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'Bulldogs in the Kitchen' teaches athletes cooking survival skills

Many Fresno State athletes excel at catching touchdown passes, swishing three-pointers, or blocking goals but in the kitchen, it is more fumbles and failed starts.

But with the help of senior dietetics students in Fresno State's Bulldogs in the Kitchen program, student athletes will not go hungry.

The program in the Food Science and Nutrition Department is a class to teach "cooking survival skills" specifically designed to help Bulldog athletes achieve peak performance. Taught by the dietetics students in the department's kitchen lab in the Food Science Building, four classes have been held with three remaining: Thursday, April 25, Monday, April 29 and Tuesday, April 30.

The class includes menu planning, developing a budget, shopping for healthful food and learning how to cook, said Dr. Lisa Herzig, director of the Dietetics and Food Administration Program at Fresno State.

Athletes will also learn how to handle food safely and manage their time so an entire meal is completed on time. At the end of the class, all participants will enjoy a meal together – a meal they prepared – family style.

Herzig said the idea began as collaboration with the athletics program to find a way to help athletes learn about nutrition to improve their athletic performance and since there is a kitchen laboratory on campus, it made sense to give them a hands-on experience with the dietetics students who are required to take cooking classes during their undergraduate curriculum.

"It was fitting to have them teach the athletes not only basic cooking skills but basic nutrition education skills as well, such as how to determine a healthful body weight, decipher pre- and post-workout recommendations, focus on the store perimeter while grocery shopping and figure out how much money they have to spend on food," Herzig said. "Essentially, the students teach the athletes basic kitchen survival skills and how to place nutrition at the forefront to improve or sustain athletic performance."

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The program began three years ago and now involves about 100 Fresno State student-athletes from the equestrian, football, tennis, golf, swimming and volleyball teams. Four workshops have already been held the past two weeks with three left.

Derron Smith, free safety for the Bulldogs football team who took the class April 18, said the class was valuable because "cooking for yourself and eating healthy is a key part of being an athlete."

He added, "Athletes shouldn't just eat fast food every day if they plan on being productive in their sport so learning a few new skills about cooking from Bulldogs in the Kitchen is very helpful to us athletes. And it was a lot of fun cooking with my teammates."

Rayanne Nguyen, Bulldogs swim team member who is majoring in Food and Nutrition Sciences and is co-coordinator of Bulldogs in the Kitchen with Megan Chavez, said the program helped her learn organization and leadership, two things she says are vital to her future career as an intern and dietitian.

"We teach the student-athletes food safety and cooking skills that many don't have much experience with," Nguyen said. "My favorite part is when an athlete tells you that they have never seen or done a certain thing before and can't wait to try it at home. As a student-athlete myself, I know how busy their schedules are and what a struggle it is to eat healthy consistently. Hopefully this workshop was able to teach them a few skills that can be implemented in their daily life and encourage optimal performance."

Although the class does not offer course credit to the athletes, many teams offer accountability points to the athletes as part of an internal competition, Herzig said.

For more information, contact Herzig at 559.278.2043.

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(University Communications news intern Samantha Gibson contributed to this copy.)

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