

SUMMER 2025

ISSUE 40

# *The Grapevine* NEWSLETTER



TEACHERS COLLEGE  
PROGRAM IN NUTRITION

READ WHAT'S FRESH  
OFF THE VINE!

# Letter from the Editors



Dear Students, Faculty, Alumni, and Staff,

We hope everyone had a fulfilling and relaxing summer! I (Sarde) had a busy and engaging start to my summer as I began taking Medical Nutrition Therapy classes while Tyra went through her last cycles of site placement rotations. It's been exhilarating to finally apply the nutrition knowledge we've gained thus far to actual patient scenarios and hands-on experiences. It has also been surreal knowing we are both approaching closer and closer to becoming RDNs.

As the sun sets on summer, we are looking forward to a new academic year as we welcome Alexia Edwards, MS, RD, CDN, CNSC as the new instructor for Food Service Operations and Management along with a whole new cohort of students. This year we also look forward to welcoming back several TC alum who will be supporting our program. We are excited to have Tyffanie Ammeter, MS, RDN, CSG, CDN joining us in her new role as Assistant MS-RDN Director to support Jennifer Hildner with site placements and coordination, Oliver Gonzalez-Yoakum, MS, RDN as the new instructor for Community Nutrition, and Matthew Graziose, PHD as the the interim instructor for Analysis of Research & Current Literature while Randi Wolf is on sabbatical in Spring 2026. We're excited to highlight Alexia Edwards in this issue of The Grapevine and will be highlighting other new faculty in future issues!

In the same vein, we bid farewell to our 2025 Program in Nutrition Graduates including our co-editor Tyra who had some parting words to share with you all for her last issue:

"I have been tremendously grateful for the opportunity to be a co-editor in chief for the Grapevine during my last year at TC. It was very rewarding to collaborate closely with faculty, alumni and current students as we put these issues together."

We are pleased to welcome Christine Cheng as our new Co-Editor in Chief who will work alongside Sarde. We have a lovely issue to share with you including several reflections on family, cultural traditions, personal health journeys, and site placement experiences. As the Summer rounds out, we hope you savor the last few days of extra sun, delicious produce, and quality time with loved ones. See you soon!

Warmly,



*Tyra Vanriel*  
CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



*Sarde Gumalo*  
CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

# Introducing our Incoming Co-Editor

## Christine Cheng



Hi! I'm Christine and excited to introduce myself as one of the future co-editors for the Grapevine!

My undergraduate studies were in Communication and Environmental studies, but I found my interest in nutrition after talking to one of our RDNs on campus at the University of California, Santa Barbara . Ever since, I've been mainly involved in community volunteer work with my local food bank, as well as clinical work as a nutrition host. I'm excited to learn more about nutrition in general, especially surrounding chronic disease and nutrition education.

In my free time I enjoy playing volleyball, trying new video games, and starting new crafting projects. I can't wait to meet everyone this fall!



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# From Tradition to Tomorrow: Celebrating Our 2025 Nutrition Graduates

BY SARDE GUMALO



On June 25th, 2025, 25 students were celebrated with a graduation ceremony for completing all the required coursework for the MS-RDN. I sat in the audience, my eyes beaming with joy and pride, as I listened to our cherished nutrition faculty members share tokens of wisdom and sincere wishes for the graduates. I reflected on the honor and weight of being part of a long tradition of excellence as Dr. Lora Sporny recounted the history of TC's Program in Nutrition—a meaningful bookend to the initial information session many of us heard when we first gauged our interest in the school. I was reminded that our program was founded by curious and intelligent trailblazers in the field, and as I looked on at our graduates, I was moved by how true that tradition remains today.



Dr. Jennifer Cadenhead also offered some wise words that lingered a little longer in the air, knowing she would be transitioning to a new tenure-track faculty position at the CUNY School of Public Health. I held back tears as I listened to Thulasi Rajasekeran share poignant words about her time at TC, and I was moved by how her experiences were not unlike my own. As other student speeches followed, including those of my wonderful Grapevine co-editor, Tyra Vanriel, and the delightful Sara Subhani, I realized how profound and transformative just two years (and more for my fellow part-timers) can be.

To me, the honorees were more than just this year's round of graduates. I had the pleasure of sitting next to them during classes, engaging in stimulating discussions, toiling through various projects together, and preparing and savoring many meals with them. From day one, I held such high regard and respect for these friends and colleagues. Today, I take comfort in knowing this smart, caring group of individuals will carve a path before us to follow and do something unique to make the world a little bit better. Congratulations to all our 2025 Program in Nutrition graduates!



# Embracing Cultural Competency:

## A Conversation with Alexia Edwards

*Interview by Tyra Vanriel*

Alexia Edwards MS, RD, CDN, CNSC is currently a clinical nutrition manager at SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn. Alexia was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and moved to Toronto, Canada, at the age of six, where she grew up in a diverse immigrant community. Growing up, she originally wanted to become a pediatrician, and while researching pediatric conditions for a project during her senior year of high school, she learned about phenylketonuria (PKU) and discovered that pediatric patients with this genetic condition were advised to see a registered dietitian for their specialized diet. This experience motivated her to look up the role of a dietitian and at that time she realized that she wanted to become a dietitian. Another motivation that contributed to her desire to pursue this career was through her research on how colonization during the slave trade resulted in nutrition-related diseases due to nutrient deficiencies. "This sparked my interest in nutrition in the Caribbean and being Jamaican, I had a personal connection to that as well. I wanted to do research in food in the Caribbean, how it's grown, the soil in different parts of Jamaica, and how that affects nutrient contents of different crops. That piqued my interest in wanting to be a dietitian specifically for Caribbean people."



*Alexia's favorite inspirational quote:*

***"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."***

***~Maya Angelou***

She completed an integrated Bachelor's dietetics program at McGill University. During the last year of the program, she was able to complete a kidney disease specialization rotation at Montreal General Hospital where she was able to treat patients in the renal protection clinic. She also provided outpatient nutrition counseling for patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (stages 1 to 4), kidney transplants, and those on peritoneal dialysis and hemodialysis. Following graduation, she began her professional career as an outpatient dietitian at a wellness center.



Driven by her love for academia, Alexia decided to pursue a Master's program at Columbia University Institute of Human Nutrition for the research opportunities and the goal of becoming a published author. After earning her Master's degree, she worked at an outpatient dialysis center. Her position gave her great autonomy and she felt proud to be a dietitian because she played an integral role in the interdisciplinary team. She advocates for dietitians to develop a strong understanding of kidney disease due to its wide-ranging effects on multiple body systems.

Alexia was an ICU dietitian at SUNY Downstate for nearly three years before assuming her current role as clinical nutrition manager. She earned deep respect from the ICU interdisciplinary team for her integral role in delivering nutritional care to critically ill patients, providing expert recommendations and personalized orders for Total Parenteral Nutrition. As clinical nutrition manager, Alexia oversees a variety of responsibilities including managing the dietitian staff, coordinating with three internship programs to supervise hospital dietetic interns, and addressing operational challenges by problem-solving and promptly resolving conflicts. She regularly participates in committee meetings focused on topics such as survey readiness, policy updates, pharmacy and therapeutics, nursing practice, and council initiatives.

Collaborating closely with the general manager, Alexia contributes to clinical nutrition needs, as well as leads hiring, recruiting, and interviewing processes. Working under Sodexo adds further responsibilities, such as completing audits, enhancing the malnutrition program, ensuring screening and metrics meet company standards, and organizing educational sessions for nursing staff and residents.

At SUNY Downstate, a community hospital with a strong emphasis on community engagement, she

requires each dietitian to participate in at least one community outreach event annually. This initiative ensures alignment between the dietitian's office and the hospital's commitment to serving the community. The hospital primarily serves a large Caribbean population. Alexia emphasized, **"Our top priority is making sure patients see foods on the menu that they recognize and feel comfortable with."** She collaborates closely with the food service team and the food production manager to update the patient menu, which involves introducing new recipes, conducting nutrient analyses, and making tailored substitutions to accommodate diabetic, renal, low-sodium, and general diets. Flexibility is key, as recipes need to be adapted based on patient feedback and the availability of ingredients from their approved suppliers.

When asked what she personally emphasizes in her role, Alexia stated, **"I try to emphasize cultural competency and cultural humility."** She acknowledges that while her team doesn't reflect the patient population, they strive to meet the patients where they are by respecting and incorporating the patients' cultural foods and practices into care. Alexia indicated that while our profession may never fully reflect the patient population, the next best thing is making sure the dietitians who are caring for them are aware of the patients' cultural foods, the significance of these foods, how they're cooked, and why they are cooked the way they are. Another layer of consideration is ensuring that the team respects the food service staff, who are also predominantly Caribbean, by simply greeting them and creating a positive workplace environment. As a manager, she enjoys the variety of responsibilities of her role, the connection that she builds with management and her colleagues, and being available to serve the Caribbean population. Alexia is excited about her new role teaching Food Service Operations & Management in our Program in Nutrition and being able to share her experiences with our students.

# *Finding My Right Balance*

BY PAOLA HERNANDEZ



I was 14 when I was first told I had Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). I didn't really know what that meant, but I trusted my doctor when they prescribed birth control pills to "control it." I thought, sure, if that's what I need. For years, I took the pill without questioning it. But as I became more aware of my body, I couldn't ignore the frustration building inside me, the feeling that something still wasn't right. My cycles never truly felt "normal," and I didn't feel good in my own body.

Eventually, I made a big decision: I would go off the pill. I wanted to understand my body instead of masking its symptoms. Around that time, I also committed to deeply exploring the roots of PCOS and pursued a Hormonal Health Coach certification at the Institute of Integrative Nutrition (IIN). In the process, I discovered a whole new world I hadn't known existed.



I began sharing what I was learning with my friends, and those conversations lit a spark in me. That spark grew into Right Balance—a platform that empowers busy women to take control of their hormonal health through cycle-syncing nutrition, lifestyle support, and compassionate community. We promote self-love, challenge diet culture, and make wellness realistic rather than restrictive. It became a space where I could channel my passion and knowledge into helping other women reconnect with their bodies and their health.

What I didn't realize, however, was that this journey would uncover another truth I had been avoiding. While pursuing my Master's specialized in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology at Teachers College, I took a Nutrition Counseling course with Professor Jill Gulotta that opened my eyes. It helped me see that I wasn't just dealing with hormonal imbalances—I was also struggling with an eating disorder. I had been so focused on "eating perfectly" to control my symptoms that I had forgotten what it meant to truly nourish myself.

That was my turning point. Instead of chasing the "perfect PCOS diet" full of restrictions, I began working on loving myself. I allowed food to be a source of nourishment, not punishment. I stopped cutting out foods just because a list told me to, and I started listening to my body. Slowly, my period came back—a sign that my body felt safe again.

It was during this personal healing that I realized Right Balance wasn't just a coaching program. It was a reflection of my own story and proof that the "right balance" isn't just about nutrients or workouts; it's about finding harmony within ourselves.



Now my mission with Right Balance is to be a friend and guide for busy women who are burning themselves out, disconnected from their bodies, and struggling with hormonal imbalances. I want to dispel the notion that nutrition is solely about the physical—calories, carbs, and weight—and instead show that it's medicine for the mind, body, and soul.

Because balance isn't something you find once and keep forever. It's something you continually strive for, adjust to, and embrace as life changes. And in that process, we discover not just health, but ourselves.





# Le Falta una Salsita



By Leslie Puebla

If there is one thing I can guarantee you could find in any Mexican household, it is salsa. When I say salsa, I am not talking about the jarred, chunky Tostitos or Trader Joe's salsa. I am talking about the salsa that has been passed down through generations from our Indigenous ancestors like the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas. I am talking about the type of salsa you make at home, where you either boil or roast your ingredients and then grind them in a molcajete. A molcajete is a traditional Mexican mortar and pestle, usually made from volcanic rock. It is typically used for grinding spices and crushing vegetables to make sauces and salsas. If you have ordered guacamole at a Mexican restaurant, there's a good chance it was served on a molcajete!



Another method that salsa is commonly prepared is the "Americanized way". When you are short on time, you quickly throw all your ingredients into the blender and BAM, homemade salsa! No judgment here -- my family does the latter.

Growing up in a Mexican family, salsa has always been an integral part of any meal. No meal is complete without some form of salsa at the dinner table, especially during family gatherings and celebrations. I can't help but laugh as I recall times at the dinner table where no salsa was present and someone would say, "le falta una salsita", which translates to "this is missing sauce." Salsa can elevate any meal! I love to add it to everything!





Aside from being a great condiment, salsa is also an excellent way to increase your vegetable consumption. How so? The main ingredients in any salsa are typically tomatoes or tomatillos, chili peppers, and garlic. There are various types of salsas, including salsa roja, salsa verde, pico de gallo, salsa de aguacate, and more. The difference between a salsa verde and a salsa roja is that the verde uses a tomatillo and jalapeño or serrano base, while a salsa roja uses a base of Roma tomatoes with dried chiles, jalapeños, or serranos. This is how they get their distinct green and red colors.

As future dietitians, we aim to help our clients and patients discover ways to incorporate their cultural heritage into their food choices while promoting healthier eating habits. One way to do this with the Mexican community is by knowing about the ingredients in salsas and embracing them. From my first job as a research assistant, I remember how happy study participants felt knowing salsa was a great way to increase their vegetable consumption.

I am thrilled to share one of my mom's salsa recipes with all of you. This salsa is chipotle-based and so delicious. To be able to share this with you, I had to beg my mom to make it since, like many Mexican moms, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, most recipes are stored in their brains and hearts and do not have precise measurements. They let their five senses guide them. Over generations, recipes often evolve based on one's geographic location, individual palate, and flavor preference. Once you get so accustomed to making salsas, you start inventing new ones based on the chili peppers you like or what you are in the mood for. In fact, this is how my mom's Chipotle salsa was born – she used the base of a salsa verde and added some chipotle chili peppers she had on hand, and voila!

I have never tried to make this specific salsa recipe because I am stubborn and only want it made by my mom. My mom encourages me to learn, but I fear it will not be the same as hers. When talking to my best friend about this dilemma, she shared that she felt the same way about making her mom's recipes, and she said something that I would like to share with you all: "You know what I'm learning? I'm learning that I'm developing my own sazón. This chicken is really yummy, and it's not like my mom's, even though I tried. So, I realize that maybe it's meant to be this way. We try to emulate our family's cooking, but change is inevitable too".



Therefore, I encourage you to use this recipe as a backbone and make it your own! I will take my own advice and step into my own discomfort and make this salsa recipe. Wish me luck and catch this salsa at the next class potluck ☺.

# Chipotle Salsa

## INGREDIENTS:

8 chipotle chili peppers (these come dried – fun fact: chipotle chili peppers are dried jalapeno peppers!)

5 – 6 tomatillos

1 – 2 garlic cloves

Salt to taste



Note: this is not your typical recipe with precise measurements – my mom encourages you all to play around with the measurements and make it your own!

1. Boil your chipotle chili peppers for 15 minutes to begin to soften them
2. After 15 minutes, add your tomatillos to the boiling water with the chipotle chili peppers and boil for another five minutes. Check tomatillos to ensure they are softened.





3. After 20 minutes, let your ingredients cool and then transfer the chipotle chili peppers and tomatillos into a blender. Add 1 – 2 garlic cloves, preferably two! Add 1 – 2 tbsp of the boiled chili/tomatillo water as well.



4. Blend ingredients together and add salt to your preference. If you prefer your salsa thinner/watery, you can add more of the boiled chili and tomatillo water. If you prefer it thick, don't add water. Enjoy!



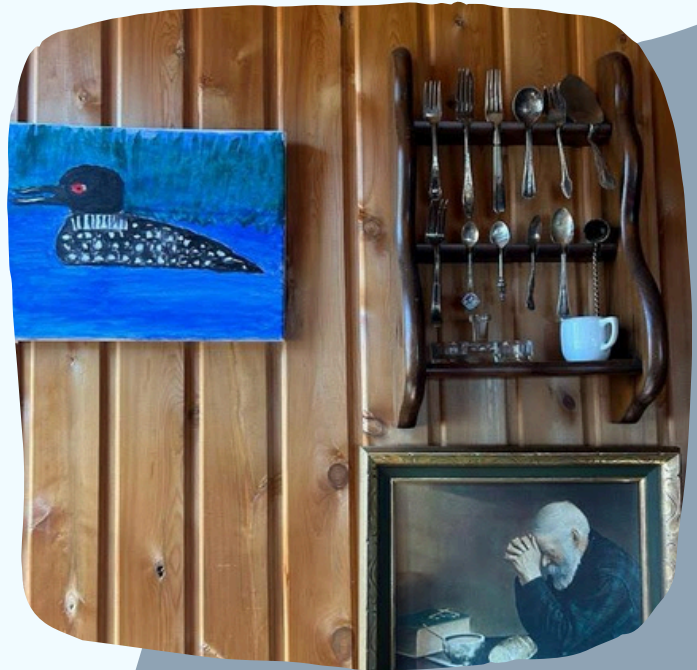
# Sweet Escape

By Ally Latvala



My family members have differing opinions on the best time of day for dessert. This topic came up on our annual July trip to northern Minnesota. Packed in our cabin on the lake that predates my 97-year-old great-grandmother, there is no shortage of laughter, games, and most importantly, sweets.

For baking inspiration, we turn to our collection of recipes - binders filled with handwritten index cards, copies of church cookbooks, or torn-out magazine ads. I associate many desserts with these visits- chocolate oatmeal "Revell" bars, blueberry pie, rhubarb cake, and Petitza, a sweet bread spiraled with brown sugar, walnuts, and spices.





Several of my loved ones and I like our treats right after dinner, while my dad and grandmother require something sweet to pair with their morning coffee. In what I view as an impressive practice of patience, a few people hold out for the “post-sauna” midnight snack. At the cabin two things are non-negotiable: taking a nightly sauna and baking an abundance of sweets. We enjoy several rounds, alternating between the 205°F haven and the moonlit waters of Swan Lake. This activity can re-awaken appetites, and luckily, there are always scraps of dessert left from dinner.

While there are some topics of conversation, mostly political, that are avoided on these vacations up north, we delight in chatting about food- what’s been on our breakfast plates, that time my cousin hid the bars from everyone... or the farmer’s markets we like in our respective homes. I don’t support shying away from contentious topics, but I think starting with less charged ones, especially food, can open the door for connection. I love hearing about others’ seemingly mundane eating habits. Knowing something simple, like what time of day someone eats dessert, helps me feel bonded to them.



The ways we nourish ourselves can highlight our shared humanity. We find equal delight in learning about both our similarities and differences when it comes to eating. I imagine what it could be like if we translated this acceptance to other aspects of our lives.

After moving to a new city, the differences between my family members and me seem especially noticeable. The more years I accumulate at the cabin, the more I pay attention to how my values compare with those of my loved ones. In many ways, we’re aligned, but I also recognize the patterns I hope not to carry into my adult life. Our shared enthusiasm for cooking and eating helps me cope with these complexities. Food drives me to recognize the beauty in both tradition and discomfort. Realizing this grounds me as I’m now just one (!) year out from talking to people about food professionally.



# Site Placement Highlights

## Sally Liu's Internship Experience

### Clinical Rotation

**Site:** NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center



“During my first clinical internship at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, I had the valuable opportunity to work in the Medicine and Surgery unit. It was an unforgettable experience to apply the medical nutrition therapy I had learned the previous summer to real-world cases. I was able to independently interview patients and write nutrition assessments and diagnoses. On some occasions, I visited the same patient more than once, and they remembered me—those moments of connection were deeply meaningful. I witnessed the full patient journey from admission to discharge, and seeing patients recover quickly was incredibly rewarding. My role went beyond writing nutrition assessments; collaboration with nurses, physicians, speech therapists, and other healthcare professionals was essential to ensuring the best outcomes for patients. I felt fortunate to contribute to that process, even in a small way. Although the internship was brief, I gained practical skills I could never have learned in a classroom. It made me truly appreciate every step of my journey toward becoming a registered dietitian.”

## Kati Coverdale's Internship Experience

### Community Rotation

**Site:** Chobani

“I was an intern with the Regulatory Compliance & Nutrition team at Chobani. One of my favorite moments was when my preceptor and I had the opportunity to join the Retail Sales and Execution team on their store visits around Hoboken and Jersey City. We observed how they build relationships with managers from each store to support sales and merchandising plans, product placement, marketing, inventory management, and more. It was great to learn about the roles of other departments across the company!”

