

SIUE Athletics and Nutrition Program Partner to Help Student-Athletes “Nourish to Flourish”

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – For college athletes, understanding nutrition and making healthy food choices can have a significant impact on their athletic performance. College is also a time when many student-athletes are living on their own for the first time and making their own meals.

To educate student-athletes about healthy eating for enhancing athletic performance, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Department of Intercollegiate Athletics and

Department of Applied Health have partnered on a sports nutrition program that also provides valuable learning experiences for nutrition and dietetics students.

“The partnership is mutually beneficial for both our student-athletes and our nutrition and dietetics students,” said Kathy Mora, PhD, RD, assistant professor of nutrition. “We provide nutrition and cooking education to the student-athletes and coaches, while our undergraduate and graduate students gain experiential learning opportunities.”

During the 2020-21 academic year, the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior’s first-ever nutrition and dietetics graduate cohort developed a sports nutrition blog to help student-athletes learn about food, healthy eating and sports nutrition. Following the motto “Nourish to Flourish,” graduate students posted healthy recipes, short articles and cooking demonstration videos featuring student-athletes.

The partnership took a step further this academic year when Mark Jamison, Intercollegiate Athletics’ assistant athletic director for high performance, approached Mora prior to the fall 2021 semester with a request to provide cooking and nutrition classes for the women’s volleyball team.

“Eating unhealthy food causes just as much—if not more—inflammation as competition and training, so understanding how to slowly eliminate or replace those items in your diet and transition to non-processed, whole food is essential,” explained Jamison. “The setback most student-athletes have is not knowing how to cook those foods or ‘make them taste better,’ which is where Dr. Mora comes in.”

After an initial cooking demonstration and team dinner, Mora developed the curriculum for the Athlete’s Training Table program, which involves both graduate and undergraduate nutrition and dietetics students.

“We scheduled three dinners with the volleyball team in the fall, where our students prepared the food, talked to the players about the menu and nutrition, and provided them with dinner after their practice,” said Mora. “They could all sit together as a team, share a meal and learn about nutrition in an informal, casual manner.”

The program has continued this spring and includes the women’s basketball team as well.

“Our hope is that our student-athletes have a better knowledge of their day-to-day intake and what is best for their bodies from a physical and mental health aspect,” said Women’s Basketball Head Coach Samantha Quigley Smith. “As a student-athlete with the rigors of playing Division I basketball, you are what you eat.”

“Good nutrition has a huge impact on my athletic performance,” said junior basketball player Jaida Hampton. “Our coaches and weight trainers are constantly reminding us how important it is to eat healthy so we can be at our maximum potential on the court. And we definitely see the benefits from this on the court.”

Senior volleyball player Jessica Vineyard sees the Athlete’s Training Table program from the perspective of a nutrition student and also as a student-athlete.

“I’m able to put my nutrition knowledge to use and enjoy a balanced meal,” said Vineyard. “It’s nice to come upstairs hungry and tired after practice and know that dinner is prepared. I’m always glad to learn something new or be able to help my teammates learn a new concept about nutrition.”

With the nutrition and dietetics graduate program offering a concentration in sports nutrition, the partnership with Intercollegiate Athletes provides worthwhile experiential learning opportunities for students.

“Interacting with athletes provides students with opportunities to apply knowledge gained in the classroom by demonstrating their skills translating evidence-based sports nutrition science into meaningful and relevant messages that support athletes’ nutrition needs,” said Mora.

“Ultimately, I hope the meals are providing quality nutrition to help the student-athletes be successful in their training and competition,” Mora continued. “We have a long list of content areas we still want to address and teach the student-athletes, and we’re just getting started.”

The School of Education, Health and Human Behavior prepares students in a wide range of fields, including public health, exercise science, nutrition, instructional technology, psychology, speech-language pathology and audiology, educational administration, and teaching and learning. Faculty members engage in leading-edge research, which enhances teaching and enriches the educational experience. The School supports the community through on-campus clinics, outreach to children and families, and a focused commitment to enhancing individual lives across the region.