

Undergraduate Education and Dietetic Internship

Early experiences of incorporating a course-based first-year research experience (FYRE) into an undergraduate nutrition and dietetics program

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Purpose: To describe early experiences incorporating a course-based first-year research experience (FYRE) into an undergraduate nutrition/dietetics program.

Process: Although research-based courses and experiences are components of Canadian dietetic training, they are often incorporated in upper program years. FYREs (where students conduct activities of the research arc: question; investigate; share) have been successfully used in other disciplines (e.g., agriculture, geography); their use and impact in dietetic education are not widely reported or known.

Systematic Approach Used: In fall 2018, a FYRE was incorporated as part of a first-year dietetics professional practice course. In groups of three or four, students drafted a research question on the practices or attitudes of a nutrition topic in the university community, and then wrote three to five survey questions to investigate their question. Survey questions from all groups were compiled, mounted online, and following ethics approval, members of the university community were recruited to complete the class survey. Students then analyzed their data (descriptive statistics), and presented their findings in a research poster. Students received feedback at various checkpoints during the term, and faculty received support from university departments (e.g., undergraduate research, teaching & learning, ethics). To evaluate the student experience, an end-of-term questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions was administered.

Conclusions: Results from student questionnaires suggest they found this experience valuable (e.g., enhanced understanding of research; improved research skills) and engaging. Suggestions were provided for future iterations (e.g., more assistance with data analysis).

Recommendations: Plans are in place to use student feedback to refine the experience and to continue offering this FYRE. Although FYREs require careful planning, they appear to be a valuable learning experience.

Significance to the Field of Dietetics: FYREs may help to develop interest and curiosity of future dietitians in research and could prepare and motivate more dietitians to conduct research.