

FOOD PROCESSING LEARNING ASSISTANTS

The first substantive question that any employer asks of a prospective employee is, “Do you have any experience?” We aim to eliminate a “no” or “not much” response by creating 10 food processing learning assistant positions for undergraduate students to gain experiential learning in the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition (FSHN) Pilot Processing Plant. In this teaching and research laboratory, unit operations of food processing and food engineering are performed. The facility is a fully functioning food processing pilot plant, with a complementary test kitchen and food analysis laboratory, for production of human consumable foods. Projects in the pilot plant are commissioned by industry partners, campus researchers, graduate students, and external stakeholders who are interested in testing new engineering technologies, novel processes, innovative packaging ideas, and creating foods for the future. Some examples of past and ongoing activities include:

- producing 25% of the pizza sauces for the University of Illinois Dining Services;
- stone-milling 50,000 lbs. of grain in one growing season;
- cold-pressing, pasteurizing, and packaging persimmon juice into 16 oz. bottles;
- extruding the brand new, nutrient-dense “Block I” breakfast cereal; and
- developing a dispensable hot sauce for foodservice organizations.

The goal of the food processing learning assistants initiative is to provide real-world, hands-on, and mentored experience for 10 food science students each year to build their technical skills and proficiencies to be optimally slated for sought-after positions in the food industry. Outcomes will include: 1) competitively advantaged students; 2) a highly trained and experienced talent pool for the food industry; 3) continuous innovations in the FSHN Pilot Processing Plant; and 4) contributions to the future of the Illinois food industry.



OPPORTUNITY:

Dovetailing with the \$3 million investment in the FSHN Pilot Processing Plant renovation, building upon the strengths of a top five educational program in food science, and drawing from the expertise of leading educators and researchers in food sciences, the food processing learning assistants initiative will be unmatched by any other food science program in the nation. The University of Illinois is uniquely positioned to offer this program, because of its location in the heart of Illinois’ food production and processing enterprises, partnerships with Illinois and global food companies, exceptionally talented faculty and support staff, and pipeline of bright-minded emerging professionals. Each learning assistant will complete a semester-long experience of approximately 10 hours each week in the FSHN Pilot Processing Plant, with specific goals and objectives mutually set by the learning assistant and the assistant director of the FSHN Pilot Processing Plant. Resumes of learning assistants will reflect accomplishments at the end of their experiences so that they are prepared to eloquently discuss their unique abilities and talents in food processing.

College of Agricultural, Consumer
and Environmental Sciences



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RESOURCES REQUIRED:

To provide meaningful and enriching experiences to 10 learning assistants, an endowment is necessary. Earnings generated will support each learning assistant and will be conveyed directly to the university to be appropriately applied to such expenses as tuition and fees. The food processing learning assistants initiative will be a signature program that will affirm our status as a university of distinction. Most importantly, to the proverbial interview question, these graduates will be able to enthusiastically respond, “I have real experience!”

“I needed more experience when I started looking for my first job. I wish that I would have had a way to work in the pilot plant—outside of my classes—to learn more about food processing and what it would be like to work at a food company.”

-FSHN student



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