

2010 Faculty Excellence

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING



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Each fall, more than 500 undergraduates, mostly first-year students, make their way to Spaulding Hall for one of two sections of “Nutrition, Health and Well-Being,” a popular general-education course that’s also required of many majors. While many faculty members would justifiably shudder at the prospect of managing a class of 250—at 8 a.m., no less!—Jesse Morrell embraces it. “New college adults are often making personal health decisions for the first time,” she says. “I have this neat window of opportunity to make a difference in life-long habits.”

Such enthusiasm is the hallmark

of Morrell’s teaching excellence, her students say. “Her passion for the subject shines through in her teaching, radiating throughout the vast lecture hall, to be soaked up by hundreds of attentive students,” says Stephen Hennigar ’08, ’10G, a former student and teaching assistant of Morrell’s.

Morrell acknowledges that her zeal for the subject matter helps make the course a favorite for the estimated 40 percent of UNH undergrads who take it. But she’s got it easy, she

says. “Students have expertise about nutrition when they walk in the door. They know what they eat, and that brings them to the table, so to speak.”

To boost students’ engagement with the course material, Morrell brings them face-to-face with their own health and wellness. Students calculate their body mass index, keep diet and fitness diaries, and screen their own blood pressure and cholesterol. “It becomes much more real, any time you can make it personal,” says Morrell. This teaching

trick has yielded rich data on the health status of undergraduates, a widely understudied demographic, which is informing her own research as a Ph.D. student at UNH.

In addition to teaching NUTR 400, Morrell developed “The Mediterranean Diet and Culture,” a summer course that takes the nutrition curriculum—and Morrell—to Ascoli Piceno, Italy. During that experience, she urges students to try unfamiliar foods. “You’ve got to try new experiences,” she says. “Students have so many opportunities here at UNH. They can do anything they want to do.”

~Beth Potier



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