



Ideas for Working with Vegetarian and Vegan Students and Interns

Vegetarian and vegan students and interns can provide a wealth of information based on their experience. They can help their peers appreciate the foods that vegetarians and vegans eat and often are knowledgeable about nutrition issues related to their dietary choices.

Support these students and interns as they bring a vegetarian or vegan voice to group projects. For example, if a group is developing a presentation on dietary modifications in diabetes, a part of the project could include use of a vegetarian or vegan diet in diabetes treatment.

Realistically, most program graduates are not going to have a first job where their sole focus is vegetarian or vegan nutrition. Students and interns may need to be reminded that they do need to know about non-vegetarian sources of nutrients, food safety issues for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, and medical nutrition therapy for non-vegetarians.

Determine how your program will handle vegetarian and vegan students' participation in food labs or food-service experiences that involve preparation of meat or other non-vegetarian foods. In my opinion, vegetarians and vegans should not be required to eat meat or other foods that are not included in their diet. Some programs will require them to participate in food preparation without eating the food since they need to be aware of food preparation techniques. Other programs allow students to modify recipes so that they are preparing vegetarian or vegan versions.

Vegetarian and vegan students and interns can be useful resources but may need encouragement to evaluate the sources of their information. Point students and interns towards reliable sources of information. Promote the development of critical thinking skills.

Help students and interns to find opportunities to volunteer with or observe vegetarian and vegan non-profit organizations and to seek out mentors who work with vegetarians and vegans.

Encourage students and interns to join and be active in the Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group (<https://vndpg.org/>). This DPG offers many resources and opportunities for students and interns to network and be mentored.

Discuss ethical issues with students and interns. For example, "If you're a Registered Dietitian and you personally are a vegetarian, would you work for a large steak producing company who wants YOU to promote and sell their new line of veggie burgers?" and "Would you promote a soy milk from a company that is owned by someone in the dairy industry?" and "Would it ever be appropriate to tell a vegetarian family that their children had to eat meat?" and "How would you advise a vegetarian family whose 12-year old wants to begin eating meat?"

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