Background

Mentorship promotes positive relationships and development of new skills, knowledge, and attitudes1 yet there is little research about mentorship within the dietetics profession. Nationally elected or appointed leaders of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics concluded that having a mentor in their lives greatly contributed to their success and became a segue to their leadership.2 Mentoring has been proven to facilitate students’ learning and strengthen students’ professionalism.3 This study investigated Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) students’ experiences with mentoring and their perceptions of what mentorship encompasses.

Methodology

A total of 611 usable responses were obtained with representation from 35 US states/territories and 69 DPD programs. A majority of respondents were female (92%), between 18-24 years old (78%), and graduating within two years (69%).

Most respondents (91%) were either extremely interested or interested in having a mentor during their dietetics education. A majority (58%) believed a mentor had been moderately or extremely influential to them. The most common resources/methods for finding a mentor were informal networking (31%) and the school’s dietetics club (30%).

Results

A dietitian unaffiliated with your university
A family member
A student further along in the dietetics program
An academic advisor
A professor/instructor

Discussion & Conclusion

Overall, it is positive that DPD students across the nation have a strong interest in having mentors. It is unsurprising that the most commonly reported mentors were a professor/instructor, an academic advisor, and/or a student further along in the dietetics program. Fortunately, of those with mentors, over half found their mentors to be influential to them. DPD students have varying expectations for mentors, but most commonly they highlighted the need for a mentor to have experience/expertise, specific attributes, an understanding that the mentor will guide, lead, and coach them, and be personally invested in the mentee.

Implications

Dietetics Students: • Most DPD students find mentors through university faculty or advisors, and the student dietetic association/chab at a university. Consider building relationships with your faculty and being an active member in your club. • Of students with mentors, most found them to be influential. Consider clarifying your expectations with a mentor as some students vary in what guidance they desire (e.g., registering for classes, academic advice, and/or personal life).

Educators: • Recognize the role of the student dietetic association/chab at your university in students’ finding mentors. Additionally, you may find ways to introduce students to other resources/methods for obtaining a mentor. • Most students value your expertise/experience, your ability to guide and lead them, and your personal investment in them.

References