

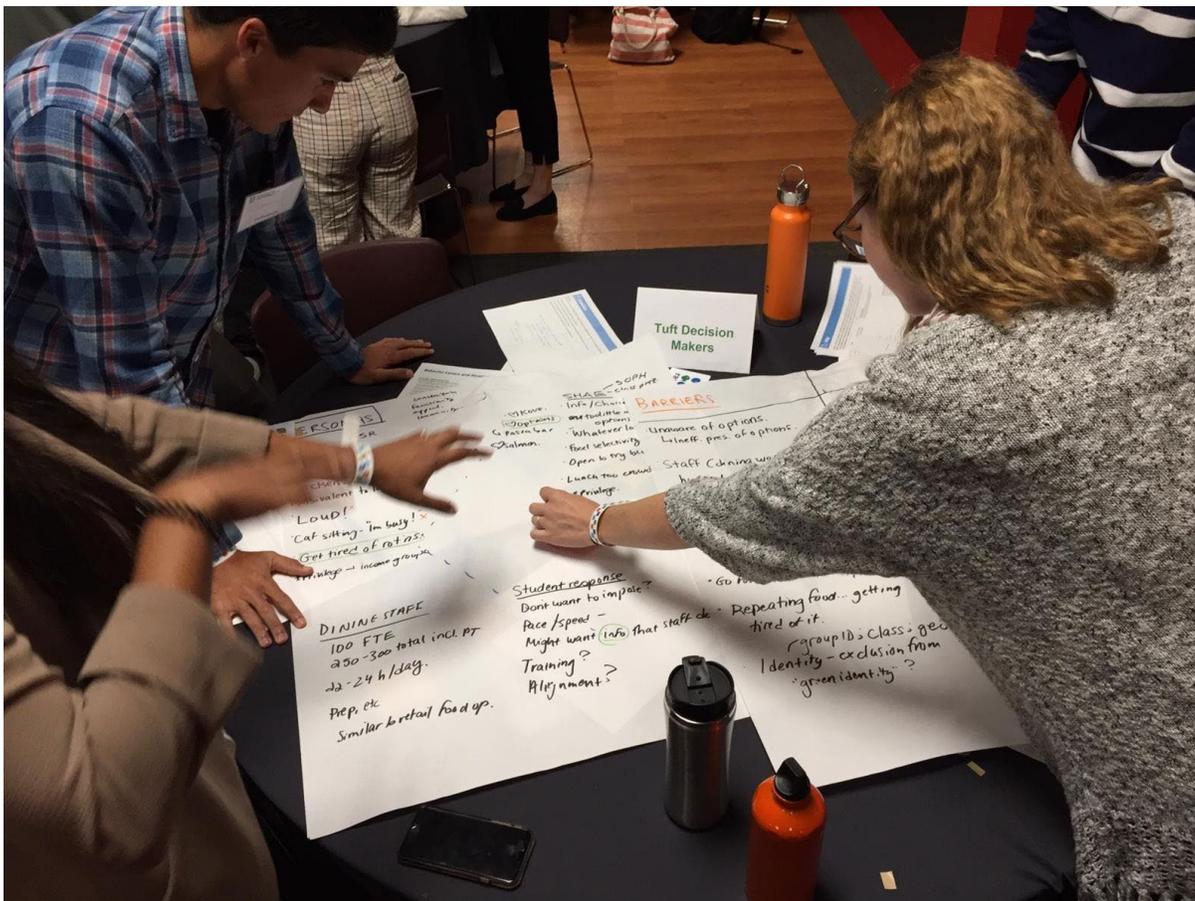
Connor Hudson, Aesclinn Donohue, Mikalyn Rush, Farah Momen, Ravi Janjwadia

The Dickinson College Human-Centered Design Challenge was a unique experience for our team, a mix of Fletcher students with a variety of professional and academic backgrounds. The challenge put forth was to design a solution that increases plant-based diets on the Dickinson College campus, convening teams from universities across the United States. Our team of 5 - known as the "Tufts Decision Makers" - traveled to Dickinson, PA to represent The Fletcher School at the 1-day design challenge and the Be.Hive Summit on the following day. Both events were hosted by RARE, an organization that leads in behavioral change interventions pertaining to environmental sustainability.

"Having never been a part of a design challenge, the whole experience was an enlightening one. I was afforded the opportunity to network with leaders in the field of behavioral science, which is pivotal in influencing end user behavior in a holistic approach to climate change," said Connor.

Our team's approach was to understand the needs and wants of Dickinson's college students as it pertains to their dining habits. We heard from 4 students who described their experience in choosing and consuming food. Some of their concerns included a lack of awareness of plant-based options, lack of diversity in food choice, and overcrowding in dining halls.

"Interviews are a critical part of the design process," Aesclinn noted. "It was great to meet Dickinson students and hear from them directly, and it was an important exercise in understanding how different environments and populations can shape the solutions being built."



Dickinson's college director of food services also shared some of his challenges in maintaining supply chains and catering to the preferences of their diverse student body. We then synthesized this information and applied design thinking principles to create a solution that met the requirements of both the foodservice and student body. Our solution was an iterative voting program that increases the self-efficacy of students in their food choices by allowing them to provide feedback and vote on a selection of plant-based options curated by the head chef of food services.

This solution was built upon a number of behavioral insights and strategies for change that were incorporated throughout the challenge. Our solution was designed to use emotional appeal and leverage social influence to encourage student engagement. Another critical component of our design was using existing structures such as the student-run Food Advisory Council and ensuring that implementation would minimize the decision making effort particularly for students who consume more meat-products as this was our key demographic.

"The experience helped me realize how 'design' and 'behavior change' can take on different meanings and methods," Mikalyn said. "I worked at the Duke Center for Advanced Hindsight over the summer, where I learned methods for designing behavioral interventions as they relate to environmental change. It was interesting to compare the methods and try to implement them in a fast-paced environment."

While our team did not place in the finals for the competition, the challenge was an interesting exercise in defining what actually constitutes behavior change and effective design. Our lens as Fletcher students and the resulting solution was a bit different from the results of other teams. We were very focused on integrating those most excluded from the campus's conversations around plant-based diets, and were targeting those least likely to change their behaviors.

"It was a difficult balance to strike between creating a solution that's ambitious, but still feasible," Farah mentions. "Our team veered towards feasibility, and we've had a number of conversations at and since the challenge around what the right mix of these factors are. It was also a great opportunity to see how other teams approached these aspects of behavior change."



"I had a positive experience. I have participated in a few other design challenges and this one was particularly unique as it blended different fields such as behavioral science and the environment. I appreciated the opportunity to apply design thinking in a dynamic setting," said Ravi.

Our experience at Dickinson College is already informing how members of our team are thinking about social change. Three of our members - Farah, Mikalyn, and Aesclinn - are exploring the possibility of creating their own organization at and beyond Fletcher, one that systematizes and scales human-centered design tools across different projects through simultaneous bottom-up (i.e. user-led, to ensure relevance and sustainability) and top-down (where power for change is often held) interventions.