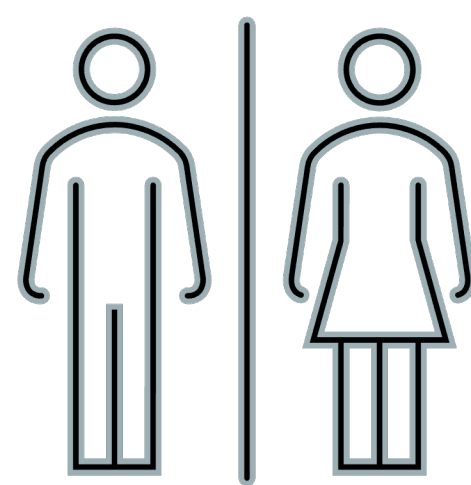
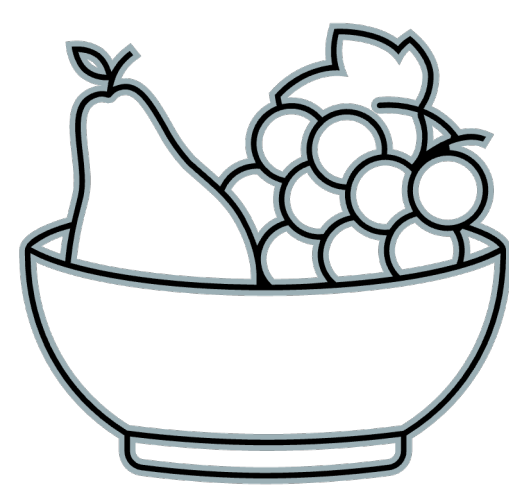


# Professional Identity: An Exploration of the Development of Identity Among Nutrition and Dietetics Students



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## Introduction

Developing a workforce of nutrition and dietetics professionals that are competent and comfortable working in multidisciplinary teams is a challenge that involves guiding the educational experiences of students throughout their academic instruction.

One approach that supports these objectives is to nurture the strengthening of their individual professional identity. However, research examining the experiences and perceptions of students in nutrition and dietetics programs regarding the development of their professional identity is lacking.

**The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of nutrition and dietetics students around professional identity and program support.**

## Methods

### SAMPLE

Students enrolled in a baccalaureate or master's degree program in nutrition and dietetics at California State University Long Beach, comprised the convenience sub-sample for this study.

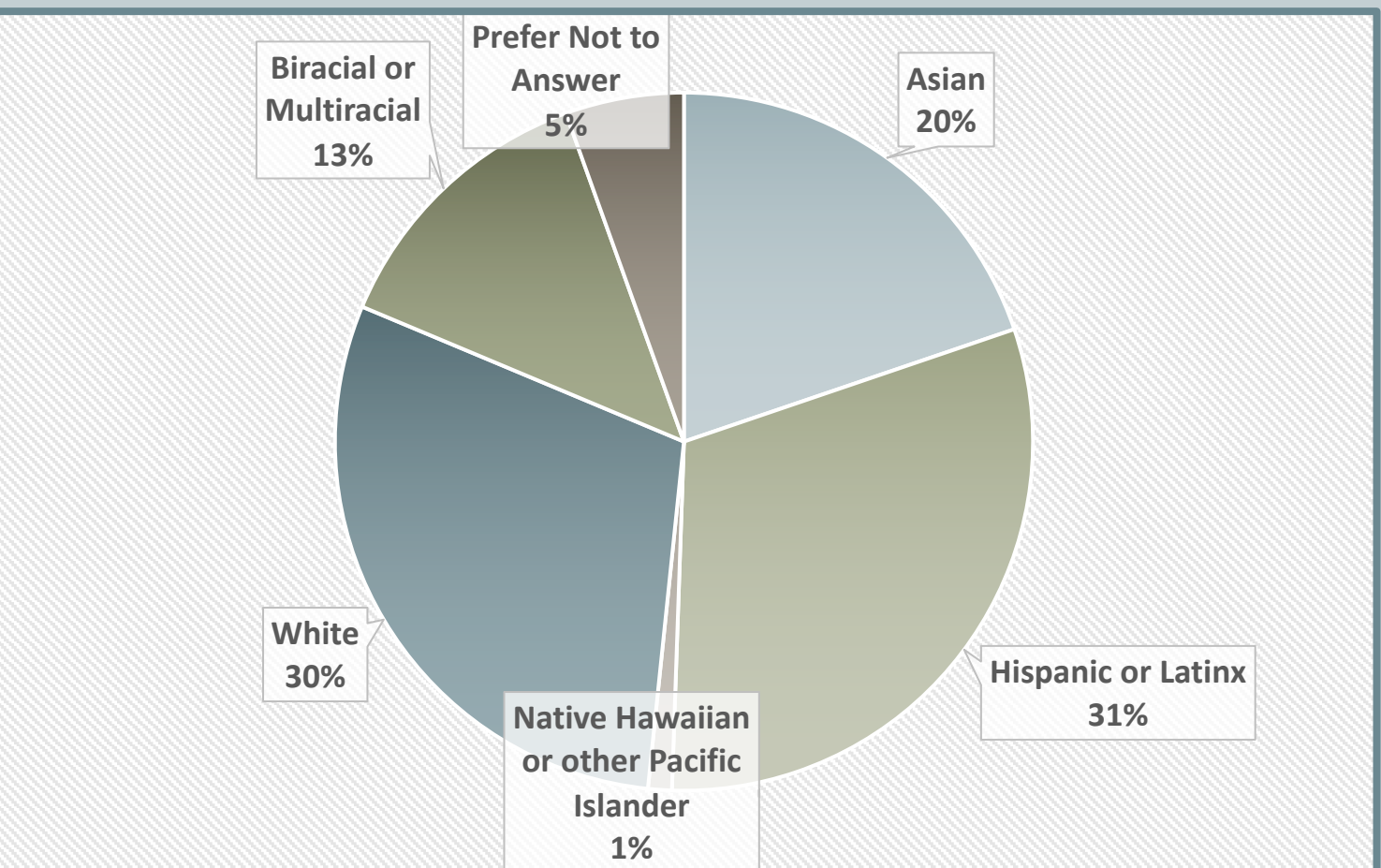
### PROCEDURE

Participants were invited to complete a 43-question Likert-style online survey that included the validated Professional Identity Five Factor Scale (PIFFS) with a slight modification to include questions that specifically referred to "my program." Ninety-one ( $n = 91$ ) dietetics students completed the survey.

### ANALYSIS

Quantitative secondary data analysis explored student views of the educational environment to allow the comparison of perceptions of program support and professional identity. Students were grouped according to sociodemographic characteristics and gender for comparison purposes. Independent samples  $t$ -Tests were used to compare mean scores of survey respondents.

## Results



Race/ethnicity were categorized as non-white and white for comparison purposes

Figure 1. Sample demographic data by race

## Results

TABLE 1. Independent Samples  $t$ -Test Results Comparing Professional Identity Scores Between First Generation and Non-First-Generation College Students ( $n = 84$ )

Variable and group	<i>n</i>	Mean $\pm$ <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experience With the Profession			-2.34	.02*
First Generation	36	3.12 $\pm$ 0.78		
Non-First-Generation	54	3.53 $\pm$ 0.84		
Preference For a Particular Profession			-1.98	.04*
First Generation	35	2.13 $\pm$ 0.84		
Non-First-Generation	55	2.45 $\pm$ 0.61		

\*  $p < .05$

TABLE 2. Independent Samples  $t$ -Test Results Comparing Professional Identity Scores Between Students Identifying as Male or Female ( $n = 84$ )

Variable and group	<i>n</i>	Mean $\pm$ <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Having the Professional as a Role Model			-2.26	.03*
Male	13	4.05 $\pm$ 0.62		
Female	75	4.35 $\pm$ 0.42		

\*  $p < .05$

TABLE 3. Independent Samples  $t$ -Test Results Comparing Professional Identity Scores Between White and Non-White College Students ( $n = 80$ )

Variable and group	<i>n</i>	Mean $\pm$ <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall PIFFS score	80		-3.74	< .001*
Non-White	53	3.75 $\pm$ 0.46		
White	27	4.08 $\pm$ 0.33		
Experience With the Profession			-3.09	.003*
Non-White	36	3.20 $\pm$ 0.76		
White	54	3.77 $\pm$ 0.81		
Having the Professional as a Role Model			-3.41	.001*
Non-White	57	4.22 $\pm$ 0.50		
White	27	4.52 $\pm$ 0.29		
Professional Self-Efficacy			-3.98	< .001*
Non-White	58	3.90 $\pm$ 0.57		
White	27	4.30 $\pm$ 0.34		
Preference For a Particular Profession			-2.41	.02*
First Generation	35	2.25 $\pm$ 0.71		
Non-First-Generation	55	2.63 $\pm$ 0.60		

\*  $p < .05$

## Discussion



### FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS

- Scored lower than non-first-generation students in 2 subscale factors:
  - Experience with the Profession
  - Preference for a Profession



### MALE STUDENTS

- Scored lower than females in 1 subscale factor
  - Having the Professional as a Role Model



### NON-WHITE STUDENTS

- Scored lower than white students in overall PIFFS scores and 4 subscale factors
  - Experience with the Profession
  - Having the Professional as a Role Model
  - Professional Self-Efficacy
  - Preference for a Particular Profession

## Conclusion

- Students from underrepresented sociodemographic, ethnic, or racial backgrounds may face additional challenges in developing a professional identity
- Minority & male students experienced a lack of professional role models indicating the need for increased recruitment of underrepresented groups into the field of dietetics
- Underrepresented groups may struggle with confidence in their journey to becoming nutrition professionals
- Instructors and preceptors hold key roles in supporting students as the develop professional identity
- Dedication to changing the status quo is necessary for the field of dietetics to advance in the area of diversity

## Acknowledgements

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## For More Information

Please contact amy.cody01@csulb.edu. More information on this and related projects can be obtained at [www.csulb.edu](http://www.csulb.edu)



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