

Advancing Students' Competencies in the Health Sciences Through a Breastfeeding Education Program

Dr. Merav Efrat, California State University, Northridge

Dr. Joyce Gilbert, California State University, Northridge

Dr. Teri Lisagor, California State University, Northridge

Problem

- A sizeable percentage of nutrition professionals lack sufficient basic and advanced breastfeeding knowledge (Figueroa, 2001).
- Similar deficiencies have also been observed among nutrition university students (Payne, et al., 2007).
- Lack of adequate knowledge among nutrition professionals in the field has been attributed to limited breastfeeding training (Payne, et al., 2007).
- According to a study of nutrition professionals, over 75% of them reported their academic breastfeeding training as inadequate (Figueroa, 2001).
- To address this deficiency, the California WIC Association recently identified the need to incorporate breastfeeding curriculum into the university setting as a priority area of focus (California Breastfeeding Roundtable, 2009).

Goal

- To advance professional competencies of nutrition science undergraduate students in the field of breastfeeding.

Project Objectives

- Develop and offer an undergraduate course in lactation education.
- Develop and offer a lactation education internship at an area hospital to undergraduate nutrition science students.
- Shadowing an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC).
- Facilitating one-on-one breastfeeding education counseling sessions at the hospital to mothers prior to their discharge.
- Receive mentoring from an IBCLC.

First Year Outcomes

- 64 undergraduate students completed a 3 units course in lactation education.
- 12 undergraduate students completed a semester long lactation education internship at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center.
- 12 undergraduate students shadowed an IBCLC for a total of 48 hours.
- 12 undergraduate students facilitated 175 one-on-one breastfeeding education counseling sessions at the hospital to mothers prior to their discharge.
- 12 undergraduate students received a total of 197 hours of mentoring from an IBCLC.

Testimonials

The experience of providing breastfeeding education at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center has been an immensely rewarding experience. I have broadened my breastfeeding knowledge, my confidence in advising patients about breastfeeding has increased and many mothers seemed to have been satisfied after our fruitful talks. But most importantly, it has opened doors to other career opportunities, such as becoming a lactation consultant.

Luisa Sabogal, Senior Nutrition Science Student at Cal State University, Northridge

As an intern, my responsibility was to help educate the mothers what to expect within the first few weeks of conceiving as well as the nutritional implications of her diet with the initiation of breastfeeding. At first, the setting and commotion in the hospital was difficult to take in, and I would fumble around with handouts and assessment papers to provide education. As time progressed and my comfort increased, my shyness disappeared as I developed my own style when working next to the Lactation Consultants. I truly appreciated being part of such a wonderful program where we not only witnessed the breastfeeding process, but also the loving bond between mother and child. The future holds many possibilities and as a result of this experience, I would love to continue in my education to become a breastfeeding advocate as a Certified Lactation Consultant.

Xochitl Valdivia, Senior Nutrition Science Student at Cal State University, Northridge

Through this experience, I have grown both professionally and personally. This experience has not only broadened my knowledge on the unfamiliar topic of breastfeeding, but has also helped me hone my counseling skills, learn ways to disseminate education and grow comfortable working with diverse populations. This experience has opened my eyes to the beauty of breastfeeding and my desire to breastfeed my own children in the future. Most of all, I am honored to have played a small part in shaping the health and future of the infants I encountered and hope that I can continue to make a difference in the lives around me.

Chanel Villanueva, Senior Nutrition Science Student at Cal State University, Northridge