Combating childhood obesity goal of visiting Costa Rican scholar

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Childhood obesity rates increasing in Latin America

Gabriela Masis, a visiting scholar in the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, is tapping the knowledge of some well-known researchers at Colorado State University. Masis, who is from University of Costa Rica, is in Colorado learning about Program ENERGY, a National Institutes of Health funded program aimed at combating childhood obesity.

Fellowship part of project involving 12 countries

Masis, an assistant professor in the School of Nutrition, was awarded a one month fellowship from the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, in Vienna for training in Program ENERGY, led by Arthur Campfield, professor in Food Science and Human Nutrition, and Francoise Smith, program director.

The IAEA supports a major Latin American project “Development and evaluation of intervention programs to reduce childhood obesity in Latin America.” Twelve countries participate in this project: Costa Rica, Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Panama, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Masis is a co-investigator on the Costa Rica project led by Dr. Xinia Fernandez. Masis says, "Childhood obesity rates for Latin America are not as high as in the U.S., but they are growing.”

Tavelli Elementary visits provide professional and personal insights

Masis has spent her time visiting elementary schools in Fort Collins and learning about Program ENERGY. The program delivers a bi-weekly science lesson to 2nd, 4th, and 6th graders at Tavelli Elementary with the goal of increasing health knowledge, healthy behaviors, and interest in science careers of children who participate.

Masis says, "We are about to embark on the intervention phase of our project in Costa Rica, and I have learned a lot about implementation and evaluation from observations of Program ENERGY. I've learned about everything from program delivery, data entry, and evaluation questionnaires, to program objectives and goals. We will be able to draw on the experiences of Program ENERGY and adapt it to the Costa Rican culture.”

Masis enjoys cultural experiences while in Colo., but laments lack of snow

Masis has had some cultural experiences while in Colorado. She went to hear then presidential candidate Barack Obama speak on the CSU Oval. She took a trip to Estes Park, and she saw a CSU football game while she was here. Her only regret is that it didn't snow! Masis says she has only seen snow once.

When back in Costa Rica, Masis will remember teaching the second graders at Tavelli about Costa Rica, assisting with science lessons, and the important insights she gained from interacting with the elementary school teachers and the FSHN faculty members. She says, "Everyone here has been wonderful, and I've learned many things, both professionally and personally.”
Learn more about the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition by visiting http://www.fshn.cahs.colostate.edu.

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