

Teaching and Education Methods

Yes... There Are Great Careers in Food Retail! Using Pre-recorded Interviews to Showcase Career Pathways and Increase Student Engagement

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Abstract

Despite the economic importance of the food retailing industry, the literature suggests that food retailers face a major talent recruitment challenge, mostly stemming from negative perceptions of the industry. Therefore, it is crucial that higher education food and agribusiness programs help students better understand and appreciate potential career opportunities and professional career paths. This research develops a teaching innovation that enhances student engagement in asynchronous online learning and explores how such an innovative pedagogy relates to students' attitudes toward careers in food retailing, with relevance extending across educational formats and disciplines. Through an exploratory quasi-experiment, it is illustrated that innovative pedagogy in online learning may make a difference with respect to attracting students to food retailing careers. The outcomes included more positive attitudes toward a career in food retailing and higher interest levels among the students who were exposed to the teaching innovation compared to students in the control group.

1 Introduction

The field of agribusiness encompasses the process of getting food from farm to fork; agribusiness marketing, then, is a broad term that is concerned with marketing functions that span both upstream and downstream food supply chains. These functions are wide-ranging and diverse—and include activities such as sales of grower inputs to managing a food retailer's private label category. Accordingly, several US colleges and universities (e.g., Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Arizona State University, Texas A&M, Michigan State University, University of Georgia, and University of Delaware) have incorporated courses focused on downstream activities, specifically food retailing, as an area of study within their agricultural and agribusiness programs. The industry need for a talented workforce is tangible; food retailers such as supermarkets, big-box retailers, club stores, convenience stores, and online food retailers compete for talent in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Food retailers have long adapted to technological advancements, from Walmart's pioneering networked inventory control in the 1970s to today's data-driven, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered retail ecosystems. The industry continues to evolve with innovations such as predictive analytics, frictionless checkout systems, and real-time inventory tracking. Modern food retailing integrates AI-driven demand forecasting, personalized digital marketing, and automated fulfillment centers, leveraging wireless connectivity and vast data networks to enhance efficiency and consumer engagement (Palus 2019; Baker 2024). The Food Marketing Institute (FMI), a trade association for food retailers and wholesalers, recently noted the ability to hire a talented workforce as a key challenge to the food retailing industry, stating "the demand for omnichannel retail and constant technological advancement will change the way companies operate, with competitive advantages going to those with strong data and analytics capabilities" (Baum 2018). Coupled with this

rise of technology innovation is the departure from the workforce of Baby Boomers, many of whom are retiring from management and leadership positions. These ongoing and pending retirements contribute to a potential vacuum of both institutional knowledge and leadership, leading to an impending talent gap (Prueitt, Van der Laarse, and Calhoun 2012; Kelly 2024). Because of these and other factors, the FMI notes that “food retailers will compete more against other industries to attract new talent, not only to support traditional workforce roles but also to meet these newer technical demands” (Baum 2018). In this evolving environment, food retailers, as well as other agri-food businesses, are increasingly challenged in recruiting and retaining the talent needed to be competitive (Prueitt, Van der Laarse, and Calhoun 2012; Shelman and Connolly 2012; Baum 2018).

With these challenges come opportunities for those desiring a career in the food retail industry, especially for college graduates (Springer and Zwiebach 2004). Contrary to popular belief, the food retail industry is an exciting one. In addition to being increasingly high-tech, food retailing is a dynamic and essential business in our economy, with ample opportunities for career-track jobs in all functional areas of business (e.g., accounting, human resources, supply chain management, marketing, computer information systems, and data analytics). Despite the opportunities, there remain significant challenges in attracting college graduates to the food retail industry given a number of negative stereotypes (Broadbridge 2003a; Mokhlis 2014). As food and agribusiness educators, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that students understand the possibilities available to them and that business stakeholders in all food and agriculture related industries have access to bright and emerging talent.

A question that arises is how we can make career opportunities in the food industry—in particular food retailing—more attractive to college students. This question becomes even more interesting as many higher education institutions in the United States have actively embraced online learning, with several universities even launching online degrees, minors, or certificates specific to the food industry (e.g., Cornell University: Food and Beverage Management certificate; Arizona State University: Food Industry Management and Marketing certificate and undergraduate business degree; Central Washington University: Food and Agribusiness Management and Marketing minor/certificate; and Portland State University: Food, Beverage, and Goods Leadership Certificate). Many online degree and certificate programs are designed to be delivered asynchronously to provide flexibility to the learner. However, asynchronous online learning has also been criticized for not providing enough meaningful opportunities for interaction with faculty, guest speakers, and even classmates relative to traditional face-to-face settings.

This research aims to address these issues by exploring how a unique teaching innovation design, based on student feedback and deployed in an online food retailing course, influences student attitudes toward careers in food retailing. Specifically, the innovation implemented is a series of video interviews with food industry professionals, where the topics of the interviews align with key concepts covered in the corresponding weekly class modules. The format of the interviews is designed to be conversational, allowing back and forth engagement between the instructor and the interviewee. This design helps to simulate a more “in-person” environment in an asynchronous online course while also emphasizing exciting facets of the food industry through interviewees’ stories and experiences, while having the ability to control the discussion and ensure its relevance to course material.

In the remainder of this paper, we review the literature examining the expanding role of online education in higher learning and subsequent challenges in fostering student engagement in online classes as well as student perceptions of food retailing as a career. We then describe the methodology used in our study, including the survey instrument and questions used in the quasi-experimental design. We also provide a detailed description of how the intervention (video interviews) was conceived using feedback from students in the control group. We then examine the results of the survey and follow-up questions administered after each video to determine whether the intervention helped increase positive

perceptions of the food retailing industry as a career destination. The paper concludes with discussion of the results and implications for promoting careers in the food industry.

2 Literature Review

The underlying question that motivates this research is how careers in food retailing can be made more attractive to college students. This ongoing challenge, coupled with the increasing number of colleges and universities that have adopted or are exploring avenues to deliver course and program content online, creates an environment that is ripe for creative solutions (Dumford and Miller 2018). According to Allen and Seaman (2013), almost 70 percent of higher education institutions in the United States consider online education an important element of their long-term strategies. COVID-19 further hastened the adoption of online learning by universities (Adedoyin and Soykan 2020). In Fall 2021, almost 9.4 million college students—or 61 percent of all undergraduate students—were enrolled in at least one distance education course, while nearly 28 percent of all undergraduate students took distance education courses exclusively (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2022). This effect appears to be enduring in nature; Statista (2024) reports that the online university education market is projected to reach revenue of \$136.8 billion in 2025—primarily generated from US colleges—while the online education market is expected to have 1.1 billion users by 2029. While online technology at large can provide efficient and convenient methods to accomplish program learner outcomes (Parsad and Lewis 2008; Chen, Lambert, and Guidry 2010; Junco, Elavsky, and Heiberger 2013; Fadde and Vu 2014), challenges in developing engaging content and its impact on learning is nontrivial and an ongoing concern for educators. This is particularly true in the asynchronous online modality, as encouraging student participation in asynchronous learning activities is often a challenge (Northey et al. 2015; Elumalai and Bino 2022).

In a survey of 3,089 North American higher education students, almost 80 percent of participants stated that online experiences were not engaging (Read 2020). While student engagement is often thought of in terms of how instructors and students interact with each other, student engagement can also be described as the level of student motivation to learn about the topics covered, student interest, and the way they interact with others in the course (Gay and Betts 2020). Course delivery in online settings requires pedagogical approaches that will create “as many learning and engagement opportunities as possible” (Gray and DiLoreto 2016, p. 5). Furthermore, students are likely to become more invested in the course content (e.g., discussions and assignments) and with their peers when the topics covered are relevant to current issues in their field such that they can connect the concepts they learn to practice (Shearer 2003). Teaching innovation, therefore, has become more important than ever. It is vital that educators consider the challenges and opportunities presented by, and the evolving nature of, the online learning environment, including learner interaction, instructor engagement, and course structure (Allen and Seaman 2013).

Given this, a broader, more industry-focused question emerges as to how we can make food retailing careers more attractive to college students, especially in asynchronous online learning environments. Indeed, the need for talent in the food retailing industry has emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity. Despite the fact that grocery retailers employ more than 8.5 million individuals in the United States and the European Union, they face two major impediments: the high demand for new skills that are hard to fill amid a shortage of available talent and increased rates of attrition for their existing employees (Mathew et al. 2022). As Carol Abel, vice president of education for the FMI noted, workforce and talent top the list of challenges that face the food industry (Abel 2023). Adding to this problem is the overall negative perception toward careers in retailing by college students. It has been well documented that descriptors such as “poor working hours,” “monotony,” and “dull” are used by students to characterize a career in retailing (Swinyard 1981; Swinyard, Langrehr, and Smith 1991;

Schmidt and Corbett 1994; Broadbridge 2003a). Moreover, college students perceive specific retail sectors—such as grocery—to be less attractive than other retail businesses (Broadbridge 2003a). Along the same lines, Kretz and Partlow (2001) showed that the image and prestige of on-site foodservice were consistently viewed by students as worse when compared to other segments of the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the stereotypes linked to a career in retailing more generally, especially those of long work hours, low compensation, monotonous work, and poor work-life balance have lingered over the past three decades (Houlton and Thomas 1990; Swinyard, Langrehr, and Smith 1991; Rhoads et al. 2002; Broadbridge 2003b). As Oh, Weitz, and Lim (2016) noted, when Broadbridge (2003b) compared his results with studies conducted during the early 1980s and 1990s (Swinyard 1981; Swinyard, Langrehr, and Smith 1991), negative attitudes toward retail careers have prevailed. One possible reason for these persistent misconceptions is the selection bias in visible role models for careers in different fields (Broadbridge 2003b; You Science 2024). Students often interact with food retailing employees in entry-level, customer-facing positions, while the corporate or managerial roles remain largely unseen. In contrast, other fields—such as entrepreneurship, marketing, and advertising—frequently showcase successful figures, which may lead students to overestimate their chances of success in those industries. This disparity in visibility may contribute to the ongoing difficulty of attracting students to careers in food retailing. Additionally, other factors such as lack of knowledge about job career paths and earnings growth potential (Alfonsi, Namubiru and Spaziani 2024), lack of exposure to certain career fields, and previous retail experience (Broadbridge 2003b) may serve to negatively affect perceptions about retail careers. Broadbridge (2003b) found that students with retail work experience were three times more likely to report that they would not opt for a career in retailing compared to their counterparts with no retail work experience. The positions held were likely minimum wage jobs, which did not accurately reflect the type of work they would hold as college graduates.

Despite the negative stereotypes held by college students of working in retail careers, food retail increasingly provides numerous professional opportunities for graduates to work in a dynamic and professional industry with considerable advancement potential (King 2012). Furthermore, the search for talent remains a high priority for food retail organizations and retail businesses more generally (National Grocers Association; Food Marketing Institute; Oh, Weitz, and Lim 2016). Beyond some insights provided by Broadbridge (2003a), to our knowledge there are no recent studies that specifically consider college student attitudes toward careers in food retailing. This question becomes particularly relevant given the increasing prevalence of online learning opportunities in universities, especially in food industry-related courses and degree programs. As universities continue to expand their online offerings, it is essential to understand how these virtual learning environments shape students' career perceptions and interests. With the growing demand for talent in food retail, investigating this connection can provide valuable insights into how online education influences students' awareness, perceptions, and willingness to pursue careers in this industry.

3 Methodology

Given the scarcity of research pertaining to student perceptions of careers in food retailing, particularly with respect to online learning, we opted for a quasi-experiment of exploratory nature to (1) identify a teaching innovation that enhances student engagement in asynchronous online learning environments and (2) explore whether the teaching innovation is likely to influence students' attitudes toward careers in food retailing. Both the identification of the teaching innovation and its subsequent deployment and evaluation were conducted in an online, asynchronous food retailing course.

The course used in this study is titled Food Retailing. It is taught in an asynchronous online format in both the spring and fall semesters at a large public university in the United States. The course focuses largely on the unique management functions of food retailers, food retailing trends, and consumer

behavior, serving as a core class for a degree program in Food Industry Management. The course also serves as a core course for an undergraduate certificate in Food Industry Management and Marketing and is routinely taken as an elective by students pursuing degrees, minors, and certificates in programs such as business administration, sustainability, and nutrition, among others. Generally, between 60 and 80 students enroll each term, with the percentage of students taking the course as a requirement for the degree in Food Industry Management making up approximately 10 percent of total enrollment. The course content consists of a combination of lectures, readings, assignments, and cases (see Appendix A for the structure of the course and course requirements), and the same instructor teaches the course each semester.

The Food Retailing course is offered for a period of 7.5 weeks, each week corresponding to a topic module that comprises both text and online article readings for that week. On the course's learning management system page (Canvas), the professor posts a video providing a brief overview and discussion of the week's topic along with an explanation of the assignments. Students are required to complete two written assignments and one 1-hour quiz each week. All quizzes are open notes, yet structured so that students need to be familiar with the content in order to successfully complete the quiz within the time allotted. The written assignments include brief Harvard Business School cases, chapter summaries, activities, and analyses of various related items. Throughout the term, announcements are posted weekly on current industry-related news stories of interest. There are no requirements regarding these current events; they are simply provided to students who are interested in current happenings in the industry. Extensive comments are provided on all written assignments. Students have 1 week to complete each weekly module, with the exception of the last module, which, due to a heavier workload, students have 10 days to complete.

3.1 Research Design

A quasi-experimental—nonequivalent control group post-test-only—design was conducted. Generally, quasi-experiments are used in field settings when random assignment is impossible. They are also conducted to examine the effectiveness of a treatment such as an educational intervention (Price, Jhangiani, and Chiang I-Chant 2015). Because students were not able to be randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups, the issue of confounding variables exists. However, consistent with methodological protocol, steps were taken to minimize the risk of confounding variables in the experimental design. Namely, the same course with the same instructor at the same institution was used. These experimental design elements help increase the internal validity of the study (Price, Jhangiani, and Chiang I-Chant 2015).

3.2 Procedure

Food Retailing is offered online in the fall and spring semesters. Students self-enrolled in both the spring course, which was the control group, and the fall course, which was the treatment group. In the control group, the teaching format of text, cases, articles, assignments, and quizzes was employed (see Appendix A). At the end of the term, a detailed questionnaire was administered. This included validated scales that queried respondents on interests in a food retailing career, knowledge about food retailing jobs, and attitudes toward a career in food retailing. To better understand individual respondent motivations, questions pertaining to desired employment upon graduation, preferred job attributes, current stage in job search, and reasons for taking Food Retailing were also asked. Demographics, employment, and program-related questions concluded the questionnaire. Considering the exploratory nature of this research, the questionnaire used in the control group included two open-ended questions pertaining to students' experiences with online courses, with particular focus on students' perceptions as to what contributes to a "good" online course, as well as their opinions toward activities that could enhance the

online course. The intention was to elicit student responses to help guide the development of a teaching innovation that could be used in the treatment group.

In the treatment group, the course was taught with the same teaching format as in the control condition, with the incorporation of the teaching innovation being the only change. The same questionnaire was administered at the end of the term. In both terms, students voluntarily completed the anonymous survey. Extra credit was offered for the completion of the survey. Students provided their personal information on the last page of the survey. All surveys were accessed by an independent faculty member who detached the last page, compiled a list of names to receive extra credit, and forwarded the surveys, without the personal information, to the authors. Students who wished to receive extra credit, but did not wish to complete the survey, were offered an alternative extra credit activity, for which there were no takers.

3.3 Initial Findings and Stimuli Development

The teaching innovation used in this study was determined based on student feedback obtained from the survey administered at the end of the spring term (control group). One of the questions from the survey asked: “Think about the best online class you have taken. In a few words, what made it the best class?” Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyze the open-ended responses to this question. TA is an applicable method for analyzing qualitative survey data (Willig and Rogers 2017). As a general guideline, when qualitative data are collected in conjunction with a larger survey, a sample size of at least 50 completed surveys is recommended (Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2017; adapted from Brau and Clark 2013). From the analysis of this question, three themes clearly emerged as to what students desire in online courses: (1) courses that are well-organized, predictable, have a clear structure, and include no surprises; (2) professors that are passionate about their field and subsequently good at engaging students; and (3) content that is relatable to students’ careers or the real world. These themes are discussed more below.

3.3.1 Well-Organized, Predictable, Clear Structure, No Surprises

Pertaining to the first theme, students appreciate when online courses are well-structured, well-organized, and contain no changes (or “surprises,” as several respondents referred to changes). This finding is not surprising, as students tend to appreciate these attributes in all courses (Delaney et al. 2010). However, in online courses, the value placed on these attributes may be heightened as students may choose online courses to fit their respective schedules or to accommodate their unique preferences for learning. This theme may be particularly relevant for this sample as 50 percent of the students in the control group worked full-time, with an additional 34 percent working part-time. Furthermore, 44 percent of the enrolled students in the control group were online degree students, rather than in-person students choosing to take an online course. Online degree-seeking students tend to be nontraditional (older than 24), thus more likely to be married or have dependents and subsequently more household provider responsibilities (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Thus, it is highly important to these individuals that they be able to plan their schedules in as predictable a manner as possible. Indeed, several students indicated that they appreciated when online courses were flexible. The responses indicated that “flexibility” referred to having work assigned far enough in advance to accommodate work and family obligations; flexibility in due dates was not indicated. Perhaps most insightful about this finding was the frequency with which respondents listed or suggested flexibility. Many indicated only this attribute when considering what made an online course a good one. Sample qualitative data from this question supporting this theme are provided in Table 1.

3.3.2 Instructor Engagement

The level of instructor engagement was the next theme prevalent across many respondents. Respondents indicated that instructor enthusiasm, engagement, and passion for the subject made their online course more interesting and engaging. Students pointed to different forms of instructor engagement including participating in discussion boards, personalized notes, and comments written to students on assignments, recounting subject-related anecdotes, sharing experiences, posting announcements, and a general willingness of the instructor to give their time. Sample qualitative data that support this theme are provided in Table 1.

3.3.3 Real-World Relevance

The last theme that emerged was “relevance,” with relevance to work, the real world, personal lives, and the subject matter all mentioned in the open-ended responses. Students valued relevant textbooks, assignments, and activities and eschewed “busy work,” videos that did not tie in to the subject matter, and endless reading. Many stated they appreciated information that held relevance to their everyday

Table 1. Responses to open-ended question: Think about the best online class you have taken. In a few words, what made it the best class?

Theme	Example Statements
Course organization	“Organized.” “Clear guidelines.” “Instructions were clear, work was predictable.” “I knew what was expected of me.” “Clarity of assignments, due dates, and course’s material.” “Consistent due dates; routine was manageable.” “Simple, straight to the point, easy to understand the material to complete.” “The easy to understand and straight forward format.” “Canvas organization and clarity on what was expected.” “The Course had a structured schedule, meaning that it was clear when assignments were due (no confusion), and the course was easy to navigate.” “Very organized, attentive teacher, easy to navigate.” “Clear, concise, and no busy work.” “It was easy to follow.” “Being able to work ahead in case something with my children came up.” “Online lectures that provided ample content and time to review material as well as online lectures to learn course material.”
Instructor engagement	“The teacher was engaged and loved teaching the lesson at hand, which translates into a much more interesting course for me. If a professor can translate their passion about an industry to me, I instantly am engaged.” “The professor was active in the course.” “The professor was genuine in the comments that were left on the assignments. I didn’t feel annoyed to do the assignments for this class.”
Real-world relevance	“The information I learned, the readings were fascinating and very relevant to what is happening in the economy today.” “It had interesting, valuable information that I could use in future endeavors.” “It’s relevance to my career goals.” “It provided a lot of resources that actually helped instead of just videos.” “Interesting content that can be related back to the real world.” “Business Writing was the best online course because the teacher gave great stuff to learn from, and our hw was stuff that could actually help our career.”

lives. These observations are consistent with ideas put forth by Galea (2017), suggesting that educators need to adapt to different learning needs required for a knowledge-based economy. Table 1 includes sample qualitative data that support this theme.

3.3.4 Themes for Course Improvement

While the first open-ended question helped identify those characteristics that contributed positively to online courses in general, the next open-ended question helped determine how the current Food Retailing course could be improved. The question was: “Please indicate if there was something that you would have liked this course to have included (e.g., different types of activities, a project, guest speakers, etc.)” TA was again applied. Several themes emerged, including both facets of the course that students thought could be improved, as well as facets that students liked. The themes are reported and briefly discussed below. Note that, when reporting the themes, the number of students indicating the theme is reported; however, it is important to emphasize that this is qualitative research, and no inferences can be drawn about the prevalence of phenomena observed beyond the sample (Maxwell 2010).

- (1) *Guest speakers.* Twelve students (15 percent) indicated that they would have liked to have heard from guest speakers to lend greater insight into the industry. Responses echoed the theme that guest speakers would be a welcome addition to the course, and a few indicated the value guest speakers bring to the relevance of the course material. One respondent wrote, “Additionally, guest speakers is something that I would have liked to see to get a deeper understanding of the food retailing industry.” Similarly, three respondents wanted more discussion of real-world application or discussion of food retailing topics.
- (2) *More explanation and interaction.* Nine students also indicated a desire to hear discussion of current events, “war” stories, and experiences related to the course topics. Along those lines, some indicated that greater interaction with the professor and classmates was also desirable.
- (3) *More videos.* Seven students (8.8 percent) indicated their preference for the inclusion of more videos. Pre-intervention, the course included a weekly, brief introductory video (15–20 minutes) of the week’s topic and explanation of assignments. The students were also assigned a video case (Eataly). Some respondents indicated that they were visual learners or that videos helped to reinforce reading material. There was also a suggestion that reading alone without videos to augment becomes monotonous. These respondents suggested more videos to help keep them engaged with the class material.
- (4) *Case studies.* Two respondents indicated they liked the Harvard Business School (HBS) case studies and would have liked working on more case studies.
- (5) *Project/No project.* Six students (7.5 percent) indicated their preference for a project to be included, in which they could apply learned concepts. A couple of respondents explicitly indicated that projects done individually (as opposed to within a group) were preferred. For example, specific comments included “a project that required us to go into a store,” “more interactive activities ... less papers,” and “a project would be awesome, instead of having to read and write every week.” However, there were also a number of students who explicitly stated that they were happy the course required no project.
- (6) *Less.* The theme of less work also emerged; two students indicated their desire for less reading and fewer assignments.
- (7) *Don’t change a thing.* Nineteen students also indicated that no changes should be made to the course. These students appreciated the engaging text, the wide range of topics covered, the predictability of the course, and the optional current event readings.

Themes 4 through 7 either do not lend themselves well as viable options for course changes or, more simply, suggest no changes at all (theme 7). For example, including more case studies in a 7.5-week course that already has three HBS cases would likely put an undue burden on students, or the caliber of case analysis might suffer. Similarly, incorporating a project might help to engage some but might be burdensome or pose scheduling difficulties for others with less flexible schedules. Thus, the decision was made to focus on themes 1 through 3: the inclusion of guest speakers, more explanation and interaction, and more videos, respectively.

Based on the above qualitative findings, a teaching innovation was subsequently developed to be implemented in the treatment group. Ideas for the teaching innovation needed to be conducive to an asynchronous, online teaching format. Advances in technology have facilitated the development of computer-based multimedia materials such as videos and recordings. This fosters a multimedia-rich environment where students can engage with various audio-visual resources while also promoting an active learning experience that enhances their engagement (Tugtekin and Dursun 2022). Research suggests that interactive videos can enhance students' motivation and make learning more enjoyable (Pulukuri and Abrams 2020; Tugtekin and Dursun 2022). In their review of teaching and learning innovations in distance education, Tugtekin and Dursun (2022) found strong evidence that incorporating interactive elements in videos increases engagement across various types of learners. Their study specifically incorporated the use of question balloons that required responses as well as links to additional, optional content. Wachtler et al. (2016) identified several interactive features that can enhance engagement in educational videos, including attention-check questions like CAPTCHAs, "ask teacher" text boxes for direct student inquiries, and embedded text-based or multiple-choice questions at key points in the video. Although much of the existing research has focused on the sciences and secondary education, these findings suggest that innovative instructional materials can also support learning in distance education environments (Northey et al. 2015; Wilson 2016).

Relying on the themes of real-world relevance, organized and predictable class structure, and instructor engagement revealed from the open-ended survey questions, we chose to immerse guest speakers into the course in an asynchronous manner, directly aligning the guest speakers' expertise with key topics covered in the weekly modules. That is, guest speakers were not only asked the typical questions about their careers and daily tasks (which is often the case with most guest speaker interactions) but were also asked to contribute directly to the pedagogy of the class. This was done by incorporating a conversational format, similar to a talk-show type interview, between the instructor and the guest speaker. These "conversations"—an important distinction from guest lecturing—were strategically placed in the course modules corresponding directly to key topics and case studies. Specifically, the guest speakers were asked to offer their opinion on the case and provide their insights relative to their functional expertise and past experiences dealing with similar situations. This allowed the format to be more engaging and personal, as well as ensure it related to the course material. The conversations were also kept short (e.g., 15 to 20 minutes) to maintain student interest. The videos were professionally edited, and PlayPosit¹ quizzes were incorporated to ensure students obtain and retain the desired information from the video. Additionally, a brief two-question survey regarding the video was placed in the corresponding weekly course module. This helped us obtain timely student feedback regarding the video.

In addition to addressing survey feedback, we assumed that incorporating select guest speakers would help students better understand the opportunities and business complexities of the food retailing industry. This approach was also expected to enhance student engagement, provide context for the course material, and improve knowledge retention. Furthermore, featuring diverse guest speakers would introduce a variety of perspectives, aligning with findings in the literature on effective learning strategies

¹ PlayPosit is an application that allows for interactive quizzes and assessments to be inserted into videos.

(Metrejean, Pittman, and Zarzeski 2002; Riebe et al. 2013). Also, enabling students to interact during the learning process has been shown to increase student engagement in the class (Umbach and Wawrzynski 2005). To further enhance student connection, all guest speakers contacted were alumni of the institution. Alumni were intentionally sought, as it was believed that being alumni of the university made their positions seem more attainable to students. The first two speakers were identified on LinkedIn using a search for the name of the university and the words “food retailing”; a few candidates were identified and those whose expertise seemed to fit with the course content were contacted by the professor. The second two speakers were former students of the professor who had graduated in the recent past (within 3 years).

Four conversations were inserted in the same-format course in the treatment group. The speakers included a director of communication and public affairs for Bashas’ Family of Stores; a territory sales manager for Mars Wrigley Confectionery; a regional manager for Eataly Marketplace; and a business development representative for Oppy. Guest speakers’ backgrounds and the topics discussed are summarized in Appendix B.

3.4 Participants

There were 135 students who participated in the quasi-experiment (80 in the control group and 55 in the treatment group). As an incentive to participate in the experiment, students were provided with 20 extra credit points in a class worth 1,000 points. Students were informed that the questionnaire would take approximately 20 minutes (the time estimated by Qualtrics, the platform on which the survey was constructed and administered). Researchers received approval from the university’s Internal Review Board in the Office of Research Compliance, and participants were apprised of their rights via a letter of informed consent presented to them prior to engaging in the research. Students were assured that participation in the survey was voluntary, they could withdraw at any time, and the data would be anonymous, with no way for the instructor to identify the student. An independent professor, not involved in the teaching of the class, retrieved the data and removed the last question, which asked for student names in order for extra credit to be awarded.

Fifty-six percent of the participants were female and 44 percent male. About 54 percent of the participants were traditional-aged students, falling in the age range of 20 to 23. Another 17 percent fell in the category of 24 to 26, with nearly one-third (29 percent) falling in an older-aged category of 27 to 46 years. Almost 50 percent of all respondents worked full-time while 37 percent worked part-time.

4 Results

There were 135 students who participated in the quasi-experiment; however, 8 responses were eliminated for various reasons (e.g., missing responses to questions), yielding a final sample size of 127 ($N = 127$). A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between a teaching innovation and students’ interests in a career in food retailing. In the survey, students were asked if they would consider a career in food retailing. Responses were coded as a dummy variable (yes = 1; no = 0), and a chi-square test was conducted in SPSS. In the control group, 41 percent responded “no,” while 59 percent selected “yes.” In the teaching innovation group (treatment group), 19 percent selected “No,” whereas 81 percent chose “Yes.” While in both the control and treatment groups, the percentage of students who would consider a career in food retail is higher than those who indicated that they would not consider such a career, the difference was considerably higher for the treatment group where the teaching innovation occurred (81 percent vs. 19 percent). Also, the percentage of students who responded “Yes” to a career in food retailing in the teaching innovation group (81 percent) is higher than the percentage in the control group (59 percent). These differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 6.86, p = .009$).

Next, Model 1 of Hayes's (2022) PROCESS² macro for SPSS was used to explore how various student characteristics interact with a teaching innovation (0 = control group; 1 = teaching innovation) to impact students' attitudes toward a career in food retailing. We tested the moderating role of students' knowledge about food retailing jobs, the presence of current or past experience working in food retailing, employment status, gender, and whether they are a first-generation college student, while controlling for age.

Results revealed negative coefficient signs for the teaching innovation × first-generation college student and teaching innovation × experience working in food retailing interactions, while the coefficient of the teaching innovation × employment status had a positive sign. Nonetheless, none of these paths were statistically significant. The interaction effects (between teaching innovation and gender) on students' attitudes toward a career in the food retail industry are only marginally significant ($p < 0.10$). However, the conditional effects derived from the PROCESS analysis yield meaningful insights into the dynamics of the interaction. Specifically, in the course where the teaching innovation occurred, female students (versus their male counterparts) reported more positive attitudes toward a career in food retailing ($\beta = 0.284$, 95 percent CI [0.011, 0.557]), and this result was significant ($p = .042$). These findings indicate that female students perceive a career in food retailing as offering a range of professional advantages, including opportunities for work-related travel, leadership development, attainment of work–family balance, job stability, competitive remuneration, and a clearly articulated career progression. With respect to the control group, the attitudes toward a career in food retailing were not statistically different between female and male students ($\beta = -0.035$, 95 percent CI [-0.296, 0.227]; $p = .794$).

The interaction effects between teaching innovation and students' knowledge about food retailing jobs on attitudes toward careers in food retail are significant (β [teaching innovation × students' knowledge] = 0.235, 95 percent CI [0.017, 0.452]; $p = .035$). Next, examining the conditional effects produced by PROCESS, in the course where the teaching innovation occurred, students who had higher levels of knowledge toward food retailing jobs reported more positive attitudes toward a career in this industry ($\beta = 0.308$, 95 percent CI [0.130, 0.486]; $p = .001$). In the control group, the attitudes toward a career in food retailing were not statistically different among students of various levels of knowledge about food retailing jobs. These findings underscore that the teaching innovation had a more positive impact on students' attitudes toward a career in the food industry—particularly among those who recognize the availability of diverse business functions within food retailing (e.g., accounting, finance), acknowledge the necessity of a college degree for career advancement, or understand the industry's potential to leverage business-related competencies.

4.1 Qualitative Findings

In the teaching innovation group, after each video, students were given the option of answering three follow-up questions. No extra credit was given for this task. The answers were provided anonymously and voluntarily. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following two statements: "The interview I just watched contained interesting information about the food retailing industry," and "the interview I just watched positively impacted my beliefs about opportunities in the food industry." They were provided a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Agree (7) to Strongly Disagree (1). The third question was an open-ended question that asked them to explain their responses to the questions. Responses to the open-ended question were overwhelmingly positive. All of the data from the videos were combined for analysis, and TA was again used to develop themes from the

² PROCESS, which is embedded in SPSS, represents a computational tool for observed variable path analysis-based moderation analyses. PROCESS simplifies the tasks when testing for moderation and allows us to probe the interactions between independent variables. PROCESS generates conditional effects in moderation models, in addition to model coefficients, standard errors, t and p values, and confidence intervals using OLS regressions (Hayes 2022).

responses. While this research is exploratory and the findings cannot be generalized, it is worth noting that positive comments overwhelmingly outnumber negative ones (45:5). Four themes emerged from the responses.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Opened Up New Considerations of Career Opportunities in the Food Industry

Students overwhelmingly agreed with the statement that the video interviews positively impacted their beliefs about opportunities in the food industry. Many of the responses suggested that students generally had been previously unaware of the career possibilities offered by the food industry. Indeed, the interviews helped to illuminate the opportunities in food retailing and helped to put the food industry on the students' radar screen. Example responses are listed in Table 2. As can be seen by the responses, students were energized by the video interviews and the realization of exciting career opportunities in the food retail industry.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Provided Insight into Jobs and Career Paths

While the responses under Theme 1 largely supported student views that there are ample professional career opportunities in food retailing, the responses categorized within this theme delved deeper into the specifics of those opportunities. Respondents highlighted the diversity of job roles available within food retailing, extending beyond traditional store-level positions to include roles in marketing, accounting, human resources, supply chain management. These insights helped students see how their varied academic backgrounds and personal interests could align with meaningful and fulfilling careers in the food retail sector. In particular, students noted that the speakers conveyed a strong openness to hiring individuals from a wide array of majors. This inclusivity broadened students' understanding of where they might fit within the industry and increased their sense of potential contribution. See Table 2 for a list of representative responses that illustrate these insights.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Interviews Were Interesting, Provided Real-World Insight

Several of the comments confirmed that the interviews were viewed as interesting, insightful, and relevant to real-world scenarios in food retailing. Many comments reflected appreciation for how the interviews provided insight on how industry challenges were handled, such as adapting to the impacts of COVID-19 or navigating communication strategies in complex retail environments. Overall, the interviews sparked curiosity, provided career context, and enhanced the overall learning experience. See Table 2 for a list of representative responses.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Videos Were Not Interesting, Did Not Increase Student Interest in Food Retailing

While the overwhelming number of students commented positively about the interviews, a small percentage of students responded either negatively or neutrally about the video interviews. Five of the 45 freely elicited responses were neutral or negative; a sample of these comments are listed in Table 2.

Overall, the survey responses post-intervention (after the viewing of the video interviews) suggest that the majority of students found the videos interesting and engaging. Perhaps most importantly, the general themes drawn from the responses suggest that the video interviews indeed contributed to positive awareness regarding career opportunities in the food retailing industry.

5 Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

Negative perceptions of retail careers by students may stem from myriad causes, including poor communication between the retail industry and prospective job candidates, prior low-level retail experience, and the selection bias inherent in the visibility of certain jobs within food retailing (Broadbridge 2003b; Oh, [Weitz, and Lim](#) 2016; You Science 2024). This presents a clear challenge—one that makes it incumbent upon food marketing and agribusiness educators to use innovative teaching

Table 2. Student reviews of the video intervention: A sample of open-ended responses

Theme 1: Opened up new considerations of career opportunities in the food industry

“I’ve always seen the food industry as only being able to work at fast food restaurants, which I dislike, but now I’m more interested to pursue a career in the food industry knowing there’s a lot of opportunity available.”

“It’s inspiring to hear about all the opportunities out there for graduating students.”

“[Speaker 1] expressed that no matter what your background, there are endless opportunities in the food industry. She herself has found a position working with food retailers even though her background was in Communications.”

“[Speaker 4] expressed how much opportunity exists in the category of produce alone, which inspires me to do more research on all categories within the food retailing industry!”

“Before the video, I did not have much interest in the food industry, but after watching it, I was able to gain some interest and a different perspective on what it entails.”

“The interview positively impacted me because I not only wanted to work in Marketing, but Food Retailing opened my mind on how it works. I never thought I would have so much interest in it.”

Theme 2: Provided insight into jobs and career paths

“The interview positively impacted me because I only wanted to work in Marketing, but food retailing opened my mind to how it works. My thought right now is I know exactly what Marketing team I’ll be joining that would be Food Retailing; I never thought I would be so interested in it.”

“[Speaker 2] did a great job at embodying and displaying the concept of perseverance. She has made her way through various facets of the industry and has inspired me to just keep trying until I finally get to the opportunity that fits me best!”

“I enjoyed the video, and it got me thinking maybe that is a business I should look into for human resource opportunities.”

“I have always been fascinated by the entire process of getting food across the supply chain to grocery stores and eventually into the homes of consumers. For that, [Speaker 1] helped remind me that the longevity of food markets leads to opportunity for my career after graduation.”

“I was unaware of the position and duties of a Territory Manager until watching this video!”

“I am an accounting student who loves food and was worried that it would be difficult to find positions within companies who value local and quality food like I do. Seeing that it is possible to take a less traditional path to such a position encourages me.”

Theme 3: Provided real-world insight

“I enjoyed listening to the information provided and how they had to adapt and change when COVID started. I also enjoyed learning that there are many job opportunities in the food industry.”

“I enjoyed learning about such a multifaceted company as Eataly, and all the interesting things the business does to reach customers and create a valuable, interactive, transparent, and unique experience.”

“It’s not often that as a student I get a chance to listen to someone in a field I could potentially be interested in. It offered real-world insight that I believe lacks in many college courses. I really appreciated this video and applaud my professor for including it in her curriculum.”

“The interview was interesting, particularly as [Speaker 3] is a Territorial Manager handling Walmart stores for Mars, which gives her a unique perspective.”

“Really interesting video and learned new things about food retailing. Assignment went by quickly and left me wanting more.”

“It was enlightening to learn about communication strategies within the food industry.”

“I thought the video was very informative and was also entertaining to watch. I learned a lot about Basha’s and how they operate in Arizona.”

Theme 4: Videos did not increase student interest in food retailing

“The video offered no surprising new information.”

“I have no interest in the food industry regardless of the video or this class.”

Notes: When respondents referred to the speaker by name, it was removed to protect speaker anonymity.

techniques in courses to help students better understand the opportunities in the food retailing industry. This research aimed to identify and develop a teaching innovation that enhances student engagement in asynchronous online learning and explore how such an innovative pedagogy relates to students' attitudes toward careers in food retailing. Despite the economic importance of the food retailing industry, the literature suggests that food retailers face a major talent recruitment challenge mostly stemming from the negative perceptions of the industry. Therefore, it is crucial that higher education food and agribusiness programs help students better understand and appreciate potential career opportunities and professional career paths.

Through an exploratory quasi-experiment, we showed that innovative pedagogy, especially in online learning, could make a difference. Specifically, embedding industry guest speakers into an online food retailing course, while having the guest speakers contribute directly to the pedagogy of the class, was associated with more positive attitudes toward a career in food retailing and higher interest levels among the students who were exposed to the teaching innovation compared to students in the control group. Also, female students in the treatment group reported more positive attitudes toward a career in food retailing. This is an important finding considering few retail managers are women and only about 10 percent achieve a CEO position in the retail industry (Holman 2023). Also, women are underrepresented in the higher-paying retail management positions and overrepresented in lower-paying front-line jobs (Carre and Tilly 2008).

It is important to note that each of the guest speakers used in this study were women who hold managerial or professional-track roles in food retailing businesses. While we do not quantify this result, it may be that the female students in the treatment group viewed the speakers as role models. Support for the effect of female role models on college students is well-documented (e.g., Herrmann et al. 2016 and Johnson 2014 find that female role models have a positive effect on female college students in the field of STEM). Indeed, using this teaching innovation may help counteract these trends and empower women to consider food retailing as a career path that offers numerous opportunities and an avenue for them to make impactful changes.

Our empirical results also indicated that students who have prior knowledge about jobs in food retailing and were then exposed to the teaching innovation reported more positive attitudes toward food retailing careers. Thus, while using innovative pedagogical approaches to make food retailing more attractive to students, it is equally important that they have a basic understanding about career prospects, what a career in food retailing involves, managerial jobs available, and the role of a college degree for advancement in this industry.

In the survey of the control group used to help condition the teaching innovation, exploratory findings revealed preferred course attributes of online students. Namely, online students greatly valued well-organized courses with no schedule changes, greater instructor engagement, and real-world relevance. While these attributes may be universally shared between online and in-person courses, the nature of online courses makes these course facets especially imperative. Indeed, this understanding was critical in conceptualizing, developing, and deploying the guest interview videos.

Furthermore, the free-response questions collected from students after watching the videos conveyed a clear message. That is, the guest interviews reinforced course concepts, fostered students' awareness of career paths in the food retail industry, and engaged students in the content. In fact, many students signaled in their responses that they were motivated to learn more about the speakers' companies. These findings are particularly notable because the free-response questions were optional and anonymous, so students who chose to answer these questions did so without any incentive (i.e., extra credit) for answering. The interest and enthusiasm portrayed in students' responses support the use of these interview-format speakers.

Our research makes several key contributions. First, while previous research has shown positive responses by students to the integration of social media for learning (Mao 2014), there is a dearth of

studies that examine various tools available to ensure purposeful asynchronous learning (Northey et al. 2015). Our study extends this line of research by exploring the role of computer-based multimedia materials as technological tools that enhance student engagement in an asynchronous online modality, specifically with respect to attracting students to food retailing careers. Second, our contributions stem from the actual teaching innovation employed. While incorporating guest speakers is a common pedagogical practice, we extend this approach by ensuring a more deliberate alignment between the speakers' expertise and specific course topics. In our approach, guest speakers are not only selected for their relevance but are also directly engaged in shaping class discussions. By strategically integrating these conversations into corresponding course modules and guiding speakers to address key topics and case studies, instructors can create a more focused and impactful learning experience. This likely increased student engagement in an asynchronous online course, which is consistent with research in the marketing education field, showing that existing technology will promote engagement when connected to course content and "positioned as a component of the learning ecosystem" (Northey et al. 2015, p. 177). Third, the videos used in our research included a brief two-question survey to capture timely student feedback. It is believed that quickly obtaining this feedback enhances course engagement, improves student knowledge retention, provides variety of thought, and most importantly enables students to interact during the learning process (Metrejean, Pittman, and Zarzeski 2002; Umbach and Wawrzynski 2005; Riebe et al. 2013). This contributes to the line of research on motivating participation in asynchronous learning. For example, Chylinski (2010) used "participatory money" to increase course participation and perceived understanding of course material, and Northey et al. (2015) used the social networking site Facebook as a tool to facilitate involvement in asynchronous learning activities. Finally, our findings suggest that those with prior food retail experience, coupled with the course intervention (video interviews), have better perceptions of the food industry as a career destination and could help condition recruiting and outreach strategies in building the talent pipeline. That is, universities may want to partner with food retail businesses in developing degree-specific marketing materials and recruiting programs targeted toward high-potential current employees. Furthermore, food retail businesses should consider ways to reduce the tuition burden of current employees by employing tactics such as tuition reimbursement programs. These strategies may be particularly relevant when recruiting for food-related online degree programs because students have optimal flexibility to pursue their university education while also continuing to work and advance at their current food retail employer.

More generally, as one reviewer aptly noted, this approach is not limited to food retailing courses or online education. It can be effectively applied across agribusiness and other disciplines to enhance student engagement, illustrate real-world career applications, and align academic learning with professional opportunities. By leveraging multimedia tools and industry collaborations, educators can better equip students to see the value and relevance of course content in their future careers, across disciplines, and delivery formats. A key component of this strategy is the use of prerecorded interviews, which offer flexibility and ease compared to live guest lectures. Having the course instructor conduct these interviews ensures that the conversation aligns with course objectives, while incorporating them into weekly activities reinforces key takeaways. Additionally, featuring a diverse range of interviewees—spanning industry segments, job functions, and career stages—helps students recognize the breadth of career paths available and the practical value of their skills in professional settings.

While the quantitative and qualitative results have interesting and important implications, some components of this research have limitations that need consideration. Namely, we used a quasi-experimental—nonequivalent control group post-test-only—design. This means that our participants were not randomly assigned to the experimental conditions, and thus one major limitation stems from facing the threat of selection differences. Students have self-enrolled in the course and any preexisting differences between the students in the Food Retailing courses might cause differences in their attitudes toward food retailing careers. Thus, we acknowledge that our results point to a teaching innovation being

associated with (rather than causing) the differences between the control and treatment groups. Nevertheless, quasi-experiments are generally conducted to examine the effectiveness of a treatment, such as an educational intervention (Price, Jhangiani, and Chiang I-Chant 2015), and we tried to take steps that increase the internal validity (e.g., selecting the same course, at the same institution, using the same instructor; Price, Jhangiani, and Chiang I-Chant 2015). Regardless of any shortcomings in research design, our findings provide useful insights to both university educators and food retail organizations alike with respect to improving the perceptions of the food retailing industry in online business degree programs.

Appendix A: Overview of Course Format: Pre- and Post-Teaching Innovation

Week	Topics	Due
	Introduction to Food Retailing	Assignment 1-1 Assignment 1-2 Quiz 1
WEEK 2	Trends and Strategy	Assignment 2-1 Case: Amazon.Com Conquering Grocery's Last Mile Video Conversation, Speaker 1* Quiz 2
WEEK 3	Focus on Consumers	Assignment 3-1 Assignment 3-2 Quiz 3
WEEK 4	Channels, Inventory Management & On-Shelf Availability	Assignment 4-1 Assignment 4-2 Quiz 4
WEEK 5	The Food System and Local Food	Assignment 5-1 Case: Eataly: Reimagining the Grocery Store Video Conversation, Speaker 2* Quiz 5
WEEK 6	Assortments and Category Management	Assignment 6-1 Assignment 6-2 Video Conversation, Speaker 3* Quiz 6
WEEK 7	Selecting and Providing Services	Assignment 7-1 Case: Target Corporation: The Grocery Business in the Bull's Eye Video Conversation, Speaker 4* Quiz 7

Notes: Single asterisks (*) indicate experimental treatment videos that were incorporated into the schedule.

Appendix B: Background and Course Fit of Guest Interviewees

Interviewee #1

Speaker #1 was the director of communications and public affairs at a large, regional grocery chain comprising 118 stores. She was interviewed in the beginning of the course when an overview of marketing strategy was presented. In this lesson, the importance of situational analyses and environmental scanning was presented, along with the concepts of segmentation, targeting, and positioning. As such, the questions that were posed pertained to these areas.

All interviews started with a question about how the speakers arrived at their current positions and what their positions encompassed. After that, questions posed were related to the course content being covered that week. Speaker #1 talked about what she does and how she arrived in her position as director of communications and public affairs. Her path into the food retailing industry was an unconventional one; she briefly discussed her past positions and work experience. Questions were posed to Speaker #1 about the functions of her job and how they relate to various strategic decisions. Speaker #1 elaborated upon the importance of environmental monitoring in her role. She explained that she oversees all activities related to community and media relations, which include philanthropic activities and connections with local and national media and industry trade associations. She emphasized the importance of managing consumer relationships and how this insight informs merchandising and promotional endeavors. She also expanded upon her role of working with the state's food industry trade association to keep abreast of public affairs and updated on legislation that could impact food retailers. Specifically, she discussed legislation that included pharmacy bills, alcohol-to-go bills, and parking ordinances. These considerations are all factored into her company's strategic decision-making.

Also related to the course content, questions were directed toward their go-to-market strategy. She explained that the food retailer owns three distinct formats, aimed at different segments of the market (i.e., traditional, Hispanic, and gourmet). She discussed the different formats, the segments they serve, and the unique needs they meet. She also discussed how their merchandising strategies and promotions differ, depending on the store format and their respective target markets. She also elaborated on their unique branding strategies and how their differentiation strategy has enabled them to be successful against the bigger retailers. All of the interviews were concluded with a question that specifically asked guest speakers about the types of careers for college graduates in the food industry and in their companies, specifically.

Speaker #1 was very enthusiastic about the industry and the opportunities, discussing positions related to media and communications. She also urged students to contact industry professionals and volunteered to be available, should students like to spend time shadowing her to learn more.

Interviewee #2

Speaker #2 was the general marketing manager for Eataly West (Los Angeles and Las Vegas). Her interview was assigned in a module where students were assigned the HBS case, *Eataly: Reimagining the Grocery Store*. This section of the course discussed the importance of the in-store experience and local foods movement (procurement). As such, the questions that were posed pertained to these areas.

Similar to Speaker #1, Speaker #2 path to her current position was unconventional: she accrued experience in industries outside of food retail (e.g., community relations for sports marketing and commercial property development) before finding her "dream job" at Eataly. She talked about the responsibilities and functions of her job (overseeing the marketing on all aspects of Eataly West's business, which includes their retail market, quick-service and full-service restaurants, and La Scola, their cooking school). Questions were then posed that related to the course content being covered that week. Specifically, she was asked to discuss the topics that were covered in the Eataly case related to

merchandising strategies and experiential retailing and their future plans for growth. A particularly pertinent question was how Eataly managed, as an entirely brick-and-mortar retailer, through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaker #2 answered the questions by discussing Eataly's mission and go-to-market strategies (e.g., transparency in sourcing and selling, communicating the stories of their products, pride in selling authentic Italian food and in procuring local food, the guidelines that they follow, and the importance of the in-store experience). This discussion very nicely reinforced what was conveyed in the HBS case. She also discussed how Eataly pivoted from an in-person experiential retailer to offering virtual experiences, such as offering online cooking demonstrations. She also discussed Eataly's expansion in North America and around the world, and how they have remained true to their mission while grappling with growing pains of expansion. She elaborated upon the differences (merchandising and promotional) between the two stores she manages and how the local marketplace dictates that difference. The interview concluded with the question of the opportunities that might exist for college graduates at Eataly. Speaker #2 was enthusiastic about Eataly's growth and their need for talented individuals. She told students where to look to learn more about the various positions available for college graduates. She also underscored the importance of guidance and mentorship and urged students to find a good mentor.

Interviewee #3

Speaker #3 was a territory sales manager for Mars Wrigley on the Walmart team. Unlike the former two speakers, Speaker #3 studied food industry management in college, where she received a degree in Business Administration in Food Industry Management. Speaker #3 was also unique in that she was older, having completed her degree online while working full-time as a grocery store manager. Once she obtained her degree, she was offered her job at Mars Wrigley. She was interviewed during the module on category management. Speaker #3 talked about the responsibilities and functions of her job; she oversees 22 Walmart stores for Mars Wrigley candy and pet food product lines. Among other functions, she designs brand displays to drive sales and ensures the display schematics are executed and maintained correctly. Questions were posed that related to the course content, namely category management. Speaker #3 provided a wealth of information on the topic and detailed how Mars Wrigley works with retailers to drive product sales. She explained how the category management team for Mars Wrigley works with Walmart buyers to decide which SKUs are working. She also discussed the adoption of shopper-centric retailing, where categories are built around meeting consumers' needs and gave related examples. She explained how her experience on the retail side has helped now that she is on the vendor side of food retailing. Speaker #3 also reiterated the need for companies to continually monitor and adapt to environmental changes as well as to continually have to think out of the box to succeed. When asked about job opportunities, Speaker #3 brought up the need for employees to be well-versed in technology. She stated that COVID-19 had precipitated the adoption of automation due to labor shortages. As a result, Mars has quickened the adoption of robots to aid retailers in maintaining displays and in suggestive selling. She concluded the interview impressing upon students the enduring nature of the food industry, which corresponds to an enduring and long-lasting need for talented and committed individuals, across all fields.

Interviewee #4

The last speaker was the youngest, having graduated only 2 years prior to the interview. Speaker #4 worked as a business development representative at Oppy. She majored in supply chain management with a certificate in food industry management. Most students were unfamiliar with Oppy, so the interview began with her talking about the company. She explained that Oppy is a global leader in the growing, marketing, and distribution of fresh fruit and vegetables from around the world. Oppy works

with growers, retailers, and logistics partners to ensure safe and quality produce is grown, shipped, and sold to customers. Speaker #4 described her job as being multifaceted and entailing the following: working to place and promote fresh produce in grocery stores; organizing promotional programs with Oppy's retail and wholesale accounts; differentiating Oppy's branded produce, such as Jazz apples and SunGold kiwi; educating buyers, produce managers, and shoppers on Oppy's branded produce; and creating demand for their produce by designing exciting retail displays, contests, and giveaways. This interview took place at the end of the course, when students were approaching their capstone HBS case involving Target and a decision on whether they should continue selling grocery items and, if so, the various paths they could take (e.g., outsource groceries, scale back). Speaker #4 was questioned about the importance of fresh produce and, specifically, branded produce, to her clients' strategies. Her accounts included Target, Aldi, and Safeway/Albertsons. She underscored the importance of grocery for Target (which cohered with the case) and talked about an emerging practice of SKU rationalization that retailers were increasingly adopting post-COVID-19 and the impact it has had on vendors. She also talked a lot about strategy and reiterated many of the course topics related to branding, consumer perception, and in-store promotional activities. She discussed the volatility of working in the fresh produce industry and explained the long-term process of planning involved in securing produce. Like the others, she emphasized the plethora of opportunities within the food industry and the multiplicity of paths that can lead to a career in the food industry.

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