Dawn Erickson, MPH, RD, LDN
College of Applied and Natural Sciences
Candidate for the Virgil Orr Undergraduate Junior Faculty Award

Courses Taught and Overall Teacher Evaluation Ratings

2009-2013
FNU 103 Weight Control Management – Average 3.9
FNU 203 Basic Nutrition – Average 3.8
FNU 443 Medical Nutrition Therapy II – Average 3.8
FNU 492 Dietetic Internship – Average 3.9
FNU 548 Applied Dietetics – taught during the summer quarter, no formal student evaluations

Teaching, Research and Service

My philosophy of teaching grows out of the experiences that I had as a student; listening to, learning from, and being mentored by teachers that have meant so much to me in the past. I come from a family of teachers. My father was a public school principal and my mother taught elementary school for 20 years. I learned what a tremendous privilege and responsibility it was to be a teacher.

As a registered dietitian working at a hospital in the Missouri town where I grew up I loved working with hospital clients to help them re-learn eating behaviors. After several years of practice I shocked family and friends by choosing to enroll in a graduate program at a university far from home. Although I loved nutrition and dietetics I wanted to use the skills I had developed in these areas to work in public health and perhaps even teaching at a university to impact larger and more diverse populations.

While conducting research at the University of Minnesota I was provided the opportunity to work with members of a rural Mississippi community to evaluate the barriers to seeking healthcare after being screened at high risk for malnutrition. After graduating from the University of Minnesota I first worked as a public health dietitian for a Native American urban population in downtown Minneapolis. I was part of a healthcare team trying to find ways of decreasing the incidence of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Increasingly my passion became trying to educate individuals and groups about the importance
of making good choices. The communicating aspect, the teaching aspect of my career was becoming central. In coming to Louisiana Tech University I have had the opportunity to prepare students to also become “communicators” as they work in their communities, in hospitals, and even within their own families to assist people in making good choices.

Although my teaching style, delivery, and learners have changed over the course of my career my philosophy has not: to empower people with knowledge and skills that enable them to be healthy, productive, and contributing members of their community. Working as the Director of the Dietetic Internship and an instructor in Nutrition and Dietetics at Louisiana Tech has allowed me to teach the science of nutrition while also educating future practitioners of the importance of developing critical thinking skills to prepare them for the changing landscape of healthcare.

I appreciate that my position is different than many of the faculty at Louisiana Tech University in that the majority of my duty is as the Director of the Dietetic Internship Program in the School of Human Ecology. As the director my largest responsibility each year is to recruit, teach, and mentor a class of 18-20 dietetic interns. I work with this group of students for 11 months which provides the opportunity to counsel, mentor, and teach them over a course of time. One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is seeing the transformation that takes place in students as they become competent and empathetic professionals.

In addition to my dietetic internship teaching responsibilities I have taught basic nutrition courses, medical nutrition therapy, community nutrition, and a graduate course in applied dietetics. I strive to see each student as individuals with unique strengths and weaknesses. Even though some of these undergraduate students may not go on to major in nutrition, my goal is to see that each student who completes a course is educated in the content and equipped to make informed decisions about their nutritional health. I love and believe in what I teach, and I aspire to motive my students to love learning.

One of the most challenging aspects of working with students is to help them understand the importance of research as a part of their overall education. Making research “come alive” is sometimes difficult when students perceive it to be unrelated to the classroom. It is important for students to be able to understand research design and critically evaluate research within their field of study. Keeping abreast of current information in their field and expanding the body of knowledge is crucial to the vitality and growth of any area of study. Research I have been involved with has focused primarily on outcomes based nutrition. Primarily the research is designed to determine if the nutrients or services
being provided cause a positive impact or outcome on an individual or group’s health. My research interests reinforce my teaching goal of finding ways to effectively “communicate” with individuals and groups for better health outcomes.

A key to preparing students to become lifelong learners is helping them make the connection between learning in the classroom and giving back through service. Learning in the classroom goes beyond the goal of just collecting a pay check to being able to make an important contribution to the community. Louisiana Tech University has a strong tradition of having students involved in service to the local community and beyond. As an instructor who encourages students to engage in professional service I try to model professional behavior through various university and professional association commitments. During my time at Louisiana Tech I have served in various capacities on behalf of the School of Human Ecology and the College of Applied and Natural Sciences. Service activities have included being a faculty representative to the University Senate and Advisory Council to the Dean. Through my professional organization, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, I have served as an officer at the local and state level. I have recently been appointed to be an accreditation site visitor/reviewer for the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, a national organization responsible for accrediting nutrition and dietetics education programs. As I have progressed in my career I am pleased to see previous Louisiana Tech nutrition alums take on the responsibility of serving through leadership in various organizations. Engaging students in the learning process so that they become competent and productive citizens that serve their local community and beyond is vital in fulfilling the mission of Louisiana Tech University.

**Publications/Grants**

**Publications – Co Author**


*Factors that Influence Breastfeeding Decisions among Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Participants from Central Louisiana* - Journal of the American Dietetic Association, May 2010

Grants Submitted/Funded as Co-PI:

Healthy Reflections: Developing Positive Self-Image Among Female Adolescents – Lincoln Health Foundation – notification pending

The Oak Tree Outdoor Learning Center – Lagniappe Ladies – notification pending

Using classroom enhancement to improve student learning outcomes in the Nutrition and Dietetics Program – Board of Regents Support Fund – Notification pending

The Effects of Caffeine and Carbohydrates on Pilot Performance – College of Applied and Natural Sciences - funded

Community/University Service Activities

Louisiana Dietetic Association Executive Board – Chair, Professional Issues, 2010, 2011

Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics - Site Reviewer, 2012, 2013

Advisory Council to the Dean of College of Applied and Natural Sciences – School of Human Ecology Faculty Representative, 2013

University Strategic Planning Committee – Retention 2010, 2011

College of Applied and Natural Sciences Health Advisory Committee - School of Human Ecology Faculty Representative, 2009 - present