

Program Promotes Diversity, Increases Interdisciplinary Skills

Dietetics is a profession where one will likely assist people from all walks of life, making diversity and communication that much more important within the field. Recruiting and connecting with teens and young adults is one way to actively cultivate the future of dietetics.

There are several dietetics programs nationwide proactively changing the face of dietetics. One such program is at Oakwood College, a historically black college in Huntsville, AL, where the focuses are diversity, public speaking, and recruitment.

"I am very impressed with the Oakwood College Dietetic interns," says Patricia Simmons, Oakwood Academy Registrar and Counselor. "They come from various cultural backgrounds and form friendships very quickly, which, [in turn, enables] them to work together as a great team."

EXPOSURE TO THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

The Oakwood College Dietetic Internship Program begins with 3 weeks of intensive instruction from individuals of various disciplines including dietetics, pharmaceuticals, nursing, respiratory therapy, medical research, and biological sciences.

This multilevel approach prepares students to work with doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals. For instance, pharmacists explain how they work with registered dieti-

tians to provide the best enteral and parenteral nutrition care to clients, while nurses describe how they team up with doctors and registered dietitians to explain disease processes to their patients.

TWO TYPES OF PROJECTS

The Oakwood College Dietetic Internship Program has two outgoing facets to facilitate communication and outreach—the High School Nutrition Research Project and the National Nutrition Month Project. Both programs are organized by Dietetic Internship director Marta Sovyanhadi, DrPH, RD, LDN, and were instated in 2001.

Working on a High School Level

Sovyanhadi's high school program is focused on Oakwood Academy, a historically black high school located on the campus of Oakwood College. Four research projects have been done at the academy, each including a pretest, instruction, and posttest. Instruction included a variety of methods such as role playing, PowerPoint presentations, use of transparencies, field trips, games, and cooking classes.

The four research projects are:

- "Effectiveness of Various Nutrition Education Teaching Methods for High School Students": The purpose is to determine the most effective methods of delivering nutrition education to Oakwood Academy students and to serve as a pilot study for other preventive care agencies serving African-American teens.
- "Start Health with 5-A-Day Program": The purpose is to increase awareness of the 5-A-Day Program among Oakwood Academy ninth grade students.
- "Effectiveness of Changes in Career Opportunities of High School Stu-

dents with Educational Intervention": The purpose is to determine if knowledge of career opportunities in dietetics could change the career choices of high school students.

- "Smart Youth Practice Healthy Choices": The purpose is to help students plan for a healthy tomorrow by learning how to prepare nutrition meals and incorporate daily exercise into their schedule.

After completion, the interns work together to prepare a presentation of their findings, all participating in the preparation and the presentation itself. Data from the pretest is compared with data from the posttest to determine if the attitudes and habits of the high school students have shifted. The results are then compiled and analyzed using the standards of scientific research and written for publication.

The research is presented to approximately five dozen North Alabama dietitians and prospective interns at a continuing education meeting and luncheon, giving the interns an opportunity to present their case.

Speaking up for National Nutrition Month

Interns also can present their collaborative research during the National Nutrition Month Project. The purpose is to reinforce the importance of nutrition and physical activities as key components of healthy living, and end results have been published in *Today's Dietitian*, *Southern Tidings*, and *Oakwood Magazine*.

The group focuses on the annual theme, with each intern researching a specific topic such as vegetables, exercise, and water. Once the individual writing is complete, the program director compiles the information into one article.

This article was written by Marta Sovyanhadi, DrPH, RD, dietetic internship program director, and Janis Newborn, institutional effectiveness director of Oakwood College in Huntsville, AL.
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Promoting Teamwork and Networking

The Oakwood College Dietetic Internship Program gives students the opportunity to work with various groups and to tailor their message to fit them best.

"[In the high school program] I noticed that the interns set the pace," says Annell Matthews, an Oakwood College senior in the program. "When an intern was upbeat and talked in an

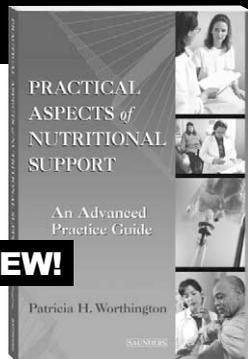
excited way, the high school students paid more attention and participated more . . . This showed me that deliverance of the message was more important than the teaching style [per se]."

Interacting with science journals and mainstream publications has also forced the interns to present their research findings in a solid, cohesive way. According to Sovyanhadi, interns have become more innovative,

written better pieces, and are more aware of deadlines and publishing requirements.

Editor's Note: *We are keenly interested in hearing about and publishing stories of successful dietetic internship programs. If your program is contributing to dietetics in a unique way, please contact Jennifer Herendeen at 120 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000, Chicago, IL 60606-6995.*

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