Addressing the need for practical student training in food systems – and more! Creating a model to promote food literacy at all levels

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Background: A partnership between RU and SL+ was created in 2017 with the aim to:

• **Improve capacity** for practical training of Food and Nutrition (F&N) students at RU
• **Increase collaboration** among food literacy enthusiasts
• **Promote healthy eating and food skills** in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)
• **Establish a research and evaluation** base for SL+

The RU-SL+ partnership: advances the knowledge and skill needs of aspiring F&N professionals; addresses critical social and environmental program goals; actively engages students in program planning, implementation and evaluation activities through participation with SL+

Objectives of RU student engagement:

• to provide experience in **food service management, nutrition education and public health and health promotion**;
• to foster **leadership development**;
• to increase **nutrition communication skill and confidence** through food literacy curriculum development;
• to provide opportunities for practical training in **community needs assessment and program evaluation**

Methods to increase RU student engagement:

• **Undergraduate students** enrolled in an experiential learning course (FNP400) worked directly with the SL+ Executive Director and gained course credit
• **A graduate student practicum** was developed for students in the MHSc program in Nutrition Communication (to develop knowledge and skill in population and public health)
• **Student volunteers and program staff** were recruited through classroom presentations and career opportunities promoted through the School of Nutrition
• **A faculty member** in the School of Nutrition worked with students at all levels to promote knowledge and skill development

Results of the RU-SL+ partnership:

• In 2018, **over 30 RU F&N students** gained new knowledge and skill through the partnership opportunities; extending their classroom learning
• **Students gained practical experience and understanding of sustainable food systems at the community level**
• Students learned the importance of community partnerships and saw the impact of healthy meals and snacks and food education on kids

Conclusions/Next Steps: Ongoing development and evaluation of this model can help to address gaps in practical training of aspiring F&N professionals and create an opportunity for SL+ to expand to other Canadian cities with F&N students