The Basic Needs and Food Security for Students (BNFS) initiative has launched a new program to help UCSF students with limited time learn how to cook healthy and nutritious food using an "Instant Pot," a brand of electronically controlled, combined pressure cooker and slow cooker.

Professional chef Jean-Gabriel Ferrandon led the first round of hands-on sessions, held this spring, while nutrition consultant Lisa Michelle Miller advised students on making healthy food choices.

In the first class, "Chef Gaby," as Ferrandon likes to be called, showed the students how to make a hearty lentil and vegetable dish and let them in on the tricks of cooking with the Instant Pot. At the end of the class, students were judged on the presentation and taste of their creations. Two lucky winners in the friendly competition received an Instant Pot to call their own, and all students received a quality kitchen knife and cutting board to encourage them to continue cooking at home.

"The recently established Student Food Market at UCSF, which provides students with free produce and other staples, and the cooking classes make a great combination for students
who want to learn how to turn the produce they receive at the Market into meals that are both nourishing and delicious," said Alece Alderson, director of student success and first generation programs, who helped organize the classes.

The program has been well received by students. Some shared that they didn't how to properly cut vegetables or how to utilize spices to bring out the flavor in dishes before taking the class.

The BNFS initiative represents the collaborative efforts of Student Financial Aid and Student Life (both part of Student Academic Affairs) and Transportation (part of Campus Life Services). Recognizing that the Bay Area is an expensive place to live, BNFS was organized to help students who have difficulty accessing food and meeting their other basic needs. The hope is that programs like the cooking classes and Food Market, combined with other resources, can alleviate some of the burden on students and help them succeed in their programs.

Additional Instant Pot cooking classes will be scheduled for students soon! For more information about the classes and other BNFS offerings, visit the Basic Needs website [1].

In the photo above, Nikole Ankrom, left, a medical student, and Minerva Loi, a dental student, select additional herbs to enhance their creations at the April 18 class. (Photo by Susan Merrell)