

Undergraduate Public Health adds nutrition minor

Fri, 08/30/2024 - 09:03

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The new Public Health Nutrition minor will provide students with more exciting opportunities. (Photo by John McCusker)

The [Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) is offering an exciting new academic option for undergraduates this fall, with hopes that the program can grow into something even bigger soon.

[A minor in Public Health Nutrition](#) is now available as a complementary curriculum to Tulane students who are majoring in a health-focused field, science-focused field, or in liberal arts.

The new Public Health Nutrition minor is designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and address the interplay between nutrition and public health. The coursework for the minor offers students exposure to interdisciplinary aspects of public health nutrition, such as education and communication, epidemiology, systems, and policy.

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Lauren Dunaway, PhD, MPH, RD, LDN

Assistant Professor [Lauren Dunaway](#) from the [Department of Social, Behavioral, and Populations Sciences](#) will head up the curriculum, which was built in response to a growing interest in nutrition both locally and nationally.

"We started out with one section of intro, we moved to two sections, and there was just a growing demand and interest from the student side," Dunaway said. "So, this is an exciting new program that we're building out."

Dunaway envisions a transition from the minor into a major within a couple of years, and even, if all goes well, more access for students who want to go on and do a master's program in dietetics.

"We are exploring opportunities and pathways to support students who want to go on to be dietitians. Something that's unique about our program is that we are public health nutrition focused. It's not a clinical dietetics program. However, by utilizing existing SPHTM graduate resources, we have the potential to create a new competency-based masters degree (for students without an undergraduate degree in dietetics) to prepare students who want to do that."

By offering more nutrition coursework in house, Tulane will also be increasing the opportunity for its own students to get needed prerequisites, as well as increasing the opportunity for collaboration with some existing programs at the graduate level.

“It’s not automatic that undergraduates would stay at Tulane for graduate work,” Dunaway explains. “But we are increasing the likelihood of providing places for our undergrad students to go, as well as supporting those other universities in the area.”

The minor is actually open to all Newcomb Tulane college undergrads, which will increase visibility and accessibility for all undergrads to become more familiar with and exposed to public health and nutrition – the latter of which has not been especially visible to students before on the uptown campus.

And even for students who decide they don’t want to go into nutrition, the increased specialization of the minor will allow them to incorporate nutrition into other fields.

“I’m excited to increase the academic nutrition presence on the Uptown campus through not only this program, but also just collaborating with other dietitians,” Dunaway said. “I’m creating relationships with the Campus Health dietitian, the dietitian in athletics, as well as the dietitian for campus food service.”

Why are those relationships important? They can help students more directly. Dunaway outlined examples that affect current students, including food insecurity and disordered eating, as being issues this kind of programming can address.

And if the topics are already important to students, those passions can reinforce the learning.

“A lot of times in public health, we go into the field because we’re interested in a topic,” Dunaway added. “And so students are often very interested in nutrition, and they want to know what they can do with it. But when trying to help a student understand how they want to incorporate nutrition into their coursework or career, I ask them to think about the three S’s: skill set, setting, and scope of practice. Answering those questions can provide some clarity on what they want to see out of internships, graduate school, or even job opportunities.”

[Click here for more information about the new Minor in Public Health Nutrition.](#)

[Click here for more information about the MSPH in Nutrition.](#)