



Interview with IAFNS Summer Research Opportunity Fellow Stella Wang

This Transcript has been edited for clarity and length.

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Thank you for joining us today. Tell us a bit about yourself and how you heard about IAFNS.

Stella Wang

My name is Stella Wang, and I'm at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in the PHD program. And, last year, when I was doing my coursework, my advisor sent me an e-mail about IAFNS summer fellowships, so I looked at the opportunity to study cognitive instruments in the food and nutrition industry. I think that's really right where I'm interested in my PHD research, which is the measurement piece.

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Can you tell us about the purpose of reviewing cognitive tests for nutrition research?

Stella Wang

We all eat different foods, and that has an impact on our body. I found I became interested in learning the methodology of assessing the cognitive function for patients on different nutritional food interventions in research. So, we're looking

into different studies on the cognitive effect on that, and more specifically on what kind of measurement tools, what kind of cognitive assessment is appropriate to test different types of cognitive function.

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As you analyze the NIH Toolbox of tests, are you using that primarily for norming or to look at how various tests would work in a nutrition research environment?

Stella Wang

So, the goal is to select the right instrument for the right purpose. And when I look at the NIH Toolbox, my first question to the IAFNS team was, what kind of questions do you have in mind for your research subjects? Is this specifically targeting the general population? Maybe a specific subpopulation has a clinical issue, Alzheimer's or, or potentially, ADHD. What we are actually, really interested in here is looking at the healthy adult population. And the NIH Toolbox was designed for use with the general population.

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It seems as though attention and memory were two of the major foci. Are there other issues that we should be tracking when we look at cognitive functioning, health and nutrition research?

Stella Wang

I think there are potentially a lot of areas, you know, other than attention and memory, as cognitive function has many aspects. There are a lot of specific functions in terms of attention or memory, that can be a focus. You can go beyond those two, I mean, there are other areas, such as for example, executive function, or processing speed.

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What would you say was your most surprising finding so far?

Stella Wang

I always knew there were longitudinal, observational studies going on, but I didn't realize the number of random controlled trials looking at very specific types of

diet, or nutrition intake as well. I was surprised to see some of the studies actually showing interesting cognitive changes in populations, and in a relatively short amount of time.

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Can tell us a little bit about your experience at IAFNS this summer?

Stella Wang

I think my introduction to the entire team was during the IAFNS Annual Summer Science Symposium in mid-June. But before that, I already was contacted by different people, including my mentor. IAFNS Director of Science Programs Marie Latulippe had already given me a lot of direction in terms of what the research project would be. We had an initial proposal, and then based on the feedback from the meeting in June, we have a revised proposal really focusing more on the NIH Toolbox, attention and memory. My interactions with the team, so far, has been very positive.

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What advice would you have for others considering IAFNS Summer Fellowship program?

Stella Wang

I think this is a very fulfilling experience. You know, I do think that I found it has a very unique mix with people from different industry, government and academic organizations joining together to work on something that's very interesting and important. Because the length of the summer fellowship is not extensive, it's only about 10 weeks. So, I think anyone who wants to take on this job, needs to be prepared, need to really have a clear set of goals, what they want to achieve, and, and very defined scope. So, they know where to go, and also start to network with different advisors and mentors within the organization so they can get the most benefit from different expertise inside IAFNS.

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Thank you Stella. We are thrilled to have worked with you this summer. And we wish you all the best.