

2026 Noteworthy Practice Honorees
Noteworthy Practice Category: *Curriculum*

Rutgers University Didactic Program in Dietetics & Dietetic Internship
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The Department of Nutritional Sciences at Rutgers University–New Brunswick collaborated with the Learning Games Lab at New Mexico State University and the Institute of Continuing Education for Nutrition Professionals to develop the Nutrition Counselor VR (<https://nutritioncounselorvr.org/>), an immersive virtual reality (VR) platform designed specifically for nutrition and dietetics education. Supported through a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Higher Education Challenge Grant (#2021-70003-35433), the project created four VR counseling simulations delivered through commercially available Meta VR technology.

The simulations allow students to engage with virtual patients in realistic clinical scenarios involving diabetes management, nutrition-focused physical examinations, and nasogastric tube placement. Each simulation is supported by comprehensive instructor and learner materials, including patient records, learning objectives, evidence-based resources, and structured debriefing guides.

This innovation is noteworthy because it integrates immersive technology with competency-based dietetics education to provide standardized, scalable, and repeatable experiential learning opportunities. The platform addresses limitations associated with traditional role-playing and supervised practice experiences while creating a safe environment for students to develop counseling and communication skills. As one of the first immersive VR applications developed and evaluated specifically for nutrition counseling education, Nutrition Counselor VR represents a significant advancement in experiential learning and educational technology within dietetics education.

The objectives of this noteworthy practice are:

1. Enhance student competence and confidence in nutrition counseling and communication skills.
2. Provide realistic, standardized experiential learning opportunities that supplement traditional supervised practice experiences.
3. Increase student exposure to clinical nutrition scenarios through immersive technology.
4. Improve student preparedness for supervised practice and professional dietetics roles.
5. Demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of VR-based learning within dietetics education

The program successfully developed and implemented four immersive VR nutrition counseling simulations, created comprehensive educational support materials for students and instructors, including patient profiles, electronic medical records, pre-simulation resources, and debriefing guides, conducted formative testing, pilot testing, and multi-site field testing with dietetics students. Students reported high levels of engagement, usability, and realism during simulation experiences and perceived the simulations as beneficial preparation for real-world patient interactions and supervised practice experiences. Field testing demonstrated increased student confidence in nutrition counseling and communication skills following participation in the VR simulations. The platform was successfully distributed through the Meta Store, supporting broad accessibility and scalability. The Nutrition Counselor VR is freely available for download and use.

The outcomes demonstrate that Nutrition Counselor VR successfully achieved its objectives by providing immersive and standardized counseling experiences that enhanced student confidence and communication skills. The realistic patient encounters increased student exposure to clinical situations that may not be consistently available through traditional educational experiences. Positive perceptions of engagement, usability, and realism support the feasibility of integrating VR into dietetics curricula. The development and implementation of multiple simulations, coupled with successful field testing and broad accessibility through commercially available technology, demonstrate the platform's potential to expand experiential learning opportunities while preparing students for supervised practice and entry-level professional roles.

Results can be found in published peer-reviewed article:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12470136/>