Increasing Engagement in a Nutrition Course through Development of a Student-Led Documentary about Dieting and Body Image Program

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Objective
The objective of this course project was to increase student engagement with nutrition concepts.

Target Audience
Students in a nutrition course at a university in the southern portion of the United States.

Curriculum Description
As part of a class project, students developed and organized a documentary on dieting and body image. The documentary was entitled: Getting Bodied: The Natural Way. Groups were formed to facilitate tasks. Groups included: painters; educational content developers; interviewers; music specialists; poets; readers; videotaping/editing; and script/storyboard. Informed by content from the course textbook and instructor-approved sources, groups met weekly to discuss and execute tasks that included: drawing body-image-related art; gathering nutrition content from online sources; recording significant body image/dieting statistics; interviewing students and faculty on campus concerning their body-image ideas; developing body-image poems; and videotaping interviews and class discussions concerning body image and dieting.

Evaluation
Engagement was evaluated based on student participation (62/64); while comments from student evaluations provided additional qualitative data.

Use of Theory/Research
This course project was informed by the experiential learning theory. This educational theory focuses on different methods of engagement as drivers for learning.

Results
Student surveys revealed that over 90% of students enjoyed participating in this project; learned new facts concerning body image and dieting; and were able to engage in nutrition research (interviews; web searches; library visits; reading of peer-reviewed journals). In addition to project engagement, students were able to facilitate community engagement through a public viewing of the documentary at the university. Over a hundred were in attendance for the viewing.

Quotes from students:
• “With this documentary I learned more aspects relating to the physical changes in the body the natural way.”
• “…my views on how the body is portrayed through the media has changed. I personally thought that waist trainers, and fat burning pills alone could allow you to reach the body you desire.”
• “I learned the statistics of having cosmetic surgery like the pros and the cons. I also learned about bodybuilding.”
• “…watching this documentary made me change my viewpoint on cosmetic surgery.”

Conclusion
This class project successfully engaged students within a basic nutrition course. Developing and implementing media-focused nutrition projects provides a source of cultural relevance to college students and engages them in non-traditional learning experiences. While student learning was not measured for this project, engagement often enhances learning experiences and can potentially advance the field of nutrition education through students’ ability to mass communicate ideas from those experiences.

Link: https://youtu.be/ebyr2lra1go