

## An Interview with Dr. Barry Hunt Professor of Health Promotion / Health Promotion Program Director

*Why should students who are interested in pursuing a Master of Science in Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion choose Mississippi State University's distance learning program?*

The distance education program at MSU offers convenience to location bound professional and pre-professional students. The MyCourses (formerly WebCT) format is easy to navigate and allows students to interact with each other and their instructors quickly and effectively. Also, the MSU program is competitively priced while offering a high quality education in the field.

*Who would be interested in your program? What sets it apart from others?*

Anyone interested in developing or improving their skills in the delivery, implementation, and evaluation of behavior change and other health promotion interventions could benefit from this program. The program content is process oriented and is based on Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) knowledge, skills, and competencies.

*Do students need to major in one of the sciences in order to succeed at the graduate level?*

There are no required pre-requisite courses. The program is designed to take students from an initial orientation to current concepts in the profession through program development, implementation, and evaluation.

*What can students expect to gain from the courses?*

The process-oriented skills developed in the program are centered around real world application. Most, if not all, health promotion programs regardless of topic are delivered using many of the same theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The ability to assess program needs, develop effective, theory-based programs tailored to specific needs of the target audience and to evaluate these programs from both a cost-effectiveness as well as a health outcomes standpoint enhances an individual's marketability in the field.

*Do enrolled students have to take any food science courses if they want to focus on Nutrition and Health Promotion?*

No Food Science or Nutrition courses are required in the Health Promotion emphasis, although classes from either field could be utilized as electives, with approval from the student's advisor.

*Do you have a standout MSU graduate who you think of as a model for the program?*

- Christopher Thomas is an employee of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and is currently Project Officer for the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (NCCCP) for six New England States and two national organizations.
- J. Don Chaney is currently Assistant Professor of Health Education at East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. Chaney is also a member of the Board of Directors for the American Association for Health Education (AAHE) and national professional organization in the field.
- Allison Ford is Assistant Professor of Health Education at University of Mississippi. Dr. Ford conducts research in osteoporosis prevention.
- Jason Horay is Health Education Manager of the Live for Life program at the Duke University Medical Center in Durham, NC

*The trend seems to indicate that the nutrition and health job market is on the rise (I looked at [mdes.ms.gov](http://mdes.ms.gov)). Do you find this to be true? Where do your students typically go to work? Can you think of any areas/fields where you'd like to see more of your students go to work? What can students do with this degree?*

Health Promotion is one of the fastest growing areas of employment in the United States. As the emphasis in health care increasingly shifts toward a more prevention-oriented focus, it is anticipated that job opportunities will become even more prevalent. Our graduates currently work in a number of fields, including, but not limited to, school health, community health, worksite health, federal government public health, voluntary health agencies, military, hospital-based cardiac rehabilitation, and more.

*Have you had any companies or organizations come to MSU to recruit?*

We have placed several students with the Centers for Disease Control and Public Health Prevention Service.

*The obesity rates in Mississippi and other states are on the rise. What does your department do to combat this alarming trend?*

The obesity rate in Mississippi has led to grant-funded projects focused on addressing the issue. We utilize students whenever possible to participate in activities and research so that they gain exposure to these types of programs. We use current health issues as much as possible in classroom discussions, which add a sense of relevance for the students.