

UCLA introduces the first program in the U.S to create healthy food habits for students

New program seeks to prevent obesity by “coaching” students

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The UCLA Health System has partnered with the Offices of Residential Life and Student Health and Wellness, departments of UCLA Student Affairs, to launch the [UCLA Food Coach Program](#), the first nutrition program of its kind in the United States.

"The Food Coach has the potential to eliminate the obesity epidemic by targeting persons who are able to make their own independent decisions regarding food health but are still impressionable and easily adaptable," said Dr. David Huber, director of the Nutrition and Obesity Training Program and founding director at the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition. "Young Adults have just begun to develop nutrition and health habits that will stay with them throughout their life. Due to an unpredictable and ever changing atmosphere created by the nature of the university lifestyle, these habits are traditionally unhealthy and lead to obesity problems later in life. This program has demonstrated very promising results in the research phase for improving nutrition practices and creating healthy habits in young adults."

The UCLA Food Coach team recognizes the sensitivity required when it comes to weight and appearance. Understanding that a person's identity and sense of self are closely tied to their weight and appearance, the team will allow undergraduate students to actively participate in their own success by choosing their health and weight goals on through a user interface on URSA, the student's online account. The university will insure that personal information such as the current weight and medical information is only available to the aforementioned university departments and the student.

"Our goal is to reduce obesity and promote good nutrition which in return will reduce a drain on financial and health resources for the university as obesity programs and additional transportation options have been implemented with health disability applications increasing creating a strain on the University and students who have to pay fees for these programs." said Christine Coons, Assistant Director of the Office of Residential Life.

An extension of Fitted ([Fitness Improvement Training Through Exercise and Diet](#)) a voluntary fitness education program implemented by UCLA alum Selina Stasi in 2012, The Food Coach is designed to help undergraduate students identify, set, and reach healthy nutrition goals during this transitional time in their lives and will prove a valuable building block to the Fitted program. Utilizing specific tools and technologies, such as RFID tags and weight sensors, the program will be supported by existing data from each student's use of the Bruin Card, UCLA's university ID card. The Food Coach will accompany students throughout their college careers, supporting and encouraging their healthy eating habits as they make their food choices. "Each Student will be assessed from data aggregated from their Bruin Card use, such as exercise habits, meal plan and choices, and medical history", added Dr. Huber, "when combined with their current weight, the system can determine their BMI and determine healthy food options for the student." The program is currently only for undergraduate students who actively utilize the Meal Plan system at the university, with an option to include graduate students in the next five years.

While participation is mandatory, students who maintain healthy weight and lifestyles not only receive more meal plan options, but additional incentives for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Students that comply will receive discounts on their tuition. "If a student maintains an appropriate weight and health status, they will be rewarded with a 25% reduction of their tuition. The university wants people to succeed. It's cheaper for them in the long run," added Coons. UCLA students are not alone in benefiting from a successful run for the Food Coach. The University was awarded a grant from the US Health Department that will support the implementation of The Food Coach and counseling for students with additional questions. An average student healthy weight level for the year for UCLA would result in additional funding. "Who wouldn't want to be a part of this," asked Nutrition student Amy Tan. "Become healthier while making my tuition cheaper, sign me up!"

For more information on the program, please visit www.uclafoodcoach/nutrition.edu or call 310-794-2558.

The UCLA Office of Residential Life's mission is to create safe, supportive and inclusive living-learning communities that engage residents in order to foster their academic success, personal growth, and responsible citizenship.

The UCLA Health System, which comprises the UCLA Hospital System and the UCLA Medical Group and its affiliates, has provided the best in health care and the most advanced treatment options to the people of Los Angeles and the world for more than half a century. UCLA's preeminence in health care — a strength that comes from the union of research, teaching and excellence in patient care — continues to be recognized nationally, internationally and in numerous forums.

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