Human Ecology grads pursue different paths to become Registered Dietitians

Delaware State University student, staffer seek nutrition careers

Jessica Teachout never imagined pursuing a military career. Like most high school graduates, she pondered career paths and the colleges to get her there. After a year in art school and some time spent reflecting, Jessica decided to capitalize on her love of science. “Nutrition is the most natural form of medicine,” said Jessica. “You are what you eat… when you study nutrition you realize (on a molecular level) what you eat becomes you. We want to put Band-Aids on everything by taking pills. Nutrition solves the problem before it starts.”

A Delaware native, Jessica attended Caesar Rodney High School, then graduated from Dover High School in 2007. She chose Delaware State University (DSU) for its Food and Nutritional Science degree program, its affordable tuition, and the encouragement she received from Dr. Samuel Besong, Human Ecology department chairperson. In May 2015, Jessica earned her bachelor’s degree.

Prior to completing her degree, and with student loan repayment on her mind, Jessica reached out to others for advice about her future that did not include amassing another $30,000 in loans for a master’s degree. Though one of her sisters suggested enlisting in the armed forces to dispel her debt, Jessica did not initially consider that a viable option. That is, until she learned about the U.S. Military-Baylor Graduate Program in Nutrition plus internship.

“I mentioned what my sister said to Dr. Giesecke in passing. A couple of weeks later, she forwarded an email to me from Baylor University.” (Dr. Carol Giesecke is a former Human Ecology Department faculty member and academic advisor.)

Eight months later, after a tedious application process, Jessica gained admittance to Baylor University’s two-year degree program.

She reported to Ft. Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, last fall. After 12 weeks of Basic Officer Leadership training, she began the MS program as a Second Lieutenant, with a direct commission, while earning her graduate degree and completing the internship. The program will prepare her for the Registration Examination for Dietitians.

Upon completing her military commitment, Jessica looks forward to a career as a clinical dietician, food service director or outpatient nutrition counselor for enlisted personnel and their families, and the community at large.

“I feel like being an officer in the Army is an honorable thing. You know that, at the end of the day, you’re going to be helping somebody.”

She advises students to: “Find what you like, that you feel passionate about. Put your all into it and I think you’ll end up in a good place.” “Step outside your comfort zone.”

Her mom, Tammy Orledge, must be proud.

“Crazy how it all worked out. It’s a perfect situation.”
Sophie Delima progressed from Delaware State University student to staffer, shortly after earning her bachelor’s degree in Food and Nutritional Sciences in May 2012. As a newly minted DSU alum, Sophie accepted a position with Cooperative Extension, DSU’s outreach arm, as a nutrition educator for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed).

Cooperative Extension “helped me realize how strongly I valued health promotion and nutrition education, and opened my eyes to the possibility of working as a registered Dietitian” said Sophie.

As a SNAP-Ed educator at DSU, Sophie visited school sites to educate children about nutrition and the benefits of healthy eating. Her work involved developing engaging children’s games and activities that made learning about nutrition fun.

Sophie said that her combined love of food and interest in health have helped define her path.

“When I learned that I could combine my passion for nutrition with my goal of working in health care, I knew that Dietetics was the right career.”

After spending three years in service to her alma mater, Sophie decided to become a registered dietitian. She applied to five different dietetic internships before being matched to the program at Iowa State University, which began January 2016. This fast-paced, six-month program offers at least 1200 hours of supervised practice in medical nutrition therapy, community nutrition and food service management. Upon completion of the internship in July, Sophie will be prepared to sit for the Registration Examination for Dietitians.

Beyond the dietetics program, Sophie plans to finish her master’s degree. Her goal is to work in a hospital or a community outreach setting, with special interest in pediatrics.

“I see my future work impacting the lives of others by sharing my knowledge of nutrition and its role in the prevention and management of chronic disease,” said Sophie, “and to motivate and inspire individuals to live healthy, well-nourished lifestyles.”

Sophie, a Haitian native, has a keen interest in global health issues. She would find it ideal to work internationally to aid malnourished children.

Sophie had this to say to students considering careers in nutrition:

“Dietetic internships are very competitive; my advice is to not give up. Take time to research the best program for yourself and be open to moving to a new area. The application process is long and confusing, so start early. Stand out from your peers by writing an outstanding personal statement, and résumé. Keep your grades up, and get as much experience as you can in the field by getting a part time job, volunteering, shadowing registered dietitians, and try to get leadership roles. If you don’t get matched the first time around, don’t get discouraged. Apply again the following year, and use the time to get more experience in the nutrition field.”

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