

Cooking Like CHAMPS

A CREATIVE AND TASTY SUMMER CAMP
IN **OU'S COLLEGE OF ALLIED HEALTH**
TEACHES KIDS THE INS AND OUTS
OF HEALTHY EATING

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY
PHOTOS BY THERESA BRAGG

What started out as a way to fulfill student competency requirements for University of Oklahoma nutritional science students has turned into a tasty, one-of-a-kind summertime adventure that's been wildly successful for many Oklahoma City-area elementary and middle-schoolers.

Now in its sixth year, C.H.A.M.P. Camp is a unique, week-long day camp that teaches students ages 10 to 12 the basics of preparing healthy food, along with a host of other related topics. Children's Healthy Activity and Meal Planning is geared specifically for this age group, as they are often just beginning to cook and prepare food for themselves.

"In today's fast-paced society it is becoming less and less common for children to eat family-style meals at home. For many, eating at home means a parent picking up pizza and bringing it home," says Allen Knehans, Ph.D., David Ross Boyd Professor and chairman of the Department of Nutritional Sciences within OU's College of Allied Health. "There is good evidence that eating meals at home leads to better nutrient intake and a healthier weight.

"Our camp emphasizes basic cooking concepts, so that children will not be afraid to try to cook at home," Knehans says. "It also introduces children to fruits and vegetables that they might not have ever eaten before, such as cauliflower or mango, and it teaches them ways to modify recipes to make them healthier."

For the past four years, C.H.A.M.P. Camp has been under the direction of nutritional sciences clinical professor and dietetic internship director Brian dela Cruz, RD/LD. Under his guidance, it has become a signature program for the Nutritional Sciences Department.

"We wanted to give back to the community. Something we've known and learned is that if kids have a hand in preparing a meal, they are more likely to consume that meal," dela Cruz says. "With childhood obesity on the rise in our country and around the world, we hope to reverse these effects by teaching kids how to eat and cook healthy meals."



Kelsey Warma discovers that healthy can also be delicious as she tops her pizza with grated mozzarella cheese.

For each day of camp, students prepare a lunch and two snacks. The menu includes kid-friendly staples with a healthy twist, such as pizza with cauliflower crust, brownies with applesauce substituted for oil, and chocolate no-bake cookies made with oatmeal. At the end of the week, each student received a book containing all the recipes and handouts.

For camper Maddy Kirkpatrick, the week's events weren't just about fun; they were a glimpse into her prospective future.

"I came because I want to be a pastry chef when I'm grown up," she said. "My parents suggested it, and I like it a lot. The counselors here are really nice. There's no pressure, and they help you a lot. I just really like the cooking part."

C.H.A.M.P. Camp is about more than cooking, however. Mixed in with the food preparation were classes on everything from proper table etiquette and the importance of hydration, to exercise and healthy eating, to basic kitchen safety and using all five senses to experience food. The middle day of the camp was dedicated to a field trip, with the campers visiting a dairy farm.

Students also had the opportunity to construct solar ovens and work on a few crafts, making dough pictures, fruit bracelets and painting with spices. Working with the recipes also helps hone their math skills.

In addition to teaching healthy habits to kids, the C.H.A.M.P. Camp provides a necessary and invaluable experience for three different groups of dietetic interns. Those who participate in the planning and execution of the camp can get the needed field experience in one short, intense period of time, rather than spread out across a semester or longer, dela Cruz says.

Through the camp, dietetic interns learn how to plan, develop and lead a nutrition program. Second-year master's students can complete the competencies required for their nutrition counseling class. First-year master's students, meanwhile, gain experience by working with the children and being in



Cate Nihira gets a little help from Brian dela Cruz, camp director and Nutritional Sciences faculty member. Each day, campers explore a healthy alternative to chips and soda and find snacks are more delicious when you make them yourself.

that the recipes must be easy for kids to make, be budget-friendly, and contain ingredients commonly found in the household," he says. "In addition, the recipes must meet the USDA school lunch nutrition guidelines for kids in 5th, 6th and 7th grades."

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charge of the entire week's menu planning and development. In all, the camp requires about 80 hours of planning.

"All internships require a school-aged child rotation," dela Cruz says. "Being managers requires a lot of leadership and management qualities, and all of our interns have the ability to run and execute this camp.

"The challenge for these students with menu planning is

Long-term, it's hoped that the experiences OU's graduating dietetics students take with them from the camp will benefit more children across Oklahoma, as these young professionals establish similar kids' programs at their new places of employment.

A number of Oklahoma companies have provided ongoing support for the camp, allowing the department to keep



Campers and coaches work in the kitchen at the College of Allied Health during C.H.A.M.P. Camp, a unique weeklong day camp that teaches students ages 10 to 12 how to prepare healthy food.



From left, campers Zahria Ponds and Elizabeth Crawford chop yellow peppers with camp coach and Nutritional Sciences master's student Whitney Warfield.

the cost as low as possible for participants. Sheri and Jim Kite, owners of The Oil Tree by Olive & Co., have created a book of vinaigrette recipes, and proceeds from the book's sale are used to support C.H.A.M.P. Camp. (Copies can be purchased at <http://shoptheoiltree.com>.) Other sponsors included Buy For Less grocery stores, Griffin Foods, the Ozarka Water Bottling Company and Shawnee Mills.

While healthy eating habits may be the end goal, for the couple of dozen kids in attendance, the camp was mostly about having fun.

"It's nice to think that after we're done cooking and learn how to do this, it's nice we can take this and pass it to other people," says first-time attendee Paige Dhanenas, clad in her camp-issued apron and chef's hat. "I love to cook, and that I'll be able to make things for other people that are healthy is awesome." 🍷

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