

Evaluation of a Media Training Workshop for Nutrition Students and Trainees in Nova Scotia

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ABSTRACT

Gaps in communication training have been identified in Canadian and international academic and practicum dietetics programs. A workshop was developed to pilot supplementary media training to nutrition students/trainees studying in Nova Scotia. Students, interns, and faculty from two universities participated in the workshop. Data on perceived learning, media knowledge/skill use, and workshop feedback were collected immediately post-workshop using a mixed-form questionnaire. A modified questionnaire was administered eight months post-workshop to obtain information on utility of the perceived acquired knowledge/skills. Closed-ended responses underwent descriptive analysis, while open-ended responses underwent thematic analysis. Twenty-eight participants completed the questionnaire post-workshop, and six completed it at follow-up. All participants rated the workshop positively (7-point Likert scale) and reported learning something new (perceived). Perceived learning emphasized general media knowledge/skills and communication skills. Follow-up data suggested participants had applied perceived media knowledge/skills in message development and media and job interviews. These data suggest that nutrition students/trainees may benefit from supplementary communications and media training and provide a stimulus for ongoing curriculum review and discussion.

Key words: media, media training, media communications, quality assurance, evaluation, foundational knowledge, media literacy, nutrition literacy, communication, dietetics.

(Can J Diet Pract Res. 2023;84:112–118)

(DOI: [10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036](https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036))

Published at [dcjournal.ca](https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036) on 2 March 2023

RÉSUMÉ

Des lacunes dans la formation sur les communications ont été observées dans les programmes universitaires et de stage en diététique au Canada et à l'étranger. Un atelier a été mis au point pour mettre à l'essai une formation supplémentaire sur les médias à l'intention d'étudiants/stagiaires en nutrition de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Des étudiants, des internes et des membres du corps professoral de deux universités ont participé à l'atelier. Les données relatives à l'apprentissage perçu, à l'utilisation des connaissances/compétences sur les médias et à la rétroaction sur l'atelier ont été recueillies immédiatement après l'atelier au moyen d'un questionnaire à forme mixte. Un questionnaire modifié a été transmis huit mois après l'atelier afin d'obtenir de l'information sur l'utilité des connaissances/compétences que les participants estimaient avoir acquises. Les réponses aux questions fermées ont fait l'objet d'une analyse descriptive, tandis que les réponses aux questions ouvertes ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Vingt-huit participants ont rempli le questionnaire après l'atelier, et six l'ont rempli lors du suivi. Tous les participants ont fait une évaluation positive de l'atelier (échelle de Likert en 7 points) et ont déclaré avoir appris quelque chose de nouveau (perçu). L'apprentissage perçu portait surtout sur les connaissances/compétences générales en matière de médias et les compétences en communications. Les données de suivi suggèrent que les participants ont appliqué les connaissances/compétences médiatiques perçues lors de l'élaboration de messages, d'entrevues d'emploi et d'entrevues avec les médias. Ces données suggèrent que les étudiants/stagiaires en nutrition pourraient tirer avantage d'une formation supplémentaire en communications et en médias, et encouragent à examiner les programmes d'études en continu et à en discuter.

Mots-clés : médias, formation aux médias, communication avec les médias, assurance de la qualité, évaluation, connaissances essentielles, initiation aux médias, littératie nutritionnelle, communication, diététique.

(Rev can prat rech diétét. 2023;84:112–118)

(DOI: [10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036](https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036))

Publié au [dcjournal.ca](https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036) le 2 mars 2023

INTRODUCTION

While Canadian academic and practicum nutrition programs accredited by the Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice (PDEP) comply with standards for communications training outlined in the Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice (ICDEP), research suggests there is a need for additional communications training within these programs [1–3]. International findings support this need and include a lack of dedicated communications training and

experiential learning activities, student/trainee self-reported and evaluated knowledge/skills that are below entry-to-practice requirements, and registered dietitians (RDs) expressing the need for additional communications training upon entry to practice [4–8]. The development of strong communication skills prior to entry to practice is imperative, as inadequate skills may impede educator–client relationships and prevent effective message delivery. This could result in client/patient misunderstanding and unintended/incorrect

knowledge application. Therefore, it is important that skills-based/-targeted communication training, in addition to the PDEP foundational knowledge, competencies, and performance indicators, occurs.

As media is one of the top sources of nutrition information for North Americans, including Canadians, nutrition programs should include media training in their communications curriculum [9–16]. Since program application of the ICDEP varies and a detailed description of current communications learning activities is not available, the extent to which media training is addressed by programs is unknown. Identified learning activities/opportunities include communications courses (required and elective), integration of communications training throughout the curriculum, social media assignments, and supplemental communications and media training [17, 18].

Given the identified gaps in dietetics communications training, Canadians' reliance on media for nutrition information, and that RDs are recognized as credible sources of this information, efforts to ensure that adequate training occurs in nutrition programs is warranted. As part of this, evaluation of curriculum-based and supplementary/voluntary training activities should occur. This project focuses on the evaluation of the inaugural Applied Human Nutrition Media Training Workshop ("the Workshop"), delivered to nutrition students/trainees from two PDEP-accredited universities in Nova Scotia (February 2018). The aim of this pilot project was to obtain feedback on the Workshop.

METHODS

Design

This project involved a post-workshop questionnaire-based evaluation and was approved by the host university Research Ethics Board.

Participants

The Workshop was open to undergraduate and graduate nutrition and foods students/trainees and faculty and undergraduate communications students. At the host university, attendees were recruited through an event poster disseminated via social media and email, class announcements, course outlines, and student caucus. Limited registration was available to nutrition students/trainees from the visiting university.

Workshop attendees were invited to complete the Media Training Workshop Questionnaire (MTW-Q). Those who consented to participation were included in the sample. Participants who consented to being contacted for follow-up participation were sent a letter of intent in Fall 2018, and those who consented were included in the follow-up sample.

The Workshop

Three university nutrition and foods departments partnered with Media Training Boot Camp (MTBC), a nutrition

consulting business that offers media and communications training to nutrition/health students and professionals, to develop a one-day workshop hosted during the Winter 2018 semester [19]. The morning session included interactive speakers and Media Training 101, and the afternoon session included Media Training 201 (Supplementary Table 1¹).

Questionnaire development and administration

The MTW-Q, a self-administered mixed-form questionnaire, was informed by the MTBC evaluation tool. It included standardized questions and consisted of eight open-ended and nine closed-ended questions (Supplementary Table 2¹) [20]. It was administered immediately post-workshop (both sessions; hard copy) and eight months post-workshop (hard copy, online via LimeSurvey [LimeSurvey GmbH, Germany, 2018]).

Data analysis

All data were analyzed using Microsoft® Excel (Microsoft Corporation, USA, 2016) separately by two research assistants (GC, AH). Categorical variables from closed-ended question responses are reported as frequency and percent. Inferential statistics were not conducted due to low follow-up response rate.

Open-ended question responses more than two words were coded using the MTW Code Book. Each assistant developed a code book independently (Microsoft® Word [Microsoft Corporation, USA, 2016]), and codes for themes that appeared three or more times were determined based on inter-assistant agreement. Recurrent themes were described using frequency counts. Responses less than three words were not coded but were retained and described with quantitative data. Disagreements were resolved by a third reviewer (SG).

RESULTS

Sample

Response rate post-workshop was 63.0% ($n = 29/46$), and 28 respondents consented to participation. At follow-up, 6 of 23 potential participants completed the questionnaire. Most respondents at both timepoints were undergraduate nutrition students ($n = 20/28$; $n = 5/6$) and attended the full-day Workshop ($n = 16/28$; $n = 6/6$) (Table 1).

Closed-ended responses

Response rates for each question varied post-workshop (Table 2). All participants reported learning something new (Table 3) and rated each session and the whole Workshop positively.

Open-ended responses

Five major themes were identified: (i) media experience, (ii) motivation for attendance, (iii) attendee planned and perceived learning, (iv) attendee planned and perceived knowledge use, and (v) Workshop feedback. "No response"

¹Supplementary data are available with the article at <https://dcjournal.ca/doi/suppl/10.3148/cjdpr-2022-036>.

Table 1. Media Training Workshop Questionnaire participant characteristics at post-workshop and follow-up

Question	Count (%)	
	Post-workshop (n = 28)	Follow-up (n = 6)
1a. Who are you?		
Nutrition undergraduate student	20 (71.4)	2 (33.3)
Communications undergraduate student	2 (7.1)	1 (16.7)
Nutrition graduate student	4 (14.3)	3 (50.0)
Other	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
3. Which of the following response options best represent your attendance at the workshop?		
Morning session	10 (35.7)	0 (0)
Afternoon session	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
All day	16 (57.1)	6 (100)

Table 2. Media Training Workshop Questionnaire Questions 8a, 8b, and 8c responses for post-workshop and follow-up

Question ^a	Count (%) ^b				Missing data ^c
	Good	Very good	Excellent	Exceptional	
Post-workshop (n = 28)					
8a. Which word would you use to describe the morning session?	1 (3.6)	6 (21.4)	14 (50.0)	5 (17.9)	2 (7.1)
8b. Which word would you use to describe the afternoon session?	2 (7.1)	1 (3.6)	8 (28.6)	7 (25)	10 (35.7)
8c. Which word would you use to describe the whole day/workshop?	1 (3.6)	2 (7.1)	5 (17.9)	8 (28.6)	12 (42.9)
Follow-up (n = 6)					
8a. Which word would you use to describe the morning session?	0 (0)	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
8b. Which word would you use to describe the afternoon session?	0 (0)	1 (16.7)	5 (83.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
8c. Which word would you use to describe the whole day/workshop?	0 (0)	2 (33.3)	4 (66.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)

^aThe "fair", "poor", and "very poor" response options are not shown as they were not selected.^bTotal counts vary due to varying completion rates for each question.^cTen participants did not attend the afternoon session.

and "Misinterpretation" codes were for missing data and responses that did not answer the question. The results for each theme are presented below and counts and percentages are summarized in Table 3.

Theme 1: Experience: Post-workshop: Twenty-seven participants described their prior media experience (Question 2). Most responses were coded as none (n = 5/28), personal (i.e., social media; n = 6/28), or novice (i.e., some experience beyond personal use; n = 6/28). Six responses were two words or less and suggested personal (n = 1/28), none (n = 3/28), novice (n = 1/28), or intermediate experience (n = 1/28).

Follow-up: Three participants misinterpreted Question 2 and described their Workshop experience positively. The other responses were coded as novice (n = 2/6) and intermediate experience (n = 1/6).

Theme 2: Motivation: Post-workshop: All participants responded to Question 4 (motivation for attendance). One response was two words ("continuing education"). General interest (n = 8/28), specific learning goal (n = 9/28), and no previous/limited media education (n = 4/28) were the most common themes. For example, "Gain insight into the role of a media dietitian. Learn key techniques and skills for communication in media" was coded as a specific learning goal with

sub-themes of role of media dietitian and communication skills. Twenty-seven participants responded to Question 5 (planned learning), and identified themes included general media knowledge/skills (n = 18/28), confidence (n = 8/28), and communication skills (n = 4/28).

Follow-up: All participants responded to Questions 4 and 5. For Question 4, identified themes included general interest (n = 3/6), desire to work in/with media (n = 2/6), and a specific learning goal (n = 1/6). Themes identified in Question 5 responses were general media knowledge/skills (n = 3/6), communication skills (n = 2/6), confidence (n = 2/6), and professional social media use (n = 1/6).

Theme 3: Perceived learning: Post-workshop: All participants responded to Question 6b (new perceived learning). Three responses were two words or less. Communication skills (n = 24/28; e.g., "Interview prep tips: key messages, sound bites, bridging techniques"), general media knowledge/skills (n = 7/28), and interview preparation (n = 5/28) were themes identified.

Follow-up: All participants completed Question 6b, and responses were coded as communication skills (n = 3/6), interview preparation (n = 3/6), and general media knowledge/skills (n = 1/6).

Table 3. Media Training Workshop Questionnaire Questions 2, 4, 5, and 6b responses and identified codes post-workshop and at follow-up

Open-ended question and identified codes	Count (%)	
	Post-workshop (n = 28)	Follow-up (n = 6)
2. How would you describe your media experience?	27 (96.4)	6 (100)
Personal	6 (21.4)	0 (0)
Novice	6 (21.4)	2 (33.3)
Intermediate	2 (7.1)	1 (16.7)
Expert	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
None	5 (17.9)	0 (0)
Misinterpretation of question	0 (0)	3 (50.0)
Not coded ^a	6 (21.4)	0 (0)
Missing data	1 (3.6)	0 (0)
4. What motivated you to attend this workshop? ^b	28 (100)	6 (100)
General interest	13 (46.4)	3 (50.0)
Learning goal	9 (32.1)	1 (16.7)
No previous/limited media education	4 (14.3)	0 (0)
Professional practice	4 (14.3)	2 (33.3)
Not coded ^a	3 (10.7)	2 (33.3)
Missing data	0 (0)	0 (0)
5. What did you hope to get out of this event? ^b	27 (96.4)	6 (100)
General media knowledge/skill	17 (60.7)	3 (50.0)
Specific media knowledge/skill ^c	12 (42.9)	3 (50.0)
Gain confidence	9 (32.1)	2 (33.3)
Not coded ^a	0 (0)	0 (0)
Missing data	1 (3.6)	0 (0)
6b. If you learned something new today, what is the most important thing you learned? ^{b,d}	28 (100)	6 (100)
General media knowledge/skills	7 (25.0)	1 (16.7)
Communication skills	24 (85.7)	3 (50.0)
Interview preparation	5 (17.9)	3 (50.0)
Not coded ^a	4 (14.3)	0 (0)
Missing data	0 (0)	0 (0)

^aTwo words or less or relevant code was not identified two or more times in the data.^bMultiple themes identified in some responses.^cCodes for communication skills, role of media dietitian, interview preparation, and professional social media use collapsed into one category for reporting purposes.^dAll participants responded "Yes" to Question 6a: "Did you learn something new today/during the workshop?"

Theme 4: Knowledge use: Post-workshop: Twenty-six participants completed Question 6c (planned knowledge use). Themes identified included knowledge/skills application in the workplace and (or) course work (n = 8/28), media interviews (n = 8/28), message development/delivery (n = 5/28), and pitching to media/accepting media opportunities (n = 4/28).

Follow-up: All participants responded to Question 6c and reported application of perceived knowledge/skills in message development/delivery (n = 2/6), media (n = 2/6) and job (n = 2/6) interviews, workplace/course work (n = 1/6), and practice interviews (n = 1/6).

Theme 5: General feedback: Post-workshop: Twenty participants provided feedback (Question 7a). Fourteen responses were assigned a code, and two were two words or less ("No", "Amazing presentation"). Themes were general positive feedback (n = 5/28), more interview practice/tips (n = 6/28), more

microphones for speakers (n = 2/28), and increased attendance capacity (n = 1/28). Fifteen participants provided suggestions (Question 7b); two responses were one word ("No"). Two themes were identified in the remaining responses: addition of content on professional social media (n = 3/28) and tailoring information to a target population (n = 2/28).

Follow-up: All participants completed Question 7a. Themes were general positive feedback (n = 1/6), more interview practice/tips (n = 2/6), and increased attendance capacity (n = 1/6). Five participants responded to Question 7b; one response was one word ("No"). Themes identified were more content on interview tips (n = 2/6), tailoring information to a target population (n = 1/6), and professional social media (n = 1/6).

No participants suggested removing content from the Workshop.

Table 4. Media Training Workshop Questionnaire Questions 6c, 7a, and 7b responses and identified codes post-workshop and at follow-up

Question and identified codes	Count (%)	
	Post-workshop (n = 28)	Follow-up (n = 6)
6c. If you learned something new today, how do you think you will use this knowledge/skill after the workshop? ^{b,c}	26 (92.9)	6 (100)
Workplace/course work	8 (28.6)	1 (16.7)
Job interviews	2 (7.1)	2 (33.3)
Print/radio/video interviews	8 (28.6)	2 (33.3)
Practice interviews	2 (7.1)	1 (16.7)
Message development/delivery	5 (17.9)	2 (33.3)
Seeking/accepting media opportunities	4 (14.3)	0 (0)
Professional social media	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
Promotion of dietetic profession	1 (3.6)	0 (0)
Not coded ^a	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
Missing data	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
7a. Is there anything you think we can improve upon when we offer this workshop next time?	20 (71.4)	6 (100)
Positive feedback	5 (17.9)	1 (16.7)
More microphones for speakers	2 (7.1)	0 (0)
Increase attendance capacity	1 (3.6)	1 (16.7)
More interview practice/tips	6 (21.4)	2 (33.3)
Not coded ^a	6 (21.4)	2 (33.3)
Missing data	8 (28.6)	0 (0)
7b. Are there knowledge/skills that you would like to see added/removed to/from this workshop? ^d	15 (53.6)	5 (83.3)
Additional interview tips	0 (0)	2 (33.3)
Content on tailoring information to target population	2 (7.1)	1 (16.7)
Content on professional use of social media	3 (10.7)	1 (16.7)
Not coded ^a	10 (35.7)	1 (16.7)
Missing data	13 (46.4)	1 (16.7)

^aTwo words or less or relevant code was not identified two or more times in the data.^bMultiple themes identified in some responses.^cAt follow-up, Question 6c was "If you learned something new, how did you use this knowledge/skill since the workshop?"^dAll responses included suggestions for addition of content.

DISCUSSION

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the Workshop (rated as good, very good, excellent, or exceptional) and reported new perceived learning in general media knowledge/skills and communication, and application of these knowledge/skills in different settings post-workshop. Feedback included addition of more content on interviews, tailoring messages to a target population, and professional social media use. As MTBC evaluations are not published, it is unknown if similar feedback has been previously provided.

The reported new perceived learning and positive ratings were expected given the respondents' minimal media experience, the previously discussed need for supplementary communications training, and the host university's curriculum. Of the 15 PDEP-accredited programs, the host university is one of three that does not include a dedicated communications course [21–35]. While communications training integrated throughout the curriculum (e.g., simulated/standardized

patients, role play, development of nutrition education materials) meets PDEP standards, the Workshop was an opportunity to supplement it and pilot experiential learning outside the classroom.

The suggestion regarding social media is not surprising, given its role in dietetic practice and patient/client-reported preference for information disseminated via social media [36–39]. Additionally, lack of social media skills has been reported as a barrier to use by healthcare professionals, including RDs [38, 40, 41]. Although North American dietetic regulatory bodies have position statements on social media use, they focus on safe and ethical use [42–49]. More information is needed to determine if this knowledge/skill area should be addressed by nutrition programs.

There were several limitations to this project. Due to convenience sampling, the sample may not be representative of Canadian nutrition students/trainees. Different feedback may have been obtained from students/trainees completing

programs with a dedicated communications course. Participant year of study was not collected, and ten participants attended the morning session only; both could impact feedback. The follow-up response rate was low, likely due to initial implementation of the questionnaire in hard copy, as response occurred only after an electronic version was offered. The data set was incomplete due to varying question response rate and misinterpretation. The Likert scale layout could have impacted responses, as positive response options were presented first and four of the seven response options were positive ratings [50]. Finally, overall positive ratings may be partially due to content delivery by novel speakers and learning occurring outside the classroom.

Despite these limitations, this was the first full-day education session offered in Nova Scotia to address media training prior to entry to dietetic practice. Future sessions and evaluations are needed to obtain representative data on this population's media training needs and determine if novel speakers and (or) learning activities outside the classroom should supplement course-based communications training. However, the data provides insight on topics and skills that may be most relevant and a starting point for communications training evaluation.

RELEVANCE TO PRACTICE

The results of this project contribute to Canadian dietetic programs' knowledge-sharing and ongoing efforts in quality assurance and curriculum improvement, and they suggest there may be a need to provide supplementary media communications training. The information gained can be used to inform review of communications curricula and to stimulate discussions. When conducting program evaluation, programs should consider if the curriculum adequately addresses communication competencies, the feasibility of including content beyond the competencies, prior feedback on communications learning opportunities/activities, and the need to ensure that nutrition students/trainees receive adequate training to effectively communicate nutrition information to the public.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the following collaborators and consultants who played key roles in the workshop development, implementation, and (or) workshop evaluation: Sue Mah and Gina Sunderland (MTBC) for being the main workshop facilitators and allowing adaptation and use of questions from their MTBC questionnaire; Kate Comeau (Dietitians of Canada) for being a workshop guest speaker; Catherine Morley (School of Nutrition and Dietetics, Acadia University) for providing feedback on the evaluation and acting as a mentor at the workshop; Gillian Batten (Communications, Mount Saint Vincent University) and Greg Pretty (Multimedia Services, Mount Saint Vincent University, GegintheBox) for being guest speakers and workshop mentors; and Amy Thurlow (Department of Communications Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University) for being a workshop mentor.

Financial support: The MTBC Workshop Evaluation was financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. GC was awarded the Judy Van Tilburg Memorial Bursary to present this work at the Dietitians of Canada Conference (2019).

Conflicts of interest: The authors have no perceived or actual conflicts of interest to report.

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