

New program enhances degree for Tulane nutrition master's students

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Dee Boling

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The nutrition section of the Department of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences (GCHB) is launching a new training program targeted at nutrition students interested in working in the maternal and child health (MCH) area. The program is being funded by the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration, and Tulane was one of two programs in the country added to the existing roster of schools providing leadership training in this area.

The Tulane Nutrition MCH Leadership Training Program will combine rigorous academics with innovative hands-on training opportunities in clinic and community settings that focus on the importance of food choice as a key to improving nutritional outcomes.

“The nutrition problems we have today are largely determined by the choices we make, which are influenced by the context we live in,” says Dr. Diego Rose, GCHB professor and director of the program. These contexts include places like schools, restaurants, hospitals, and community environments, and are influenced by food and nutrition policies as well as underlying socio-economic conditions. “There is a whole gamut of food system activities that influence our decisions. We want to give students a chance to understand that and to experience it,” Rose says.

The Nutrition Leadership Training program is open to students who are registered dietitians and can support up to five new students per year. In addition to the nutrition MPH program’s existing requirements of 45 credit hours and a 300-hour practicum, students in the leadership training track will also participate in an 80-hour research experience and three 20-hour observational rotations. They will have the opportunity to gain teaching experience, present at a professional meeting, and

participate in ongoing trainee meetings to further develop leadership competencies. Students will also get a one-time \$10,000 stipend for their participation in the program.

“It’s like an ‘extra-strength’ degree program,” says Rose, providing additional value in the career marketplace. Data show an increasing need for nutritionists throughout the country as the current workforce hits retirement age.

To satisfy the observational rotations, the program will use the nutrition section’s existing partnerships with community groups that work in the production, distribution, and consumer stages of the food system. “Food is integral to New Orleans culture, so it’s a great place for students to gain first-hand experience of what shapes our food choices, and ultimately our nutrition and health outcomes,” Rose says.