The Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC):

BACKGROUND

College students are especially prone to having certain disorders and are underutilized for health services. The pandemic has heightened these barriers. Student diets are more susceptible to living arrangements and socioeconomic status. UHS dietitians report seeing more students skipping meals, eating foods with low nutritional value, and presenting with more eating disorders.

- Appointment demand has increased, but workshops are underutilized.
- Time constraints and decreased focus.
- Increased fatigue and decreased focus due to stress.
- Food insecurity and access barriers.
- Poor mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, etc.).

OBJECTIVES

To create, distribute, and analyze a UT Austin student nutrition survey that...

The Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC):

- Serves as a liaison between University Health Services (UHS) and the student body to address student health concerns.
- Conducts campus-wide surveys to assess student health concerns and raise awareness of UHS resources.
- Presents evidence-based recommendations to UHS.

RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POLICY, AND ADVOCACY (RIPA) SUBCOMMITTEE:

- Conducts research on student health concerns observed during appointments.
- Designs a survey on nutrition knowledge, eating habits, and food access.
- Conducts campus-wide surveys to assess student health concerns.

PROJECT CONTEXT:

- College students are especially prone to having misconceptions about healthy eating/nutrition and face a variety of barriers to eating healthy foods.
- The pandemic has heightened these barriers.
- Student diets are more susceptible to living arrangements and socioeconomic status.
- UHS dietitians report seeing more students skipping meals, eating foods with low nutritional value, and presenting with more eating disorders.
- Appointment demand has increased, but workshops are underutilized.
- Time constraints and decreased focus.
- Increased fatigue and decreased focus due to stress.
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- Poor mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, etc.).

METHODS

- Conducted a literature review on nutrition knowledge, food insecurity, barriers to healthy eating, and body image in college students, including impact of pandemic; researched similar surveys implemented at other universities.

- Interviewed UHS dietitians on common student concerns observed during appointments.

- Designed a survey on nutrition knowledge, eating habits, food access, and body image among UT Austin students, focused on:

  1. Demographics (gender, race, ethnicity, classification, college, etc.).
  2. Nutrition knowledge, habits, and access/barriers.
  3. Dietitian services (awareness, access/barriers, and satisfaction).

- Sent survey to UHS diversity, equity, and inclusion committee members, UHS dietitians, and UHS leadership for feedback and approval.

- Distributed survey via tabling, social media, and class presentations, using a gift card incentive.

RESULTS

- Overall change in eating habits since starting college.
- Proportion of students who skip 1+ meals daily.
- Reason students would access dietitian services.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- Most students skip at least one meal a day and have worse eating habits since entering college, citing time as a key reason.
- While most students believe they would benefit from dietitian services, very few take advantage of their offerings, relying on family, friends, and social media for nutrition information.

- Promotion of free dietitian workshops as reliable sources of nutrition guidance can address high demand for services.
- Findings may inform workshop development.
- Creation of educational resources, outreach, and events addressing key barriers to healthy eating (ex. HIP Cookbook).
- Survey results can be shared with other organizations focusing on nutrition and food insecurity on campus.

- Project may serve as a model for other institutions.

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