



Stepping into food safety education

The Conrad N. Hilton College at the University of Houston has partnered with restaurants in the Houston area to provide free food safety trainings for employees to become ServSafe Food Handler Certified.

This certification enables those that wish to work in the hospitality industry have a higher chance of securing a job. The ServSafe Food Handler certification covers important food safety topics related to handling food that is a requirement for entry-level workers as well as provides a good basis of food safety principles that can be applicable for any consumer.

Under the supervision of Dr. Sujata Sirsat (*pictured on next page*), Ph.D. student Karla Acosta has conducted trainings for over 400 individuals in the greater-Houston area community (*pictured left*). Since the majority of individuals wanting to attain this certification are those that are food workers, Acosta has come across several entry-level employees that have low-levels of education and have difficulties passing the exam portion of the certification.



Acosta uses her previous experience as a health inspector, teaching experience, and her Latino culture to tailor each class to the needs of her students. Acosta has found it effective to use culturally-appropriate examples to teach food safety so that the concepts taught in class relate to her students as well as help them in memorizing food safety principles more effectively. As a native-Spanish speaker who grew up working in the hospitality industry, Acosta understands the difficulties associated with trying to pass exams that have a different Spanish-dialect, as well as the many challenges and disparities experienced by entry-level employees.

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Photo credits: Pearl Cajoles

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With the help of Dr. Sirsat, Acosta has also been able to implement the use of iPads into her food safety trainings in order to engage the class better as well as to help individuals become familiarized with the use of technology as the implementation of technology is becoming more inherent in the hospitality industry—helping these individuals gain a competitive advantage as they enter the workforce or aim to secure a job.

Most of the individuals that come across Acosta's trainings have experience as or hope to become dishwashers, cooks, preps or servers for restaurants or other food establishments. In these positions, workers are required to have the state-mandated Food Handler Certification in Texas. If an individual is not able to successfully pass the exam, they are subject to termination and will not be allowed to work handling food or near/with food-contact surfaces— an essential and significant requirement for anyone in the hospitality industry.

As the majority of entry-level employees in the hospitality industry are minority populations, the Conrad N. Hilton College at the University of Houston is making small **steps** to help them secure jobs through customized and effective food safety education.

**One small step for food, one
giant leap for
food safety.**