Engaging the Next Generation in Professional Organizations: Where Are We?

SUMMARY
Professional organizations (PO) provide opportunities for networking, professional development, publications, and leadership. Little is known about university students’ awareness of and engagement with PO. It is unclear what resources university students prefer to receive from PO. A cross-sectional study of nutrition/dietetics, public health, and social work students evaluated PO awareness, membership, and resources of interest. Among participants (n=306), PO engagement was low. Awareness varied by PO and discipline. Students indicated professional development, networking, and career opportunities as the preferred PO resources. Educators and PO can use this information to enhance engagement and membership from university students.

OBJECTIVE
To evaluate university students’ awareness about and membership in health-related PO and the types of training and/or resources students are interested in receiving.

RESULTS
• Most students (80.7%) self-identified as female.
• Overall engagement in PO was low.
• Highest Memberships:
  • 37% of nutrition/dietetics students were members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
  • 6% of public health students were members of the American Public Health Association
• Most preferred professional resources:
  • 53% want information about career opportunities
  • 49% want networking opportunities
  • 43% want professional development opportunities

CONCLUSION
Many students are not members of PO or even aware of PO. Integrating benefits of PO engagement into nutrition and health-related education at universities, while prioritizing student-requested resources, may enhance students’ awareness, membership, and professional development.