

growing minds @ university

*Connecting undergraduate and graduate
students to local food and farm to school*



Asap
Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities



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Project Summary

Since 2011, ASAP—in collaboration with Western Carolina University and Lenoir-Rhyne University—has developed innovative methods for incorporating local food and farm to school trainings and experiences into curricula for nutrition and dietetics and education students. The resulting project, Growing Minds @ University (GM@U) is changing the lives of hundreds of college and university students each year.

Growing Minds @ University builds the capacity of future Registered Dietitians, community leaders, educators, and health professionals to use local food and farm based experiences in their professional careers. Through the project, college and university students and Dietetic Interns are empowered with the skills and knowledge necessary to help children and adults make healthy food choices.

While they learn how to teach children and adults about healthy, local foods, they also develop a value for fresh, local foods and farms. The result is empowered, healthy young professionals ready and able to bring a unique set of skills to the workplace and to their communities.

After five years of developing the project with Western Carolina University and Lenoir-Rhyne University, ASAP is ready to offer this project to other universities.

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Our Mission

ASAP (Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Project) has been a national leader in the local food movement for more than a decade. ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. The organization's work includes a broad array of planning, communication, grassroots organizing, research, and advocacy in order to generate awareness and increase consumer demand for local food and farms, develop the regional capacity to support local farms, expand the availability of locally grown food, and foster systemic change in agriculture and the food system.

www.asapconnections.org





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Community Impacts

Local food education and farm to school experiences, including farm field trips, school and community gardens, local food taste tests, and cooking with local foods, are effective ways to teach children and adults about food. People engaged in local food education learn where fresh foods come from, who grows it, how to cook with it and how it tastes. These activities are important teaching tools that encourage healthy eating behaviors in children and adults while building connections to agricultural heritage and communities.

Growing Minds @ University focuses on undergraduate and graduate dietetics and nutrition and education majors. Future teachers and health professionals will have significant impact on the education and health of our children and by providing the knowledge and experience in their professional training phase, **we are setting these students on a course to effect change.**



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Our Approach

ASAP's approach envisions and acts from the perspective that the changes needed in our food system are social in nature - farmers, business owners, teachers, parents, politicians, health professionals, and engaged citizens are the key to change. ASAP works to ensure that everyone has the social spaces, tools, means, and knowledge to transform the food system to one that is good for our health, our communities, our environments, and our economies. Our daily efforts are focused on creating a responsive food system where we are all empowered, at the cash register and through civic engagement, to create the food system we want.

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Universities and colleges can choose to fund all or a selection of following project components:

- Local food and farm to school trainings – Day-long trainings for undergraduate/graduate students and Dietetic Interns, designed for the unique needs of each group of students.
- Local food and farm to school experiences integrated into undergraduate curricula – Class presentations, activities, research projects, and service-learning requirements designed for needs of diverse courses.
- Growing Minds @ University Fellowships – Paid, part-time positions that put students in leadership roles, directing their peers in conducting farm to school activities.
- Local food and farm to school “learning labs” – Local elementary schools, preschools, tailgate markets, hospitals and other community locations where university students can experience local food and farm to school activities on a regular basis.
- Resources for professors and students – Resources may include a farm to school library with children’s literature, curriculum guides, cooking kits, stipends for local food cooking demonstrations, tastings, and cooking classes, stipends for farm field trips and farmer and chef classroom visits, recipe cards, and “I tried local. . .stickers.”
- Integration of local food experiences into dietetic internship rotations or volunteer requirements (See **“Addressing Dietetic Internship Competencies Through Local Food and Farm to School”**).
- Project evaluation and revision – ASAP has developed evaluation tools to assess the experiences of



university students and professors, learning lab teachers, and children involved in GM@U. The tools include university student reflections forms and end-of-semester/program surveys, alumni surveys, family surveys, teacher focus group guides and faculty surveys. ASAP can assist universities in designing and implementing a plan for project evaluation.

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Project Outcomes

Growing Minds @ University (GM@U) makes connections and encourages collaboration between university faculty and students and community teachers, parents, food service providers, community health professionals, farmers, agricultural and farm to school specialists. Through GM@U, these individuals work together toward the common goal of developing healthy local food systems and fostering healthy eating in children and adults.



Students Connect with Community

In the 2013-2014 school year, 750 university students participated in GM@U, attending trainings and presentations by local organizations, volunteering in the projects' community learning labs, and visiting local farms. In the fall semester of 2014, the project provided WCU students with over 260 opportunities to volunteer in local schools. Through the project students interact with the wider community around their university in an authentic and meaningful way.

"This program is relational. It's not a sterile project doing things with paperwork; we're actually building relationships, not just with entities or institutions. Instead, our students are forming relationships with children, with colleagues in schools, and with partners at ASAP. This is at the heart of good teaching, and it's what I like about the project. I'm a relational person too, I've built a stronger collegial relationship with other professors and gotten to know others at ASAP; it enriches my life. This project has been a real source of personal satisfaction."
- WCU faculty member

Students Gain Skills in Working with Children and Diverse Populations

GM@U provides university and college students with opportunities to work with and teach children about local food and farms in classroom, cafeteria, garden, and community settings. Because the project involves hands-on activities with children of many ages, university students gain lessons in relating to children, classroom management, experiential education, outdoor learning, inquiry, and more.

"This is such a powerful tool for the children from CVS (Cullowhee Valley School) as well as us as WCU students. This provides a different sort of interaction with students from what we are typically provided during a placement experience. I feel like this experience allowed me to interact with and observe students on a different level, which was extremely enlightening. In this dynamic, children do not hold back, they share exactly what they are thinking and it is refreshing. Loved the experience. Thank you!" - WCU undergraduate student



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Project Outcomes

Students Explore Healthy Foods

GM@U prompts students to reflect on their local food or farm to school experiences. Semester after semester, dozens of students talk about the changes they are making in their own diet and attitude toward food as a result of being part of the project.

"Since being a volunteer with [GM@U] I have started my own garden. I figured if we can get greens growing with kindergarteners, I can surely get a garden going myself. Also, I buy more local produce and am more interested in where my food comes from."

- WCU undergraduate student

"It was awesome that the kids got excited about cabbage and I really enjoyed it too. I went out and made the recipe the next day because I loved it so much." - WCU undergraduate student

"Being involved [in GM@U] opened my mind on how to eat local food myself and how to better utilize local food in nutrition education. I learned so many new ideas of how to educate the public in where their food comes from." - Lenior-Rhyne University Dietetic Intern

"Yes, I'm a nutrition major, but before [GM@U] I had my fair share of things I wouldn't eat. Like sweet potatoes. Then in one farm to school workshop they handed us sweet potato sticks. Raw. Honestly they looked and tasted like carrots, and I couldn't for the life of me figure out why I had been convinced they were so yucky. Since then I've tried to approach vegetables with an open mind." - WCU undergraduate student

Students Become Leaders

Thirty university student leaders involved in GM@U at WCU have expanded the project's efforts to 6 elementary schools, 2 Head Start Centers, 2 hospitals and 2 community organizations. Additionally, a total of 10 university students have served as GM@U Fellows. The fellows lead their university student peers in conducting cafeteria taste tests, organizing local food cooking classes, and gardening with children.

"Through the project, I was able to learn how to communicate with children and effectively send messages about healthy eating. ASAP allowed me to be very independent and creative resulting in successful childhood learning." - WCU undergraduate student

Students and Faculty Conduct Research

Twenty-two undergraduate education and nutrition students have conducted research through the project. Six students have presented on the project at national conferences. Participating faculty have extended their involvement in GM@U further, by being involved in farm to school related research, presentations, and writing.





Next Steps

Interested in bringing one or more components of Growing Minds @ University to your college or university campus?

Call ASAP to schedule an introductory consultation. During our first meeting we'll answer your questions about how the project would work in your setting and how it can be tailored to suit your particular needs and budget.

To learn more, contact Emily Jackson, ASAP Program Director.
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*Growing Minds packet and information available at
asapconnections.org or growing-minds.org*

