

# NDEP-Line

Fall 2019

*NDEP's mission is to advocate for and empower educators and preceptors to lead the profession of nutrition and dietetics.*

## From the Chair...

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Welcome to the fall edition of the NDEP-Line!

Maintaining cutting edge education programs requires continuous evaluation and updating. Connecting with peers can be useful for new ideas and also bouncing off new ideas. Active membership in NDEP is one way to connect with others. As of May 31, 2019, NDEP had 1539 members. This is an increase from last year. NDEP has resources for the educator the NDEP-Line is a great way to disseminate and share

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# Making the Connection through Experiential Learning: Understanding the Role of a Registered Dietitian in One Aspect of Foodservice Management

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## INTRODUCTION

The foodservice industry is ever-evolving to meet consumer needs and trends, and dietitians are perfectly suited to foster the link between health and high-quality food products. Furthermore, the customary teacher-centered college classroom modality is no longer sufficient to teach the frequently changing, high-impact lessons that need to be taught.<sup>1</sup> The training and experience offered in dietetic programs uniquely positions dietitians as key stakeholders in assisting the foodservice industry, in compliance with recipe analysis and federal menu labeling laws, nutrition-focused recipe and menu development, and steering consumers towards healthier options.<sup>2</sup> It is often expressed by students they do not make the connection between their DPD curriculum and becoming a registered dietitian RD, specifically foodservice management courses.

Instead of viewing students' perception of foodservice management as a negative problem, it can be viewed as a teachable moment or educational challenge to overcome. Finding new ways to change the mindset of students by creating a meaningful way to connect the two worlds

would be the educational challenge. What type of teaching methodology would garner the most significant impact, while meeting the objectives in a meaningful way? Perhaps it would be experiential learning (EL), where students participate in real-world application of theoretical concepts.<sup>3,4</sup> EL has many benefits including; practical aptitude, personal and social development, and maximization of learning.<sup>3</sup> EL gives educators the ability to connect practical experiences with course content in a controlled environment, therefore providing high-impact learning opportunities for the students.<sup>3-5</sup> It is important to note ACEND requires EL as part of competency requirements.<sup>6</sup>

Nutrition and Dietetic students do not appreciate foodservice management courses in their four-year programs. Anecdotally, students reported not seeing the correlation between a registered dietitian and the world of foodservice management. Furthermore, students see little value in taking foodservice management courses since their intention is not to be foodservice managers. For the instructor, this created an environment and the need to address the purpose and value

of foodservice management in each lecture. The purpose of this article is to present a method to improve or address this issue and how it can change student perceptions and understanding of the value in foodservice management as part of their curriculum as well as enhancing EL. These experiences can help students garner information necessary to make informed career decisions before and after graduation. This article provides a detailed account of an experiential learning (EL) experience that helped students make valuable connections between foodservice management and working as a (RD).

## DESIGN

### Part One. Exploratory Pilot Program.

The process of establishing an EL component for students began with locating a RD currently working in a foodservice setting. To acquire potential recommendations for RDs working in a foodservice setting, endorsements were requested from faculty of the nutrition department. After multiple conversations with colleagues, a RD was identified. Following recommendations of the faculty, the RD was contacted via email asking for willingness and interest to participate. Following the agreement with the RD to participate, the planning phase of the EL pilot program began, which included defining the purpose and specific course objectives. The proposed objectives for the pilot program were derived from the course and student learning outcomes (SLO) in alignment with ACEND standards.<sup>6</sup> (See Figure 1).

The pilot program consisted of a 2-hour experience at the RD's retail location and a survey garnering student perception of the EL activity. University IRB approval was obtained prior to survey distribution. After discussing dates and times, a signup form

utilizing centralized scheduling system (SignUp Genius)<sup>7</sup> was created, utilizing a free platform, which provided students the ability to make changes as needed. This method provided maintenance-free organization and the RD was able to see which students were participating in real-time. Prior to participation in the EL pilot, all 89-students were asked to read and sign a participation waiver releasing the retail location and university of any liability in the event of an accident or injury. Additionally, the faculty member outlined appropriate dress code for attendance and why it was important for students to adhere to it; safety and professionalism. The dress code included non-skid shoes, hair restraint, Nutrition Department polo shirt, and long pants.

The students were divided into small groups of four. The EL had four components; a one-hour didactic program provided by the RD, observational and participatory activities, and a reflection paper that aligned with the objectives. The students were instructed to take notes throughout their experience to assist them in writing their paper summarizing what they learned for each objective. In the paper, students were also asked to provide constructive feedback, which was garnered and disseminated to the RD and an EL redesign meeting was scheduled.

### Part Two. Feedback, Redesign, and Program Implementation

At completion of the pilot program, the faculty member and RD met to address feedback from students for the development of the EL activity for the following semester. Additionally, the RD suggested increasing the students in each session from four to six because she could easily accommodate more students without altering the integrity of the experience. The majority of students

stated the lecture portion of the experience was informative but, suggested the RD present the material in the didactic component of the class as a guest speaker. This would ensure students' experience at the retail location was dedicated to applied learning and a more effective use of time. This stimulated a revision of the learning objectives into two categories; didactic and experiential. Some of the objectives were restructured and consolidated. (See Figure 2).

1. Students will work with or shadow a retail dietitian to learn about the food production in a retail setting. **(SLO 1, 7)**
2. Students will participate in or observe a production system for hot foods kitchen preparation. **(SLO 1, 7)**
3. Students will learn about sustainability actions in retail foodservice operations. **(SLO 4)**
4. Students will be able to describe the federal menu labeling law and how it relates to retail food production. **(SLO 1, 3)**
5. Students will observe and be able to describe the principles of food safety and sanitation in retail foodservice. **(SLO 2, 10)**
6. Students will participate in or observe a retail dietitian facilitated culinary demonstration or class. **(SLO 7, 8)**
7. Students will prepare, shadow, or assist in preparing a food production schedule. **(SLO 1)**
8. Students will observe interactions between management and employees **(SLO 7, 8)**
9. Students will be able to describe a Registered Dietitian's primary role in retail foodservice. **(SLO 8)**

**Figure 1.** Course Objectives and SLOS

- Didactic Objectives**
1. Students will learn about sustainability actions in retail foodservice operations. **(SLO 4)**
  2. Students will work with or shadow a retail dietitian to learn about the food production and schedule in a retail setting. **(SLO 1, 7)**
  3. Students will be able to describe the federal menu labeling law and how it relates to retail food production. **(SLO 1, 3)**
  4. Students will learn principles of food safety and sanitation in the retail foodservice. **(SLO 2, 10)**
  5. Through observation, students will implement knowledge of federal menu labeling laws as they relate to retail foodservice. **(SLO 1, 3)**
- Experiential Objectives**
1. Students will apply principles of food safety and sanitation by participating in a retail dietitian facilitated hands-on demonstration. **(SLO 2, 7, 8, 10)**
  2. Students will be able to describe a registered dietitian's primary role in retail foodservice. **(SLO 8)**
  3. Students will observe interactions between registered dietitian, management, or other employees.

**Figure 2.** Course Objectives and SLOS

After restructuring of the pilot was complete, a new semester including 56-students participated in the EL opportunity. The RD attended classes and gave a lecture on the didactic objectives to prepare students for their in-person retail visit. Throughout the lecture, students were able to gain understanding of the role of a RD in a foodservice environment and in community nutrition. Students established a correlation between the purpose of their foodservice management course and the job of a retail RD. After learning about the didactic objectives, students utilized centralized scheduling system to select a date and time that worked best for their schedules to attend the foodservice retail facility. Students were asked to sign liability waivers for the university and the retail facility.

#### **Data Collection Instrumentation**

Following the EL component, students were asked to participate in a qualitative study, a brief survey outlining their perceptions of the EL activity. Prior to completing the survey, the purpose of the survey was described, and students were asked to read and sign an informed consent. Of the 145 students who participated in the EL activity, only 121 completed the survey. The purpose of the lesson was to establish a connection between foodservice management courses in a nutrition and dietetics program and the role of a RD. The survey consisted of two questions to gain student perceptions.

1. How valuable was the retail experiential learning activity to your overall understanding of a registered dietitian's role from the perspective

of foodservice management courses in a Nutrition and Dietetics program? Rate using a Likert scale from not valuable to very valuable.

2. Do you feel the retail experiential learning activity helped you make a connection between community nutrition as a registered dietitian and the purpose of taking Quantity Food Production: A Foodservice Management class? Yes, no, or other briefly explain.

#### **RESULTS**

The majority of students (n=57, 73%) in the pilot stated they found the EL activity to be valuable or very valuable to help them gain an understanding of the role of a RD from the perspective of a foodservice management course in their Nutrition and Dietetics program, while 15% (n=12) remained neutral, and (n=8, 10%) reported limited or no value. In comparison, the redesigned cohort, a higher percentage of students rated the EL activity as valuable or very valuable (n=37, 84%), 11% (n=5) rated neutrality, and 5% (n=2) noted limited or no value. (See Figure 3).

A majority of students (n=68, 88%) in the pilot stated the EL activity helped them make a connection between community nutrition as a RD and the purpose of taking a foodservice management class. Interestingly, 5% (n=4) stated other but did not provide feedback explaining what other meant. Compared to the pilot, 95% (n=42) of students in the redesigned cohort made the connection to the purpose of the EL activity. In the redesigned cohort, no one answered other. (See Figure 4).

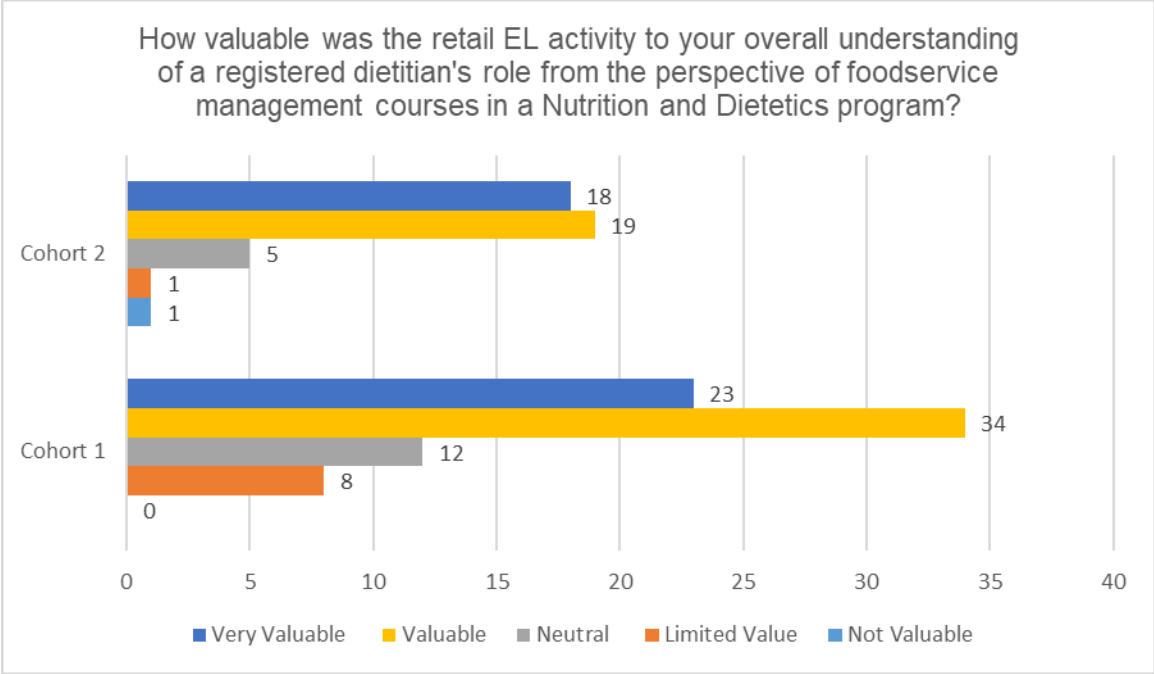


Figure 3. Student perceptions of the value of retail EL.



Figure 4. Student perceptions on course connection to retail EL.

## DICUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to evaluate how EL helped students connect course content and purpose and the roles of a RD. Similar to the research by Grace et al. students made connections between course content and the role of a RD with a majority reporting the EL activity helped them see the relationship between the food management course didactic portion and the role of the RD. This study concurred with the findings of Rosier et al., EL opportunities help students understand course objectives and career paths when universities establish relationships with industry partners. As shown above, a majority of students rated EL at valuable or very valuable, in helping them better understand the role of a RD and the objectives of their course.

### Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study was the RD had worked in the foodservice industry for approximately three years and was an alumna of the undergraduate and graduate Nutrition and Dietetic programs of the university. Students gained valuable knowledge and a fresh perspective from the RD as a former student.

A potential limitation was ascertaining a foodservice location with a RD. Techniques to overcome this would involve considering all different types of foodservice settings, vetting faculty, and utilizing alumni resources. This program could be replicated in other foodservice practice settings such as healthcare institutions, schools, restaurants, or corporate cafeterias where a RD is present, and is not limited to retail foodservice operations.<sup>8</sup> Coordinating with campus alumni chapters may help foster these partnerships. Incorporating EL in foodservice management courses can provide high-impact learning opportunities.<sup>3-</sup>

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