



The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college

RAINBOW TACO BOWL

- 2 cups cooked brown rice
- 1 can low sodium black beans
- 1 can sweet corn
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 tomato, chopped
- Greek yogurt as “sour cream”
- 2 tbs taco seasoning OR 1 tbs chili powder, ½ tsp paprika, ¼ tsp garlic powder, ¼ tsp onion powder, 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp s + p
- Fresh cilantro
- Optional: shredded cheese



In this July 2020 Issue:

Summer Academy Is In Full Swing! Meet the Instructors and See Students' Reviews!

- **Cookology 101**
- **Urban Planning**
- **NYC Hour**

Cookology 101

According to a [July 20 white paper](#) published by the [Federal Nutrition Research Advisory Group](#), “poor nutrition is the leading cause of illnesses in the US.” Unhealthy diets not only kill more than half a million people each year, they also result in higher healthcare costs for families and lower academic achievements for students.

This summer, DDC students are learning about healthy nutrition through Cookology 101, an online culinary class led by Amity Lui who has a Bachelor’s Degree in Nutrition and Food Science and is an MS candidate in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The course, drawing on science, math, and culture, teaches students how to create nutritious and balanced meals using healthier versions of common dishes. *I have an amazing group of students, says Amity, they learn from each other and I learn from them too. They already know a lot about nutrition. As I introduce them to the “science” of cooking and show them*

that healthy food can be delicious, they are intrigued by important culinary tips such as: celery cooks quicker than carrots because it contains more water; and tomatoes stored in the refrigerator lose flavor and texture because the cold temperatures alter their genes!

The class also examines public health issues. Amity explains, *we do the "Sugar Shocker" experiment. I pour sugar in a glass, one teaspoon at a time, and I ask students to say stop when they think I have reached the amount of sugar in a 12-ounce can of Coke. I usually hear "Stop!" at the fifth teaspoon... not even close! A 12-ounce can of Coca Cola contains 10 teaspoons of sugar!* This demonstration leads to a discussion about type 2 diabetes, which affects minority groups at a higher rate than whites and increases the risk of severe complications from Covid-19.

Students are also digging into the social injustices of food access and quality. They discuss the concept of "food deserts" where low-income communities are often plagued with supermarkets offering very few fresh vegetables and fruits and an abundance of ultra-processed items with no nutritional value – all at exorbitant costs. Amity explains that some of the students live in food deserts and know that one dollar can buy either one apple or three bags of chips. *The best choice is the apple, she says, because the chips have few nutrients and high counts of calories, fat, and salt.*

Nia C., DDC '23 says, *I learned so many things in this class – how to prepare food, how to make vinaigrette for healthy salads, how to put together a balanced meal; and how to cut sugar and calories!* Melody D., DDC '22 agrees, *Thanks to this class, I plan on eating a bit healthier.* Mariam D., DDC '22 summarizes students' sentiments about the class very well – *I love it!*

Urban Planning

This class is a wonderful opportunity to introduce DDC students to careers and ideas critical to how we socialize and live together, says Michael Snidal, co-instructor with Jenna Dublin. Both Jenna and Michael are Urban Planning doctoral candidates at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. Each instructor brings their own unique perspectives to the class: Jenna has a deep knowledge of community development, gentrification and historic preservation; and Michael brings expertise in housing, development and neighborhood change.

DDC students' early exposure to the field is important, Michael stresses, *because it familiarizes them with well-paying careers that also will allow them to improve the places where we live. Students need to see professional opportunities in urban planning the same way as they view career options in the legal or healthcare fields. DDC and its students are ten years ahead,* Michael adds, *urban planning is underrepresented in primary education. It is usually offered only in small post-collegiate programs even as our world becomes more urbanized every day. We need experts who not only understand how cities function but also ensure that today's choices will positively impact the future.*

Urban Planning is not just about the development and revitalization of city spaces, it is also a tool for democracy, equity, and justice as it addresses issues of housing, transportation and other everyday services. The field offers a unique lens to understand the specific policies involved in structural racism. Urban planners have helped reverse previous legislations that targeted vulnerable economic classes, from urban renewal to highway planning to segregated housing.

We introduce students to the skills, knowledge, and networks fundamental to an urban planner; and we address social challenges such as food deserts, clean water, gentrification and affordable housing, Michael explains. *Urban planners join the class to discuss their projects. Jenny Osman, NYC Economic Development Corporation, who is an expert on food*

access; and Louise Yeung, a climate change planner and Director of Resiliency for NYC both visited the class.

Students have shown a tacit knowledge of the basic issues, although initially they were not familiar with Urban Planning as an academic and professional field. *Our class project, “Big Ideas for Small Lots,” was originally a New York City design competition for new affordable housing built on vacant lots. We are amazed by the thoughtful proposals students are developing for common challenges such as school design, trash collection, public safety activities, says Michael. They know how to identify the problems and the people involved to inform their development of feasible solutions.*

This class has taught me that high school students are thinking a lot about bigger questions. They have new, diverse and open-minded perspectives about the world, they are incredibly interested in their communities and they bring that passion to the class, says Michael.

Paola F., DDC ‘22 says, *I really like the class because it explains the zoning history in the community and the underrepresentation of low-income neighborhoods in urban planning conversations. It also shows you how to creatively address these problems today. And Kamila A., DDC ‘23 adds, the class includes several guest speakers who are urban planners, they are so inspiring!*

For the Urban Planning class syllabus, please visit:
<https://ddcurbanplanning2020.squarespace.com/>

NYC Hour

The NYC Hour workshop builds on students’ knowledge to increase their culturally relevant civic awareness and their engagement in community issues to promote positive changes in their neighborhood. It also provides them with critical advocacy and leadership experience.

Every week, DDC Counselors Taylor Ellis and Nathaniel Robinson lead students through an exploration of the elements of civil society in each borough, such as activism in Brooklyn, diversity & culture in Queens, and community in the Bronx. At the end of the week, students work on a short project related to what they just learned, from writing a poem in the Japanese tradition of Haiku to contacting legislators for stricter gun control.

The goal is always to increase students’ academic strength. In this class, we use culturally relevant instruction, which stresses the importance of including students’ cultural references, to ignite their creativity and expand their knowledge, says Taylor.

This is a learning experience they would not get in school, says Nate. This class connects local issues to their lives and their own experiences as they learn to improve society and effectively relate to people of different cultures. And Taylor adds, in NYC Hour, students are not expected to regurgitate ready-made answers. We want them to unearth new perspectives by thinking critically about how we define community problems and develop feasible solutions.

For example, in their focus on Brooklyn, students examined different forms of activism – from educating others to advocating for legislation to engaging in community service. They reviewed news reports on current events to identify five key challenges for youth – high poverty rates, homelessness, overcrowded schools, high youth unemployment, and lack of after-school opportunities. Students then expanded their understanding of the issues through discussions of real-life scenarios about how the issues have affected their lives. With their more robust perspectives, they learned to analyze a relevant legislative proposal, build coalitions with community groups with similar goals, and write letters to legislators to advocate for new policies. NYC Hour allows students to dissect a social issue, examine their positions, take a stance, and build productive relationships as a tool to advocate for change.

Students appreciate the opportunity to express themselves, says Teacher Assistant Tara Joshi. They feel a sense of ownership over their borough's civic activities. They like that the class engages their creativity and thoughtful efforts for real-life problem solving. There are no right or wrong answers in this class. It is all about innovative thinking to test and refine ideas in order to develop strategies. These are very valuable life-long skills.

Nia C., DDC '23 says, I enjoyed learning about different boroughs in NYC. I live in the Bronx and knew little about the other boroughs, but not anymore! I learned that culture is about the customs and traditions people practice; perspectives cover how people view certain things; poetry is a way to share your ideas; and activism means creating change. This class has inspired me to continue my efforts to make a positive difference in my community.

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