

Experimental learning paying off

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Through the use of the Online Health Program Planner, a tool created by Public Health Ontario, a soon-to-be-implemented peer nutrition education program by and for university students looks to help enhance critical thinking skills.

In an article published in the July issue of *American Journal of [Health Sciences](#)*, co-authors June Matthews and Paula Dworatzek, both associate professors at Brescia University College, reported on the unique experiential learning assignment whereby students used a novel online tool with real-world applications.

Problem-based learning, combined with the teaching pedagogy over a three-year span, allowed the students to focus on developing core competencies in public health.

“What was really interesting and rewarding about this assignment, was observing the students transition from feeling overwhelmed by a self-directed learning process to being confident in the quality and quantity of work that they accomplished,” said Dworatzek.

Laura Vandervet, a former student in the program, said, “navigating through the Online Health Program Planner helped to integrate academic principles and imparted skills important to my current position as a Health Promotions Planner.”

“This is really a report on [experiential learning](#),” added Dworatzek, who taught the course with Matthews. Both professors saw a need to combine

community nutrition with an emphasis on program planning and evaluation that could be applied in a real-world setting.

The students who took the course were all graduate students who had a deep understanding of technology, aiding in the success of the findings, said Matthews.

“The Ontario Health Program Planner is well-suited for the millennial generation,” she said. “These highly-connected students quickly grasped the benefit of using an online approach to program planning, similar to what individuals in [public health](#) units across the province are already doing.”

Going forward, Matthews and Dworatzek hope students are able to develop and evaluate new strategies similar to the peer [nutrition education program](#), where the information is relevant to the [students](#).

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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