Using Twitter to Enhance Engagement in Undergraduate Nutrition Courses

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**Background:** Millennial students prefer interactive, technology-infused classroom environments. Twitter is a popular social media platform and microblogging site with 645 million active users. Twitter generates opportunities to communicate with other professionals, stay abreast with research/news, connect with the public, create business opportunities, and market individual brands. With the amount of misinformation generated by noncredentialed individuals, it is particularly important for registered dietitian nutritionists and students to establish their presence as nutrition experts. This project’s goal was to provide undergraduate nutrition and dietetics students with a hands-on demonstration of responsible, professional social media messaging.

**Methods:** Undergraduate nutrition and dietetics students (n=114) from four courses at Bowling Green State University participated in interactive Twitter chats. These provided extensions of in-class discussions on hot topics in the field (e.g., 2015 Dietary Guidelines and organic vs. conventionally grown produce). Following the Twitter chats, a seven-question survey was administered and analyzed using paired t-tests.

**Results:** While 67.5% of students reported using Twitter for personal reasons before class, only 22.8% had used it professionally. Participating in class Twitter chats reflected positive attitudinal changes with 62.3% of students rating Twitter as important to their future occupational success after the activity, compared to 19.3% before (p<.0001).

**Conclusions:** Exposing undergraduate nutrition and dietetics students to professional uses of social media technologies, such as Twitter, improves the ability of our next generation of credentialed nutrition and dietetics professionals to market their expertise. These educational exposures empower students to use social media for communicating evidence-based nutrition information in a consumer-friendly manner.

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