health fields, such as nutrition. The LPW foundation awarded \$280,000 this academic year.



“Once again, the Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation continues to support my dream of completing graduate school and becoming a registered dietitian. The foundation's mission reminds me of the importance of serving the community. As I complete my final year in the coordinated program, I hope to carry forward their values by providing individualized care to help others live healthier, well-balanced lives.” - **Alexys Ray**

“The continuous support of Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation never goes unnoticed. I am incredibly grateful for such generosity! This assistance allows me to focus fully on my graduate studies and bring me closer to achieving my career goals in dietetics debt-free.” - **Nadia Varigina**



“I am so grateful to the Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation for assisting me in the funding of my academic pursuits. It's very inspiring to know that there are organizations that empower women and support their educational goals throughout their journey. I hope to be able to give back to my community in the future as I build my professional career!” - **Michaela Cotner**

“Thank you so much to Lettie Pate Whitehead foundation for their generous contribution and support to my education journey. I appreciate your help immensely, and am thankful everyday for this opportunity.” - **Blakely Stone**



“The more I receive the Lettie Pate Whitehead Scholarship, the more my faith in the Trinity (God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit) is strengthened. Thank you to Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation for believing in me to further my education, I am so grateful.”

- **N'Mahaminata R. Kutsoati**

[Click here to apply.](#)



The Lettie Pate Whitehead scholarship recipients

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“Thank you for awarding me the Lettie Pate Whitehead Scholarship and recognizing my potential to contribute holistically to the field. I am deeply appreciative for the support, which empowers me to continue my journey as a future healthcare provider with a dedication and purpose.”

-Ayushi Patel

“Thank you to the Lettie Pate Whitehead scholarship for giving me the opportunity to study nutrition at Georgia State University. I am so grateful for the acceptance of this award and the recognition for my achievement.”

- Rifa Kibria



“I am very grateful to have received this scholarship, as it has allowed me to continue studying something I believe I can make a great impact with!”

-Cole Underhill

“I am extremely grateful to have received this scholarship. I will continue to work hard towards my goals, thanks to their generosity.”

- Ellie Cox



[Click here to apply.](#)



Dr. Missy Cody Student Travel Endowment

Recipients

Thanks to this endowment, undergraduate and graduate Nutrition students were able to attend professional conferences to network, present, and increase their nutrition knowledge.



*“I’m honored to receive a travel award from the Department of Nutrition, which made it possible for me to **attend FNCE** and **share my research through a poster presentation**. It was a **fantastic opportunity** to **connect with** other **RDs** doing amazing work. **Thank you to the Department of Nutrition for your generous support!**”*
- **Shani McLean, Graduate student and Dietetic Intern**

*“I greatly appreciate being awarded these funds, as they will allow me to **travel to Pittsburgh, PA** to present research I conducted over the summer at the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**.”*
- **Wesley Grace, Undergraduate student**



[Click here to donate to the Travel Fund](#)



The Barb Hopkins and Cathy McCarroll Endowment for student volunteers

Volunteer experience gives any graduate school applicant a competitive advantage; however, it is often implausible to work for free, as students may need to spend their already limited time earning a living. **The Barb Hopkins and Cathy McCarroll Endowment** provides **financial support for Nutrition students engaged in a sustained, meaningful volunteer experience at a health-related non-profit.**

The endowment was established by Dr. Mildred “Missy” Cody in 2023 and **to date, six students have received scholarships** through this mechanism. The most recent recipients are two Nutrition undergraduate students, **Clara Goncalves and Jazmine Smith.**

Clara Goncalves



“Working at Grady’s Food As Medicine Program has been such a fulfilling experience. I’m beyond grateful for the opportunity to be present and support such an important mission! Everyone deserves the right to know the power of food, and FAM brings that message home a bite at a time.”

-noted Clara

Jazmine Smith



“Volunteering with Grady’s Food as Medicine program has been a wonderful experience! Working with Ms. Dhana has shown me the importance of integrating nutrition into healthcare, which she demonstrates in her nutrition education and cooking classes. The program’s impact on the community by addressing chronic diseases and food insecurity is amazing.”

-shared Jazmine

Donate to support student volunteers



Study Abroad Program in Florence, Italy: *Living the Mediterranean Diet and Lifestyle*

May 2025



The hard work of our Graduate Coordinated Program director, Jessica Todd, MS, RD, LD, has paid off, and the “Living the Mediterranean Diet & Lifestyle. A Study Abroad: Florence, Italy” program had been approved for Summer 2025! The program is open for the current Nutrition students and the current RDN's for 32 CPEU's!

All the pictures are from Jessica's scouting trip in May 2024.

Name: NUTR 3380/6380

Living the Mediterranean Diet and Lifestyle

Study Aboard: Florence, Italy

Dates: Maymester 2025, May 13 - 22

Hours: 3 credit hours

Organizers: GSU Department of Nutrition in partnership with Florence University of the Arts/ American University in Florence and Food Culturology

Goal: The Mediterranean diet, widely researched, is known for its effectiveness in preventing and treating various chronic conditions. The U.S. food environment and public health landscape differ significantly from Mediterranean regions. This course will immerse students in the food and lifestyle of Florence, Italy, engaging with expert professors on topics like the Mediterranean diet, public health, and the Slow Food Movement while participating in hands-on workshops led by culinary experts.

Study abroad experiences



San Lorenzo Market



Carducci primary school



**Galleria dell'Accademia,
Michelangelo's David**



**Pecorino cheese
production in Pienza**

Study abroad experiences



Montepulciano,
Salcheto, a sustainable
organic winery



Azienda Agricola Pruneti,
an organic olive oil producer



Jessica Todd, exploring
architecture



Piazzale Michelangelo,
Florence overview

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS



Jasmyne Blacks, MS, RDN, LD.

Manager of Grady's Food as Medicine Pharmacy

Hello, Jasmyne! Could you please introduce yourself to our readers and share a little bit about your background?

Hi, Nadia! Absolutely. My name is Jasmyne Blacks, and I'm currently the manager of the food pharmacy at Grady's Food as Medicine program. I've been in this position for about two years now. I completed both my undergraduate and master's degrees at Georgia State University. My undergrad was in the nutrition science program, and I completed the Coordinated program in 2021.

That's fantastic! How do you feel your time at Georgia State prepared you for this role?

I feel that Georgia State prepared me immensely.

Seeing how everything I did there translates to my work now is incredible. I received so much support from my professors, not only in the nutrition program but also in my prerequisite courses. My anatomy and physiology professor and my chemistry professor believed in me and helped me find effective study habits. My physiology professor even guided me through the grad school application process and GRE preparation.

I also held several leadership roles at GSU, working as a Supplemental Instruction (SI) leader and later as a program assistant. This experience taught me how to mentor students and develop leadership skills. Working closely with the program coordinator helped me gain the organizational skills I use today. Once I was in the Coordinated Program, I worked with Dr. Rafaela Feresin as a graduate research assistant in her lab, where I developed research projects, ran experiments, wrote research papers, and prepared for conferences. This training became invaluable when I started managing public health interns at the Food as Medicine program. I also created a community elective rotation for the coordinated program from scratch, providing students with hands-on experience in the program.

That's amazing, Jasmyne. I'm sure your professors would be delighted to know how much their mentorship impacted you. Could you tell us a bit more about the Food as Medicine program?

Of course. Grady's Food as Medicine program has been around for about five years. We're based at the Jesse Hill Market, which was once a McDonald's but has transformed into a wellness hub for Grady employees and patients. This year-long program provides patients access to cooking classes, nutrition education, and fresh produce pickups. It's aimed at helping patients manage conditions like diabetes and hypertension through plant-based nutrition.

We initially worked with a few clinics, but now we're partnered with all 80 clinics at Grady's downtown location. Volunteers are critical to our program's success. We hold fresh food carts at different clinics monthly and engage volunteers regularly. This program also gives patients access to food stamps, Medicaid, and Medicare enrollment assistance, thanks to a representative from the food bank who visits weekly.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS -Jasmyne Blacks

It sounds like a comprehensive and transformative program. Could you share some success stories from your participants?

One patient comes to mind who recently joined the program. She shared that her blood pressure had significantly dropped, and her doctor was amazed. Patients have also reported reduced A1C levels, some going from uncontrolled levels around 10 or 11 to as low as 5.5. Others have been taken off blood pressure medications or insulin, which is a powerful testament to the effectiveness of nutrition-based interventions. We're currently tracking life after graduation to see if improvements continue. Even if numbers don't always improve, the feedback is invaluable. Last year, our data showed a 2.1% decrease in A1C, which is higher than typical research findings.

It's inspiring to see these results. What are some main barriers participants face in joining or continuing with the program?

One big challenge is transportation. Many patients struggle to reach downtown Atlanta regularly. We provide some assistance through a Common Courtesy program, but it's not always feasible. Another issue is the weight of the produce bags—patients receive 20-25 pounds of produce; for some, carrying it is difficult. Maintaining consistency after the program ends is also a challenge. During the program, they have a supportive community, which can be harder to maintain independently. Our team works hard to build a sense of community while they're here, but the challenge extends beyond the program.

That makes sense, and it's clear you're making a real effort to support participants in every way possible. What options are available for those who'd like to engage with the Food as Medicine program?

Volunteers are the backbone of this program. We need help with the food pharmacy, fresh food carts, and the teaching kitchen. For instance, we pack nearly 500 bags weekly and hold classes and individual cooking sessions, often with just one person covering each area. Volunteering can be a one-time commitment, or some people come regularly. The fresh food carts are a great outdoor opportunity, while the teaching kitchen allows more patient interaction. We also have an expansion called the Neighbor Program, which offers a shopping experience for produce. Graduates of the program can continue shopping with us, which gives them more long-term support.

That sounds wonderful. I can tell that community involvement is central to the program's success. Is there anyone you'd like to recognize for their support in your journey?

Yes, I'd like to shout out to Jessica Todd, who believed in me as I pursued my goal of becoming a registered dietitian. Kate Wiley, my graduate adviser, also provided tremendous support. The faculty at Georgia State are genuinely outstanding, and I'm grateful for all they've done to help me get to where I am today.

I know you presented at FNCE this year. Could you tell us more about it? How did the presentation go, and what was the experience like for you?

Absolutely! FNCE is the Food and Nutrition Conference & Expo, the largest nutrition conference, which most dietitians are likely familiar with. Being able to present there was incredible. When I started my position, I worked with public health interns despite not having a public health background. Instead, I used my research experience to guide and supervise them.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS -Jasmyne Blacks

We partnered with Georgia State and Emory; I had three interns working on different research projects. Each intern developed a complete research paper, from a literature review to a conclusion, and then presented their findings to the Food as Medicine team. These were groundbreaking projects. For instance, we created a survey to assess patient experience at the food pharmacy and analyzed nutrition assessments from cooking classes. Another intern investigated BPA files and referrals, which signal eligibility for the program to providers. We felt these projects needed a broader audience, so I collaborated with Dr. Shaikh, who helped us finalize abstracts and posters for FNCE. With her support, we had three posters accepted at FNCE, covering everything from the food pharmacy to nutrition assessment to patient experiences. One of our posters included qualitative interviews on the patients' experiences and their words and quotes were very impactful. Each project showcased what Food as Medicine is achieving, highlighting patient outcomes like increased fruit and vegetable consumption and feedback on the program. People from across the country showed interest, including pharmacists, food bank directors, and healthcare professionals. It was incredible to have Grady's support in attending and presenting our work. Sharing these stories and the patients' experiences was deeply meaningful for me.

That's truly inspiring, Jasmyne. It's fantastic to hear how well the program was represented. You're giving a lot of credit to your team, and that's wonderful to see. Speaking of teamwork, it's sometimes easy to overlook the support systems behind success. Could you share more about that?

I can't stress enough how critical teamwork is, especially in this field. When people see someone succeeding, they often don't realize how much support goes into that. Dhana Blissett, my coworker has provided me mentorship, and as has Kathy Taylor, my director, who's always encouraged me to use my skills to their fullest. The team at Food as Medicine and everyone at Georgia State have contributed so much to where I am today. Recognizing and appreciating that support is essential.

Thank you for highlighting that. Now, on a more personal note, could you share some of the challenges you faced on your journey to becoming a registered dietitian and how you overcame them?

I'm grateful you let me share my story because I want others to know that success isn't always a straight path. When I started college, my science and math skills were weak. My undergraduate adviser even suggested I might not succeed in nutrition because I struggled in my first chemistry course. But I'm a hard worker, and setbacks only motivate me more. With the help of professors who believed in me, I started excelling in my science courses.

In the nutrition science program, I often felt intimidated by peers who seemed so confident, but I leaned into my strengths—hard work and creativity. I developed unique study techniques and utilized office hours to build relationships with professors. When I got into grad school, balancing my research assistantship, thesis, and rotations was challenging, but my cohort was supportive, and we helped each other through.

After grad school, I faced an enormous challenge with the RD exam. I didn't pass on my first attempt or even my second. I was devastated, but I kept pushing forward. During this time, I found a job at Grady and even developed the Food as Medicine internship before I officially became an RD. It was a difficult journey, but with support from family, friends, and mentors like Jessica Todd, I persevered and finally passed the exam.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS -Jasmynne Blacks

Thank you for being so open about your journey, Jasmynne. I'm sure many people will find inspiration in your story. Do you have any practical advice for those preparing for the RD exam? Definitely! First, I'd say to everyone: you will pass. Your training is solid, and it's just a matter of brushing up and tackling the test. A mindset shift helped me immensely—believe you're already a dietitian, and this test is just a formality.

To prepare, start by understanding your study style. Focus on your weak areas and break down the material by domain. I found it helpful to create a study schedule, dedicate one week per domain, and use practice tests to identify where I needed more review. When you take practice tests, go beyond just checking answers. Understand why each answer is correct and why others aren't. It's not only about knowing the information but also about understanding how the test presents it.

Also, avoid overwhelming yourself with too many resources. Choose a few trusted study tools and stick with them. And finally, during the test, trust your instincts. Don't second-guess your answers; your first choice is often correct.

Thank you for this advice! As we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers, future dietitians, or the nutrition community?

First, a huge thank you to Georgia State University—they were a fundamental part of my journey. I'm so grateful for everything I learned there.

To future dietitians and current students, I'd say your journey is your own, and there's no need to compare yourself to others. Each step you're taking now will bring you closer to your goal. Appreciate where you are and make the most of every moment. Challenges don't define you; resilience does. And remember, once you succeed, share your story to inspire others.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my journey. I'm thrilled to represent Grady and Georgia State and look forward to what lies ahead.

Thank you so much, Jasmynne!

Connect with Jasmynne

here



ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS

Sherry Coleman Collins, MS, RDN, LD, FAND

Hello, Sherry! This is such an honor to talk to you. Please, introduce yourself to our readers.

Sure! I'm Sherry Coleman Collins, a registered dietitian nutritionist and a fellow with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation. I'm also the president-elect for the Georgia Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. I'm a proud Georgia State alum, active in the Student Nutrition Association, and even served as its president. I loved my time at Georgia State, and I'm so grateful for the strong foundation it gave me.

Since graduating, what has your career path been like?

Up to me, I've had a varied and exciting career! (laughing) Before becoming a dietitian, I worked in nonprofit fundraising at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. I met a dietitian there, which sparked my interest in the field. It was the first time I realized that food could be therapeutic and part of disease management. I decided to go back to school and met with Dr. Dea Baxter at Georgia State, and she warned me it would take a while. But I thought, "The time will pass anyway." I spent five years completing my prerequisites, my bachelor's, master's, and internship.

After graduating, I worked at Egleston as a diet tech and then moved to CHOA Scottish Rite as a nutritionist, which I enjoyed. But I think connections are crucial, so I networked a lot, meeting with dietitians in Atlanta to learn about different career paths. One of those connections led me to school nutrition in Cobb County, where I worked for almost five years. Eventually, I wanted to focus more on public health communication. That led me to a role with the National Peanut Board, which was a great opportunity. I started full-time, then shifted to consulting after having a baby, giving me the flexibility to continue the work I loved—communication, marketing, and public health.

Last year, I was ready for something different again, and a fellowship with the Academy's Foundation came up. Thanks to my network, I learned about it, applied, and joined in January. Now, I focus on nutrition research communication and dissemination.

That's incredible! It seems like everything aligned for you. Do you take that as a sign that you're on the right path, or do you sometimes push through resistance?

I think it's both. Things don't always have to be easy to be right. Starting something new is often complex, but challenges are part of learning. For example, stepping into the fellowship was challenging because I'd been in my previous role for so long. But I always want to be teachable and embrace lifelong learning. Resistance is natural and doesn't mean something isn't right—it can mean you're stretching yourself. In those moments of resistance, I tap into my resources. Early in my career, a preceptor told me I wasn't proactive enough in answering my own questions. It was tough to hear, but it taught me to look for



ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS -Sherry Coleman Collins

solutions independently. Now, when I encounter challenges, I ask myself, “What are my resources?” That approach has been invaluable.

That’s excellent advice. Looking back at your time at Georgia State, are there specific classes or professors who had a lasting impact on you?

Absolutely! I still keep in touch with several professors who were incredibly supportive. Every class I took was valuable; nothing was wasted. Even the Krebs Cycle helped build a foundation for everything I’ve done since.

One of my favorite classes was the food science lab with Dr. Missy Cody. I love to cook, and this class taught me the science behind it, which I’ve used in every job. Kathleen Zelman taught a media nutrition class that was instrumental in my career. I’ve stayed in touch with her, and she even gave me invaluable advice when I was pregnant, saying, “You’ll never regret the time you spend with your children.” That helped me find a balance between my career and family.

Dr. Christine Rosenbloom was also a significant mentor. She chaired my master’s project and has been a wise voice throughout my career. I still lean on these relationships; they’ve supported me in my professional journey, even 20 years later.

It sounds like those relationships were so important. It’s inspiring to hear how networking doesn’t have to be transactional but can be about genuine connections and camaraderie.

Absolutely. Networking is about building genuine, supportive relationships. The friendships I formed with my cohort and other dietitians have been invaluable. We support each other at state and national levels, advocate for our profession, and spend time together socially. These aren’t transactional connections but lifelong relationships that make a real difference.

Was there a specific rotation during your internship that confirmed what you wanted to do?

I initially thought I wanted to work in diabetes or renal care but did not enjoy those rotations. I didn’t yet appreciate the challenges that people with chronic conditions face daily, and I wasn’t ready to provide the kind of care they needed.

But I loved my rotation in school nutrition. The collaboration, proactive education, focus on feeding kids, and changing attitudes about food really resonated with me. That rotation helped guide my path.

As a dietitian, you often must address nutrition misinformation. How do you approach that?

Addressing misinformation varies by platform and audience. My approach is to focus on sharing positive, accurate information. For example, if someone mentions a harmful myth like “take 10,000 IU of vitamin D daily,” I correct it gently but firmly. I try to promote evidence-based information in my writing, speaking, and on social media. As Joy Bauer mentioned at FNCE this year, it’s practical to put out positive, factual information consistently. We can’t address every piece of misinformation, but we can help balance it by sharing what’s accurate and helpful.

Stay connected:



ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS -Sherry Coleman Collins

Thank you for that insight. What advice would you give current students or new dietitians?

First, remember that your journey is your own, so don't compare it to others. Relationships are precious, so invest in them and maintain them over time. And always be open to learning. There's great value in pushing through challenges, but you also need to trust that sometimes things will align naturally. And for anyone going into dietetics, remember that nutrition can truly transform lives. Our work is impactful at every stage of life. Be proud of what we do and embrace the privilege of helping others through food and nutrition.

Sherry, you mentioned misinformation; why do you think it spreads so easily? Is it a general lack of nutrition education or something else?

It's not just about nutrition; it's a broader issue and most of the public has a low scientific literacy. Many people struggle with basic science understanding. I'm passionate about research communication and looking closely at why there's such a gap in translating science to the public. On average, research findings take seventeen years to reach clinical practice. If it takes this long for trained experts, imagine the challenge for the general public.

People are often misled by those who seem credible but aren't. One solution is communicating science in plain language, making accurate information more accessible. Plus, there's a human tendency to look for easy solutions or a "bad guy" to blame, and especially during certain times—like election seasons—people are quick to dig in and trust their chosen sources, even when faced with credible, conflicting information.

That's very true. How do you think dietitians can become more effective communicators in this climate?

It takes practice to meet people where they are. Not every dietitian needs to be online making videos or posting on social media. You can make an impact where you're most comfortable—whether with one-on-one counseling, in-service training for colleagues, or presentations for staff.

For example, if you're in a school district where a teacher promotes specific nutrition ideas—like a paleo diet—you could respectfully organize a staff wellness presentation to provide evidence-based information. The key is focusing on those in the "middle," who may be open to accurate information but are also exposed to misinformation. It's about presenting evidence in a way that respects people's intelligence without making them feel embarrassed for previously believing misleading claims.

I like that approach. With so much information out there, how do you stay updated?

There's a lot to keep up with, and I recognize that I can't be an expert in everything. I focus on my areas of expertise, like nutrition communication and food allergies, and, for anything else, I refer people to colleagues who specialize in those areas. I rely on resources like the Academy's SmartBrief for nutritionists, the Eat Right Weekly, and Karen Collins' newsletter for research summaries. Conferences like FNCE and state-level events are also great for catching up on the latest trends. I also attend webinars regularly to continue learning.

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS -Sherry Coleman Collins

Since you started in dietetics, what significant changes have you seen, and what changes would you like to see in the future?

Social media has had a massive impact, creating more access to dietitians but also making misinformation easier to spread. It's a double-edged sword. On one hand, it's opened up new career opportunities, but on the other, it's allowed non-experts to position themselves as authorities. Moving forward, we need more dietitians and more diversity within our field. Our profession should reflect the public we serve, so we need more men, people of color, and practitioners from various backgrounds. We also need better reimbursement so people can access our services. It's essential to support this effort through organizations like the Academy, which advocates for dietitians on multiple levels.

What can dietitians and students do individually to help advocate for these changes?

Get involved. Since I was a student, I've been active at the local, state, and national levels. You don't have to take on a big role right away, but serving on a committee, attending advocacy days, and supporting others can make a big difference. I also learn a lot from students—each generation brings new perspectives and skills, and we're all learning from each other. Issues like AI, for example, will present both challenges and opportunities for future dietitians.

Speaking of AI, how do you see it affecting the field, and what would you say to someone who thinks they can replace a dietitian with AI?

AI is a useful tool, but it's just that—a tool. It's helpful for things like crafting messaging or brainstorming, but it isn't perfect, and it makes mistakes. AI can't replace the personalized human connection that a dietitian provides. Our work isn't just about delivering facts; it's about understanding the individual's mindset, culture, and behavior. Technology can support behavior change but doesn't replace the relationship-driven approach that drives tangible outcomes.

I love that. As a final message, what advice would you give to students, new dietitians, or those with more experience?

My advice is to get deeply involved in your profession. Love what you do, try new things, and don't do it alone. Build meaningful connections—both for career development and personal fulfillment. We spend much time working, so invest in relationships that enrich your professional life. When we connect with others, we invest in our lives and careers in the best way possible.

Thank you, Sherry!

Connect with Sherry

here



Kudos to the Nutrition Faculty



Congratulation to Dr. Rafaela Feresin for receiving a grant, awarded by the **Peanut Institute**, in the amount of **\$620,921**, titled ***“Impact of Peanuts on Cardiometabolic, Cognitive, and Intestinal Health in Prediabetes Among Racially Diverse Populations.”***

Dr. Feresin is the study’s Principal Investigator.

Do you have or know anyone with prediabetes or high blood pressure? Click [here](#) to find out about opportunities to participate in research studies being conducted in the Feresin Lab.

Kudos to the Nutrition Student



Congratulations to Wesley Grace, a senior nutrition major, who placed 2nd in the Experienced Researcher category of the GSU Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium!

His research, "*Dissecting Lipid Metabolism in High-fat-diet-mediated Colon Cancer Metastasis*," was completed through a program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). While there, he also was named a 2024 Gould fellow, which meant the program paid for his living expenses and provided a stipend.

Georgia Campus Food & Nutrition Security Summit '24



We are proud of our professors and students for shedding light on such important issues.

Assistant professor, Dr. Nida Shaikh, led the organization of this summit. Darian Williams, second year Coordinated Program student, participated in the summit.

“I’m thrilled to have been part of the inaugural Georgia Campus Food and Nutrition Security Summit! Today, a room of passionate individuals came together to discuss the critical issue of food insecurity among college students. We heard inspiring talks, collaborated on solutions, and left feeling empowered to make a difference.

I’m grateful for the opportunity to be part of this important work.” - Darian Williams

Fulton Fresh University



Dr. Nida Shaikh organized a series of free cooking and nutrition education classes for GSU students. All attendees received 10 lbs of fresh produce upon class completion.

“Improving access to nutritious foods especially among youth is dear to me and to so many of my colleagues and RDNs. Thrilled with the start we had yesterday to our first of four free cooking class and nutrition education and produce pilot program for students at Georgia State University.

Working together with Cecilia Tran, MS, RDN, LD, our vision is to scale and grow this program each semester.

Thank you Desiree Wanders for supporting this initiative! And a special thank you to Valeria Alvarado and Darian Williams, student research assistants, for their support with creating the program evaluation survey in Qualtrics.”

-Dr. Nida Shaikh



13th International Pediatric Intestinal Failure & Rehabilitation Symposium in Pittsburgh, PA



This **global meeting** is designed to bring together international and national experts in the **interdisciplinary care of children with intestinal failure.**

PIFRS integrates medical and surgical dialogue to help **build off the dramatic interdisciplinary work** that has characterized **intestinal failure management.** Global leaders in the field will set the stage for important next steps and networking.

*Our Undergraduate Program Director and Clinical Associate Professor, and Lewis College Associate Dean for Academics and Professor of Nutrition, **Dr. Anita Nucci**, represented the Department at the symposium.*

Dr. Nucci and Jessica Alexander

*Dr. Nucci
reconnected with
a patient she
treated as a child
with short bowel
syndrome.*



Two of the #GSUNutrition Dietetic Internship Coordinated Program preceptors were chosen to speak at the Food as Medicine through a Multicultural Lens Webinar Series hosted by the Massachusetts Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics - **Jasmyne Blacks, MS, RDN & Dhana Blissett, MS, RDN, LD.** Jasmyne is also an alumna of our Graduate Coordinated Program

Food as Medicine Partnership: A Plant-Based Food Prescription Program Benefiting Underserved Communities in Grady Health System



“It was an honor to represent Grady’s Food as Medicine program at the recent MAND webinar. I am hopeful that the attendees were inspired to create similar programming to serve and profoundly impact marginalized communities affected by chronic diet-related conditions and food insecurity. I especially enjoyed the development phase, sharing and working through ideas with my coworker Jasmyne Blacks. We both learned that there are numerous steps involved in creating a CEU approved webinar. It was indeed a learning process.”

-Dhana Blissett, MS, RDN, LD

Grady Food as Medicine, Teaching Kitchen Manager



“Grady’s Food as Medicine program has proudly been standing for 5 years. We not only had the opportunity to be able to highlight our plant-based approach to managing chronic disease and culinary medicine techniques but also began the discussion on the innovative ways we tackle food insecurity. This was done through highlighting the Food Pharmacy and our partnership with the Atlanta Community Food Bank. It was most impactful to be able to shine more light on the food pharmacy and its various innovative approaches to tackling chronic disease. I truly enjoyed the opportunity to continue to highlight the amazing work of our team and keeping Grady at the forefront of the conversation pertaining to Food as Medicine.”

- Jasmyne Blacks, MS, RDN, LD

Grady Food as Medicine, Food Pharmacy Manager



More Highlights

[Sharon Rhodes](#), MS, RDN, LD, Registered Dietitian
Nutritionist, Food and Nutrition Consultant *at Rhodes
Consulting LLC*

[Sahar Elkhodary](#), BS, RDN, LD, Registered Dietitian
Nutritionist *at Dietitians On Demand*

[Michelle Giang](#), MS, RDN, LD, CLC, Registered dietitian *at
the Department of Army*

[Stephanie Henesy](#), MS, RDN, LD, Director, Nutrition and
Food Service *at Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice*

Stay connected:





We're craving good news!

Have an update on your
post-graduation life?

We want to share what
you have been up to.

Send us your update
here:

nutrition@gsu.edu

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**Would you like to support the GSU
Department of Nutrition and its
current students?**

Consider making a donation:



Give to the Panther's Pantry:



Thank you!