Faculty Spotlight: Jennifer Chadbourne

Clinical assistant professor shares what it’s like to teach at her alma mater, what she does to unplug and recharge, and the class in high school that changed her opinion of science

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From an educational journey that took her across the country and back, to work as an inpatient dietitian, oncology dietitian, and boundary-pushing telehealth clinician, Jennifer Chadbourne (https://closa.unh.edu/person/jennifer-chadbourne) has had a range of meaningful and high-impact experiences as she has worked to achieve her goal of supporting human health and disease management through food and nutrition.

In 2019, Chadbourne realized another goal when she accepted a position as clinical assistant professor of nutrition in COLSA’s department of agriculture, nutrition and food systems. As a clinical instructor, she now has the opportunity to share her knowledge more broadly with others and prepare new entrants to the field of dietetics to tackle pressing health and nutrition challenges.

COLSA: What's your current position? How long have you been in the position?

Jen Chadbourne: I am a clinical assistant professor in the nutrition program, and I've been in this position since the fall of 2019.

COLSA: Can you give me a brief overview of what it is you do?

Jen: I teach a variety of courses within and beyond the nutrition program. I teach our introductory nutrition course, which hundreds of students of all majors enroll in, as well as several upper-level courses. I developed and teach an Advanced Diabetes Care course that speaks to my clinical expertise as a certified diabetes care and education specialist. I also teach a food science course, which was my focus as a graduate student. Additionally, I teach courses in culinary and sustainability, nutrition counseling and telehealth.
I was a telehealth clinician for most of my career, well before the COVID-19 pandemic sparked the widespread acceptance of telehealth in healthcare. I was thrilled to discover the Center for Digital Health Innovation (CDHI), formerly known as the Telehealth Practice Center, and joined soon after I came to UNH. As faculty in CDHI, I learned about the interdisciplinary Introduction to Telehealth course under the College of Health and Human Services. I began teaching modules in the course then transitioned to being the course lead. I now oversee the curriculum and interdisciplinary team of instructors who teach the course with me. The Intro to Telehealth course is offered to undergraduate and graduate students from a variety of disciplines — social work, nursing, nutrition, psychology, and more.

I also developed and launched the UNH Telehealth Certificate Program in the Spring of 2023, which provides healthcare professionals across the country with advanced training in telehealth. I continue to oversee the delivery of that program and teach several courses within the program.

COLSA: What motivates you most to do what you do?
Jen: Seeing the students learn and grow as young professionals is motivating to me. I love to watch students absorb new information and apply new skills as they develop into young professionals who are ready to go into the field and make a big impact helping people in various ways.

That’s exciting for me to be a part of, and I really appreciate that aspect of my role as an instructor.

COLSA: What are the goals you most want to accomplish in your work?
Jen: A goal of mine is to ensure that our students leave the program prepared and confident in what they can accomplish with the education they received here. I’m excited to be training next generation of nutrition experts who will address some of the issues we face in the nutrition field, helping to combat things like food insecurity, obesity and chronic disease and helping to support people who need nutrition intervention and support.

COLSA: Where did you go to college and graduate school?
Jen: I was accepted to UNH as a business student but saw nutrition in the course catalog while at orientation, and it spoke to me. I grew up as an athlete and knew how important nutrition was from that lens, so the idea of pulling those pieces together in a college degree program was enticing to me.

I completed my undergraduate degree here in the dietetics pathway, and then I moved to Southern California to do my dietetic internship at the VA hospital in La Jolla. I was in San Diego for a year and then moved back to Maine to complete my master’s degree in food science and human nutrition at the University of Maine in Orono.

COLSA: What led you to your current position at UNH?
Jen: I worked as an inpatient dietitian through graduate school, and after graduation I moved back to New Hampshire. I accepted a position at a cancer clinic in Massachusetts where I worked as an oncology dietitian. Shortly after, I started a part-time job at a start-up company, called Good Measures. We were paving the way for nutrition services to be delivered through telehealth. That was the beginning of my journey in telehealth.

Because Good Measures was a new company, there were a lot of different hats to be worn early on. I worked both clinically and on the business side of things, trying to help get the company get off the ground and sell the idea of nutrition services delivered through telehealth. Eventually, I had to choose between the two roles. My supervisor asked if I preferred the client facing work — traveling, promoting services, building client relationships and executing contracts — or would I rather work clinically with patients to support their nutrition care.

I was torn because I loved both roles, but I chose to focus on the clinical work. My long-term goal was to teach, which ultimately influenced that decision. I felt like the client work wouldn’t give me the skill set and experience I needed to be a clinical instructor.

COLSA: What was it like coming back to the place where you were an undergrad and being in the department with some of the people who were here when you were an undergrad?
Jen: There wasn’t as much of an acclimation period because I already knew the campus and program well, even though there have been changes since I was a student here. I already knew many of the faculty and knew they would be great colleagues, which is part of what drew me into this role. It has been fun to work with amazing people who were at one time, my instructors.

COLSA: Let’s go back a little bit. Where did you grow up and what was it like?
Jen: I grew up in Sanford, Maine and lived in the same house my whole life. It was a great place to grow up. I spent a lot of time outside, and I was really involved in sports.

My family is still in Maine, but my parents sold my childhood home a few years ago and built a new home in Parsonsfield, which is about 40 minutes west of Sanford.

COLSA: And do you have siblings?
Jen: I have a brother. He went to UNH as well, and we both played rugby for UNH. He was living close to me in New Hampshire for a while, but just recently moved to Maine.
**COLSA: What is your earliest memory?**

**Jen:** My earliest memories are of birthday celebrations. My birthday is in the winter, and my dad would turn our backyard into what he called “DeZenzo World” — because our last name, my maiden name, is DeZenzo. Every year, he built an ice rink and cut out paper letters to layer in the ice read “DeZenzo World”. He would string up lights around the rink and create ice sculptures in whatever Disney character was my favorite that year.

I remember having the best birthday parties because he turned our backyard into a magical space. I don’t know how he had the time to do it all, but it was great.

**COLSA: So this kind of leads into my next question, which is, tell me about your mother and father.**

**Jen:** My dad is a carpenter. He built the house that we lived in. He is a very hard worker, and I remember him always being on a job site. He loved taking us to Disney World and the Olympics. He was always looking for opportunities to expose us to different experiences that allowed myself and my brother to explore our interests and talents. I remember going to a street try-out for luge when I was a young kid. My brother was invited to train at the Olympic training center for luge.

My mom was the finance director for USNH. She is a graduate of UNH and worked for UNH throughout her career. She just retired a few years ago, but it was fun to be on campus with her for a couple years. She was also an incredibly hard worker and was the first in her family to go to college. She set the bar high for what a strong, hard-working woman looked like.

Now that I’m a parent, I’m amazed at what my parents were able to juggle and the childhood they provided to us.

**COLSA: As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?**

**Jen:** I wanted to be a fashion designer. I loved fashion. I looked at schools initially for fashion design and decided I wasn’t comfortable committing to one thing for the rest of my life.

**COLSA: Do you have any mentors or people who deeply influenced who you are, what you believe in and what you’re committed to in your work in life?**

**Jen:** When I was a student and working as a UNH peer educator, Suzanne Sonneborn, who was the dietitian at UNH Health and Wellness, helped me transition from being a student into a young professional. I was inspired by her and her approach to nutrition. In working with her, I discovered who I was as a young professional and came out of my shell.

**COLSA: Did you have any life changing experiences that put you on the path that led you to what you’re doing today?**

**Jen:** Growing up, I had no interest in science classes until my senior year in high school. I took an anatomy and physiology class with an amazing teacher. I wouldn’t have pursued a science degree in nutrition if I hadn’t taken that class.

**COLSA: What do you do in your spare time? What are your hobbies or outside interests?**

**Jen:** I love to garden and grow vegetables, fruits and flowers. I also love to play sports and play soccer in a coed recreation league. My husband and I both enjoy being outside, getting away from people. My husband is an avid whitewater kayaker so whenever we go on vacation, it’s usually a multi-day whitewater trip. The last trip we went on was a 9-day rafting trip in the Alaskan/Canadian wilderness on the Tatshensini river. That’s usually what our vacations look like — either that or going to the lake to visit our families and spend time on the water.

We also like to skate in the winter and go cross country skiing on trails near our house. We try to hike as much as we can in the fall and the spring. Other than that, we love to do just about anything with our toddler.

**COLSA: What is your favorite book and your favorite movie?**

**Jen:** I don’t know that I have a favorite movie. I enjoy the book series I’m reading right now by Sarah Maas.

**COLSA: If you could be or do anything else, what would that be?**

**Jen:** I’ve always wanted to be a surgeon or emergency care doctor, but that was never a realistic career for me because I get too squeamish.

**COLSA: If you could have dinner with five famous people living or dead. Who would they be?**

**Jen:** The only person that comes to mind is Taylor Swift. I am a Taylor Swift fan and would be happy to have dinner with her.

**COLSA: What one word would you use to describe yourself?**
Jen: Determined. When I set my mind on something, I make it happen.

COLSA: What are you most proud of?
Jen: I'm most proud of the life that my husband and I created together. We both worked hard to build a great home, we have great friends and family, we have a great partnership, and now we have a wonderful son.

COLSA: What's one thing about you that few people know?
Jen: Some people are surprised when I tell them that I have a lot of introverted characteristics. In my work I tend to come across as being extroverted, both as a clinician working with patients and as an educator. It's a skill that I developed when I was a teenager waiting tables because I had to be outgoing in that role. I've carried that with me throughout my career.

COLSA: What do you like most about your job?
Jen: Part of why I came here was because of the amazing people I knew I'd be working with. I feel fortunate to be part of a great team. I also deeply value the time I get to spend with my family in the summer months.

COLSA: What has been the happiest day of your life?
Jen: I don't have one specific day that I can pinpoint as the happiest day of my life. I would say I have several small moments scattered throughout my life that I really appreciate and look back on fondly.

COLSA: Any micro moments that you want to share?
Jen: Marrying my best friend was pretty great. Having my son — all the typical best moments. I enjoy going on the trips I mentioned before, getting out into the wilderness and connecting with people and the environment in ways that aren't possible when we are caught up in technology and the day to day chaos of life.

COLSA: How would you like to be remembered?
Jen: I want to be remembered as being impactful. I want to do something with my time here and impact people in a way that is positive and productive to the world.

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