

Preparedness of recent University of Saskatchewan Nutrition graduates to work with Indigenous populations in a culturally humble manner

*Alicia Johnson¹, Diana Mytroen¹, Kailee Hondros¹, Sydney Wright¹, Martina Richmond²,
Stephanie Cook², Sara Langley³*

¹Nutrition Practicum Program, Saskatchewan Health Authority ²Nutrition Services, Saskatchewan Health Authority ³First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Indigenous Services Canada

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived readiness of dietetic graduates to work with Indigenous populations in a culturally humble manner.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted. A survey was developed with both open and closed-ended questions with the option of participating in a later interview to better understand experiences of working with Indigenous clients. The survey was sent via email to 105 University of Saskatchewan alumni of the Bachelor of Science in Nutrition program who graduated between 2015 and 2019.

Results: Thirty-five out of 105 participants (33%) responded to the survey. The majority of survey participants were female (94.1%, n=32/35), identified as Caucasian (82.9%, n=29/35), and were age 25-30 years old (88.6%, n=31/35). The mean percentage of participants who perceived sufficient personal understanding of Indigenous topics such as traditional foods, impact of colonization and health disparities, was 8.75% (3= /35); 27.9% (n=10/35) of participants reported having no exposure to these topics at entry-level. The mean percentage of participants who would avoid these tasks was 22.9% (n=8/35), while 3.35% (n=1/35) of participants felt able to serve clients comfortably at entry-level. This study found positive relationships between knowledge of specific concepts and the perceived ability to comfortably perform tasks surrounding Indigenous health. The interview was conducted with three participants and comments through the survey and interview support increased learning opportunities for dietetic students related to Indigenous history, culture and health.

Conclusions: The study results suggest that recent dietetic graduates from the University of Saskatchewan Nutrition Program did not perceive themselves to be adequately prepared to work with Indigenous populations in a culturally humble way at entry-level. This suggests that more Indigenous content could be offered during the undergraduate program, including practicum, with attention being paid to the NUTR 310: Food Culture and Human Nutrition course.