



Interview with IAFNS Summer Research Assistant Salima Taylor

This Transcript has been edited for clarity and length.

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Could you tell us your name and where you go to school and how you heard about IAFNS?

Salima Taylor

My name is the Salima Taylor and I go to Tufts University and specifically the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. I heard about IAFNS through my adviser and she just said that it would be a great internship to complete.

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Can tell us a little bit about your research and how it fits in with IAFNS focus?

Salima Taylor

My research focuses on understanding dietary patterns of black women in the US. And eventually, hopefully in West African women. The idea would be to identify high-fiber food sources that are culturally appropriate and consumed by them as a population and include these in weight loss or weight management interventions but maybe more holistically interventions that focus on metabolic disease. I think it fits well into what IAFNS does because the Carbohydrate Committee tries to comprehensively understand the role of Carbohydrates including fiber in diverse populations. And it's unique, because I think that focusing on populations like black women in the US and West African women represents an exciting focus for the Carbohydrate Committee. So, I was allowed to kind of explore a space, a semi-undiscovered space, with the committee.

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Will you present to the committee at the end of the summer?

Salima Taylor

Yes, I have a presentation this week and I'll be sharing my findings, and they're not exactly what I expected. I found a rather limited amount of

research on dietary patterns of black women in PubMed, and research journals. But there's possibly information on nutrition that appears in other fields such as anthropology or sociology, ethnic studies, or migration studies. So, I think next steps for me are really teasing out those linkages and trying to better understand the limited research in this area. In nutrition, research can be complemented by studies in other areas. I hope to extend this research topic into my PhD Program and, hopefully my dissertation because of questions I have about health equity and why we have differential health outcomes in various populations. On the question of health, taking this further for me is not only a professional journey and transformation, but also a personal transformation as well. It's requiring me to sort of come out of this box of academia and really examine the type of research that's conducted. So, I hope to better understand what nutrition or dietary patterns for black women in the US look like. All the while keeping in mind that that group is not a monolith, there's so many different subpopulations that may fall under this category, because we know that race is a social construct -- not a biological one. So, there could be women identifying as black in the US from the Caribbean, or from West Africa, and from other parts of the world. So, understanding and teasing out those details, and then how their dietary patterns differ amongst their populations, is key.

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What are some questions you're trying to answer in your research?

Salima Taylor

How dietary patterns change, based upon how long somebody's been in this country, or their sort of level of assimilation or connection to, say, the country of origin, or even religion, how and what role that plays? And what about landmark dishes, like say, Mac and Cheese or other things that were created and cooked in the US by black chefs and black cooks. But I think that teasing that out, like is it a question of, do black women consume the same thing as other Americans? And is there a diet appropriate for this population if there was to be an ideal diet? And is that related to soul food? We often hear about Southern cuisine. We often hear about the American diet. But our foods were created and consumed during periods of survival and resistance. So is that the ideal diet? I think that brings in questions of history, questions related to oppression and stress, and also mental health, and how people cope. So, I think that it's a huge topic that needs to be understood in order to get to the bottom of these questions.

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Could you say more about the differential health outcomes you mentioned?

Salima Taylor

Focusing on health and better health outcomes for a population that is suffering from disease outcomes like obesity and diabetes, and other metabolic diseases at starkly higher rates than other populations in this country is really

important.

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Have you come across people from academia and industry and government this summer? And has that helped you in your journey?

Salima Taylor

I have somewhat, when I've met with the committee. It's definitely a cadre of people, from industry, from academia and government, so it really runs the gamut which I appreciate. I do wish I had more time to explore the committee and the people on the committee, to really understand their varying perspectives. A couple of committee members reached out to me and provided some feedback on my presentation and the progress that I've made and they were wonderful insights. One of them asked why I was focusing on fiber when, you know, maybe 20-30 years ago, the nutrition field walked away from focusing on a single nutrient. That informed my decision to make the focus more about dietary patterns. And another person from industry reached out and shared their experience on ethnic diets and how we can think about them in more dynamic ways than maybe previously has been done in nutrition research.

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Can you tell us a little bit about your career goals, and then any advice for future IAFNS fellows?

Salima Taylor

I'd like to be a young researcher, designing interventions for minority communities, and specifically black communities, or black women, in the US and hopefully eventually in West Africa. While much of the interventions or the work had focused on weight loss, I'd like to focus on health outcomes, in general, specific to energy metabolism. And I think that it would be kind of lovely to be able to translate the research that I'd be conducting into programming. To tease out the success of really good research, and place that information into programming for communities and community members. Then you connect with the population and provide a setting where they can provide feedback around those programs.

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Thank you for making the time to share your experiences and goals with us.

Salima Taylor

You're welcome.