Evaluation of "Deciding on a Nontraditional Career Path: Networking Nutrition Students with Professionals".

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Summary

Since many students are only exposed to traditional careers in hospital, community and food service settings as part of curriculum, nutrition faculty sought to expand students' perceptions of the nutrition field by highlighting nontraditional careers. Four alumni representing nontraditional careers in government, higher education, international work and business/website design were chosen to speak at a virtual panel. Each alumnus described their education/training, career path, lessons learned and words of wisdom. Prior to the program, a pre-event slideshow featured additional nutrition alumni in nontraditional careers. A post-seminar survey evaluated the effectiveness of the seminar.

Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of a seminar featuring a variety of nontraditional career opportunities available for nutrition majors.

Methods

Preparation:
Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn through models and alumni can be models for nutrition majors since they have similar educational backgrounds. Student researchers and faculty contacted nutrition alumni in nontraditional careers to take part in the virtual one hour seminar. Twenty-seven alumni provided information for a pre-event slideshow, while four participated as live speakers. The careers showcased included:
- National and International Nutritionist
- Assistant Professor of Nutrition and Program Director
- USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion Nutritionist
- Founder and owner of Whitney Bateson Digital Strategy

Undergraduate and graduate health sciences students were invited to the seminar.

Program Description:
Following the pre-event slideshow, speakers explained the experiences and opportunities they pursued in order to arrive at their current position. They also described their current responsibilities and provided words of wisdom.
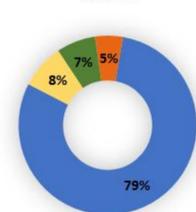
Evaluation:
After the conclusion of the seminar, an IRB-approved survey was emailed to the participants who registered for the virtual seminar. Before distribution, face validity and content were confirmed.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank WenXin (Jennifer) Tang and Rachel Samson for their contributions to this project as well as the seminar attendees who completed the survey.
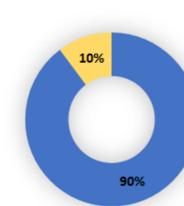
Results

Race

79% White, 8% Asian, 7% Black, 5% More than 1 race

*Percentages not equal to 100% due to rounding

- White
- Asian
- Black
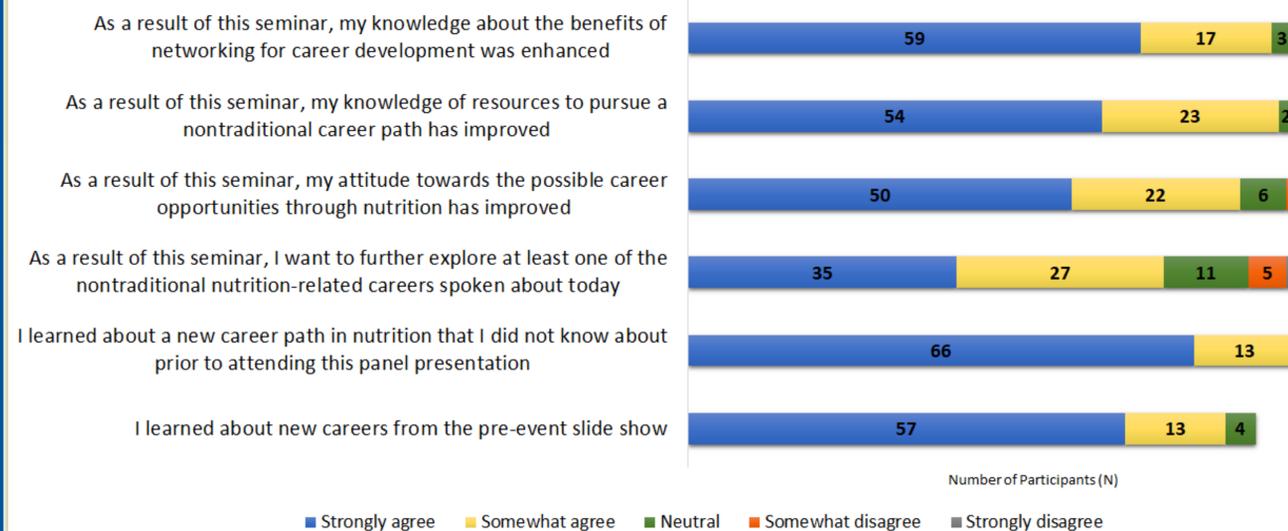- More than 1 race

Participant Demographics

Of the 203 attendees, 171 were students and 88 of the students completed the survey
85 were undergraduate students
80 were nutrition majors
77 students were female (87.5%)
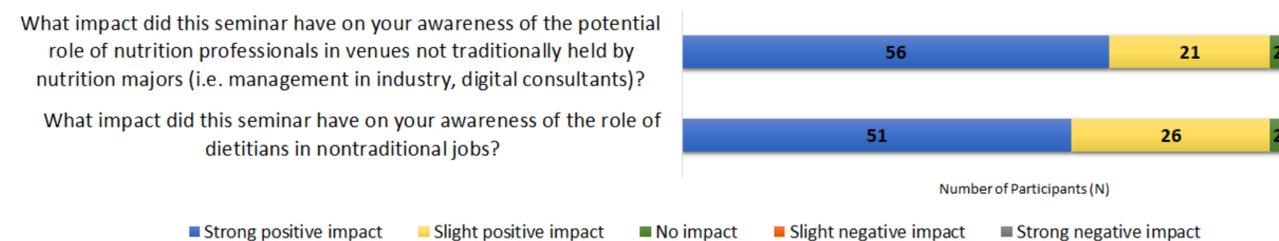11 students were male (12.5%)

Ethnicity

90% Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino, 10% Hispanic or Latino

- Non-Hispanic or Non-Latino
- Hispanic or Latino

Responses from Nutrition Majors

As a result of this seminar, my knowledge about the benefits of networking for career development was enhanced — 59, 17, 3, 1

As a result of this seminar, my knowledge of resources to pursue a nontraditional career path has improved — 54, 23, 2, 1

As a result of this seminar, my attitude towards the possible career opportunities through nutrition has improved — 50, 22, 6, 2

As a result of this seminar, I want to further explore at least one of the nontraditional nutrition-related careers spoken about today — 35, 27, 11, 5, 2

I learned about a new career path in nutrition that I did not know about prior to attending this panel presentation — 66, 13, 1

I learned about new careers from the pre-event slide show — 57, 13, 4

Number of Participants (N)

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Responses from Nutrition Majors

What impact did this seminar have on your awareness of the potential role of nutrition professionals in venues not traditionally held by nutrition majors (i.e. management in industry, digital consultants)? — 56, 21, 2, 1

What impact did this seminar have on your awareness of the role of dietitians in nontraditional jobs? — 51, 26, 2

Number of Participants (N)

- Strong positive impact
- Slight positive impact
- No impact
- Slight negative impact
- Strong negative impact

The top three "nontraditional" positions students expressed interest in learning about were:
1. Sports nutritionist
2. Medical or holistic careers
3. Physician's assistant

Featured Professionals

Carlie (Saint Laurent) Beaucejour:
MS, RDN, LD
Founder of Crave with Carlie, LLC

Lieutenant Colonel Justin D Kocher:
MS, RDN, FACHE
Career Management Health Professions, Military

Sarah Strout: RDN
Peace Corps Volunteer
M.S. Nutrition for Global Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Isaac Hicks: RDN, CSSD, LDN, CSCS
Director of Performance Nutrition, Indiana University

Speakers

Meghan Adler: MS, RDN, FAND
Nutritionist, USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

Whitney Bateson: MPH, RD
Owner, Whitney Bateson Digital Strategy

Arnetta Fletcher: PhD, RDN, LDN
Assistant Professor of Nutrition and Program Director at Shepherd University

Pamela Malo: MHS, RD
National and International Nutritionist

Conclusion

Having students learn from observing others can expand their knowledge about careers that could be pursued with a nutrition degree.