

Teaching Philosophy

Rena Mendelson

It has been my distinct privilege to serve as a professor of Nutrition at Ryerson University in a program that values diversity, creativity and professional development. I am doubly fortunate because I am able to share my own continuous learning with eager and committed students. After many years of study, I have continued to be fascinated by the constantly changing field of nutrition and the opportunity to share this with students as I continue to learn even more from them.

The following model, "The Learning Circle"¹ was created by a colleague of mine and captures the philosophical approach that I have tried to use in my work with students and colleagues as well.



From the time I entered the field of nutrition, teaching has been my greatest pleasure and highest priority. Along the way I have had the opportunity to undertake research and service that have enriched my experience and enabled me to share these with students to promote an ongoing link to practice and policy.

In the classroom, I endeavour to create for students a framework for each lecture that is coherent, connected and evidence-based. Within that framework, I seek their knowledge and experience to reinforce the principles under discussion. I also share my own experiences that have been informed through research and service to my professional field as described below.

Research

I have undertaken ongoing research with Ryerson undergraduates and University of Toronto graduate students over the years. Sharing the experience of discovery together is one of the most exciting aspects of working with students as colleagues. The largest project for which I was the Principal Investigator was the Ontario Food Survey (1996 – 2003), a collaborative effort with colleagues from Ryerson and the University of Toronto, Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health. This project employed 32 interviewers and several supervisors and research assistants of whom most had earned Ryerson bachelor's degrees in the School of Nutrition. The work remains an important source of information about the food and nutrient intakes of Ontarians and has been an essential component of the FNN200 Nutrition and Metabolism course. In addition, this work has led to my role on the Advisory Committee to the Institute of Medicine (US) for the development of the summary document on the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs). The DRIs have been an important initiative between Canada and the US to update and revise the way that we approach nutritional requirements and this document is designed to meet the needs of professional (and student) nutritionists. It has been especially helpful to bring this experience to the classroom and to bring my students' needs to the process.

Service to Dietetics and Nutrition

Over the years, I have served on numerous committees for the Dietitians of Canada (DC) and during the 1990s, joined the Education Committee. This group established the accreditation procedures and published the framework for dietetics education that remains to this day the basis for program accreditation. Soon after that, I served for two years as a member of the Transitional Council for the College of Dietitians of Ontario. This was an important step

forward as dietitians joined the accredited health professions for the first time in Ontario. I think that it was helpful to our students to anticipate the changes to the profession long before they became a reality. Recently, I conscripted the DC Obesity, Diabetes and Cardiovascular Network to collaborate on the Canadian evidence-based clinical practice guidelines for the treatment and prevention of obesity. The guidelines are the result of an extensive collaborative effort across many medical subspecialties and as an active member of the “obesity community” I was pleased to bring the DC group to the table. Since that time, I have agreed to serve as the Nutrition Section Head for the Canadian Obesity Network, a new Center of Excellence. My involvement in this area has enriched the FNP500 course in Energy Balance.

One of my ongoing service commitments includes the roles I have played as Chair of the Board of the National Institute of Nutrition and the Canadian Council of Food and Nutrition. These organizations are committed to serving as a catalyst for the development of evidence based nutrition policy. Working with health experts from across Canada and with food and other industry representatives, I have been able to bring to students the most relevant issues of the day from a broad set of perspectives. My engagement with corporate CEOs, federal health officials and others who deal with the regulatory affairs of Canada’s main food industries has enabled me to bring these matters directly into the classroom and to stimulate discussions that are well informed.

The time I spent as Associate Vice President, Academic was a special challenge for me. Working with faculty from across the university to develop the Ryerson agenda for research and graduate studies, involved the establishment of new policies, procedures, staff positions, offices, etc. and was just a detour from my primary commitment. Year after year, the job was extended until I could finally come home to the place where I belong, seven years later.

Since my return, I have felt like a brand new faculty member and I have embraced the new technologies with enthusiasm. By all accounts the use of power point, blackboard and other tools have helped me to enhance the learning and teaching environment in my classroom. I have tried my best to avoid the tyranny of power point and to use it effectively to help students see the patterns of data and to analyze the constantly changing dimensions of this field that continues to fascinate me after all these years.

¹ Linda Millar, Vice President, Education for Concerned Children’s Advertisers