Impactful Course Activities and Assignments and Suggested Improvements to Food Security-Focused Collegiate Curriculum

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Background: Providing comprehensive food insecurity education and training in higher education is critical for preparing nutrition, public health, and social work students to address this issue in their future careers. Not much is known about course activities that aim to prepare students to screen, monitor, and intervene upon food insecurity in their future careers.

Objective: To describe impactful food security-related course activities and to synthesize student suggestions to improve the training of future nutrition, public health, and social work professionals.

Study Design, Setting, and Participants: A cross-sectional 31-item questionnaire was completed by 306 undergraduate and graduate nutrition, public health, and social work students attending higher education institutions across the United States (n=13). This abstract summarizes two open-ended questions that captured current impactful course activities/assignments and student suggestions to improve college curricula.

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Inductive thematic coding approach by two independent coders to analyze current course activities/assignments and student suggestions to improve college curricula.

Results: Class lecture and discussions about food insecurity topics were most frequently reported by students as impactful activities. Lectures or discussions that focused on defining food security and populations that are at greater risk for food insecurity were most impactful to students. Students suggested improving curricula by increasing awareness of food insecurity resources, building skills to assist populations with food insecurity, and enhancing current course curricula. High emphasis was placed on increasing application-based opportunities (eg, service-learning), skills training, awareness of community and campus food security resources, and coverage of food security topics.

Conclusion: Impactful training to prepare students to assess and respond to food insecurity in individuals and communities is a public health need. Student respondents in this study suggest means of enhancing their food insecurity-related training, which may be used to develop a toolkit for instructors in related fields.

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Implementing Policy, Systems, and Environmental Obesity Prevention Interventions in Rural Georgia: The High Obesity Program

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Objective: To evaluate the implementation of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) obesity prevention interventions in rural Georgia from 2016-2023 under The High Obesity Program (HOP).

Use of Theory or Research: Poor diet and sedentary behavior are significant risk factors for obesity. Guided by the Social Ecological Model, which identifies multiple levels that contribute to health behavior, HOP (CDC-DP18-1809) aims to improve individual nutrition and physical activity behavior through increased access to affordable healthy food, safe and convenient places to be physically active, and policies to support obesity prevention behaviors.

Target Audience: Citizens of five rural Georgia counties (Clay, Calhoun, Steward, Taliaferro, Dooley) with a high prevalence of adult obesity (>40%).

Program Description: HOP, known as Healthier Together (HT) in Georgia, works at the local level to implement evidence-based strategies and leverage partner resources to address obesity and its associated factors. Beginning in 2016, HT facilitated development of community coalitions, needs assessment and prioritization, intervention selection, implementation, and evaluation. Coalitions selected community gardens, healthy food pantries and coolers, sidewalk repair, walking trails, playground modifications, and active community design.

Evaluation Methods: Counts of interventions implemented and sustained, food pantry healthy standard implementation checklists, themes identified from qualitative project staff records (program and coalition meeting agendas, county activity reports), and annual progress reports were used to evaluate process and implementation outcomes.

Results: HT planned and implemented 22 community gardens, 8 coolers, and partnered with 7 food pantries. Of those, 72%, 50%, and 72% of gardens, coolers, and food pantries, respectively, are still active. No food pantries fully implemented healthy standards. HT repaired/enhanced 11 playgrounds; one is planned for 2023. Nine walking trails were installed; 8 are still accessible. Four walking trails were installed; 8 are still accessible.

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