

Nutritional Sciences – Strategic Plan 2014-2019

Executive Summary

Brief Introduction

The Department of Nutritional Sciences has been recognized as one of the top graduate nutrition programs in the nation in the recent rankings by the National Research Council. Our undergraduate program of education spanning the applied and science domains is also widely recognized for its quality. Our undergraduate dietetic program and our dietetic internship program have both recently undergone highly favorable reviews and reaccreditation by ACEND. We aim to sustain and grow the excellence of the Department, so the strategic planning process presents a welcome opportunity for us to identify our priorities to support advancement of the Department over the coming 5-years. Our strategic planning process was informed by contributions by faculty, students, alumni, and external collaborators and advisers. The highest priority Department goals are highlighted below. The Department of Nutritional Sciences has a very bright future. With the enthusiastic support of our outstanding faculty, staff, students, and alumni as well as administration of the College of Health and Human Development and the University, we aim to continue as a leading nutrition program in the United States and world.

The highest priority goals of the Department of Nutritional Sciences are best integrated into cross-cutting themes as depicted below.

Funding and resources

- **Funding and resources targeting specific fellowship, training, and research and communication needs are among our highest priorities.**
 - Secure graduate and post-doctoral fellowships, and pilot funds, bridge funds, and incentive funds to support research.
 - Seek opportunities for training grant support around established inter-disciplinary research teams targeting selected research emphases.
 - Resources – obtain priority equipment and services for research and communication. Examples include field-based, real-time data collection tools, digital video conferencing, enhanced capacity in social media and rapid-response communication, and access to enhanced biostatistics, bio-informatics, and administrative and grant support.

Recruitment and retention

- **Recruitment and retention are keys to viability and success of the Department.**
 - Prioritize faculty recruitments around inter-disciplinary research teams targeting identified research emphases. Explore opportunities for co-hires with the Social Science Research Institute, the Huck Institute, and other units like Food Science and Kinesiology. Specific opportunities should be noted in diet / metabolism / physical activity with Kinesiology, the microbiome / metabolome, functional foods / bioactives, and food choice with Food Science, and nutrition / cancer with the Penn State Hershey Cancer Center.
 - Foster promotion and retention as well as professional development of our existing faculty.
 - Support core teaching and research functions of our faculty. Evaluate the ongoing burden of regulatory compliance and other required reporting tasks.

- Promote recruitment and retention of high merit, well-prepared, and culturally diverse students and trainees at the undergraduate, graduate, dietetic intern, and post-graduate levels.
- Promote diversity enhancement as highlighted by the Penn State Diversity Framework Challenge areas / goals.

Collaborations

- **Collaborations facilitate exchange of ideas and our access to additional expertise and resources to advance research, education, and outreach.**
 - Expand research, education, and outreach collaborations with the Penn State Hershey College of Medicine and other medical or health education venues; placing particular emphasis on the Penn State regional medical campus in State College. Specific opportunities include the departments of Surgery, Gastroenterology, Hematology / Oncology, Public Health, and Rehabilitation Medicine.
 - Grow research, education, and outreach collaborations with other units / centers / colleges – Kinesiology, Biobehavioral Health, Human Development and Family Studies, Hospitality Management, Food Science, Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences, and others.

Research

- **Research is one of our highest priorities in supporting the global advancement of human health.**
 - Conduct impactful nutrition research that sustains the health of individuals, families, communities and society and trains students for careers in nutrition research.
 - Enhance existing and build new inter-disciplinary research teams that span the continuum from the genome to populations; from the biologic to behavioral. Target projected funding opportunities. Promote junior faculty co-principal investigator and co-investigator collaborative research opportunities in projects of senior investigators.
 - Seek research-related funding and resource priorities and collaborations as highlighted above.

Education / teaching

- **Providing effective instruction and advising in our undergraduate and graduate curricula and maintaining a high standard in teaching excellence are among our leading priorities.**
 - Assess and revise our undergraduate and graduate curricula and co-curricular experiences based upon alignment with faculty expertise and available resources. Aim to specifically strengthen analytical and critical thinking to prepare future professionals and leaders in nutritional sciences and related professions.
 - Explore flexible approaches to address faculty teaching load concerns including team teaching and expanded application of teaching assistants and new technologies.
 - Emphasize the nutrition – health – sustainability continuum throughout our undergraduate and graduate curricula. Promote engagement in one's own health. Explore opportunities for collaboration with the Kinesiology "Exercise is Medicine" program through a "Nutrition, Our Science, Your Health" construct.
 - Encourage students through effective advising to complete a 15-credit emphasis to focus their undergraduate studies to meet the current and future job market,

- public health concerns, and research agenda. Assess the completion rates, satisfaction, and course offerings of emphasis areas.
- Maintain accreditation of the didactic program in dietetics and the dietetic internship. Enhance the preparation of dietetics students for acceptance into dietetic internships and graduate school, or for the workforce. Provide effective instruction in the dietetic internship using innovation and technology while preparing graduates to be competent entry level dietitians and nutrition professionals.
- Develop an online Master's Degree Program to address pending ACEND requirements for dietetic internship.

Communication and outreach

- **Communication and outreach are important priorities to widely disseminate our contributions and enhance our visibility.**
 - Improve communication of research activities and important findings within and outside the department. Promote branding through new electronic communication technologies. Emphasize the nutrition – health – sustainability continuum of department initiatives.
 - Utilize innovative outreach activities as strategies for improving nutrition and for marketing, informing, and educating persons about our department, our programs, and the value of our contributions. Collaborate with the Nutrition and Dietetics Alumni Society in these efforts.
 - Recognize and value outreach efforts at a level congruent with other valued department achievements.

Synergies with the College and University Strategic Plans

- The Department of Nutritional Sciences by its very nature comprehensively targets the “*simultaneous pursuit of human health and happiness and environmental quality*” component of the University’s sustainability strategic plan. Sustainability themes are integrated throughout our Department Strategic Plan as we seek to emphasize the nutrition – health – sustainability continuum of our initiatives.
- “Nutrition, Our Science, Your Health” branding is in strong alignment with College and University priorities.
- Our Department research activities are consistent with College and/or University priorities that target:
 - Vulnerable populations including infants, children, pregnant women, and the aged.
 - Neuroscience including fMRI investigations of ingestive behavior.
 - Stress / resilience, inflammation, and health outcomes.
- The global reach of our Department is supported by our international research and outreach activities. We hope to further emphasize global issues throughout our curricula and to enhance access to global experiences for students.
- The Penn State Diversity Framework is highlighted throughout our Strategic Plan.
- Ethics are incorporated into our student orientation programs and curricula.