



Bobcat Fuel

TURNING UP THE HEAT

“Bobcat Fuel helped solidify my passion for sports nutrition. The hands-on experience and applicational learning opportunities from Brittney are key elements in helping me reach my goal of becoming a sports dietitian” ~ KIERSTEN MILLER, INTERN

BY BRITTNEY PATERA

What began with two interns and a fueling station has become a developed sports nutrition program—in addition to providing nutrition services to the athletic

teams, Bobcat Fuel now offers internship opportunities for undergraduate nutrition students at Montana State University. However, getting to this point was not easy. When I first started at MSU in February of 2017, I worked part-time. With only two days a week in athletics, I had to maximize my time there. The first thing the department wanted was a fueling station, so I put most of my energy into creating a place where athletes could go before or after lifts and practices to get food or protein shakes to refuel and recover. To operate, I was given a concession stand outside the weight and athletic training rooms. With previous head football coach Jeff Choate’s passion for nutrition, football was already offering food items for the team. Being given the concession stand space helped create a smoothly functioning fueling station, which served football players from the back side and other athletes from the front. Since it was the middle of spring semester, finding student help was difficult. Luckily, there were already two students involved with the department who helped operate the station, which officially opened for student athletes in April 2017. It started out simply, offering a few items that would help fuel athletes for workouts and recovery for muscle growth—enough to get the job done.

While I was getting the fueling station up and running, I also started to work on nutrition for teams, and educational materials. I created an Instagram and Twitter account (@msubobcatsfuel) to post recipes, nutrition tips, and to engage with student athletes. I had met with every head coach regarding goals for their team and discussed what nutrition services I could offer. I introduced myself to each team and offered basic fueling education presentations and discussions. After that first

semester I invested in building an internship program, enhancing what we do for the student athletes. That summer, two interns joined me in building educational content and increasing our interactions with student athletes. Volleyball, and women’s and men’s basketball were training over the summer along with football, so we started to educate these athletes on the importance of meal composition. We went to the dining halls with them and helped build ‘performance plates,’ as well as facilitate grocery store tours. Seeing the expansion of the program while my position was still part-time, I knew extra help was a necessity to continue the growth of the nutrition department. I reached out to the head of the undergraduate nutrition department at MSU, and she sent an email out to students. Soon, two interns turned into six for the 2017-2018 school year and my position increased to three days, allowing me to expand what we offer student athletes, and to provide students at MSU with a great opportunity to get involved with sports nutrition.

Montana State was the first school in the Big Sky Conference to hire a dietitian, putting nutrition at the forefront on every team. When I started at MSU, football was already implementing nutrition strategies into daily operations for student-athletes. After that summer, teams wanted to incorporate nutrition strategies into training and game day operations, as they saw the positive effects it had on performance. Men’s and women’s basketball, volleyball, and track and field started to utilize Bobcat Fuel to deliver practice and game day nutrition support. With the help of more interns, that school year we were able to do more. I began serving football from the front of the fueling station as well, but giving them their own window.

The interns operated the fueling station—since it was still so new, athletes were excited about what foods would be offered, as it varied every day. My goal was to offer a fruit, carbohydrate, and protein option each day, but rotate the items offered. That school year, Bobcat Fuel also added protein shakes to the fueling station menu. Every day, the interns made protein shakes for the athletes after their lifts—these recipes varied as well. We also added “Bobcat Bites” that year (oatmeal, peanut butter, dried fruit, chocolate chips and protein powder all rolled up into a bite, each ingredient adding different performance benefits). We implemented “Try It Tuesdays”—every Tuesday at the fueling station an intern would introduce a food containing high performance benefits that athletes might not try on their own.

Bobcat Fuel interns also helped create nutrition education content for teams to hang up around the fueling station and post on social media, as well as help set up and distribute any game day fuel the teams needed. In spring of 2018, the volleyball team decided to take their nutrition to the next level. They started implementing nutrition weekly, and I designated a student to be their nutrition ambassador, a position that remains in place.





Nutrition is now a part of Bobcat culture and Bobcat Fuel continues to expand. I am now full time in athletics, and there are three separate sports nutrition internship programs offered to dietetic students at Montana State University: one during the summer, one for fall camps, and one for the school year, each with unique opportunities. The summer program involves helping the team's training on campus—men's and women's basketball, volleyball, and football. The football fueling station continues to operate and the other teams receive snack bags, vitamins, and protein shakes—all distributed by Bobcat Fuel. It is during the summer months that athletes work to get where they want to be for performance during the season. Using a machine called the bod pod, interns help conduct body composition tests at the beginning and end of the summer lift session. When teams focus on hydration, interns use a refractometer to test hydration levels. Summer is also the time to educate athletes on meal prepping and planning.

For the fall camp internship, students focus on fueling and recovery for the volleyball and football teams during their intense three-week training

sessions leading into season. Bobcat Fuel continues to educate these teams on fueling for practices and game-day competition, as well as provides after-practice fuel and recovery options. We weigh football players before and after practices to monitor hydration and weight. Bobcat Fuel interns attend every football practice to offer and encourage hydration through their staple carbohydrate and electrolyte drink (or, as the guys call it, 'the sauce'). After practice, we give the guys recovery through various food sources. I try to provide a protein drink option, hydration, a salty food item for fluid retention, a fruit that is high in antioxidants, and sometimes a fun item! The Bobcat Fuel team prepares snack bags for the guys to eat at night, providing extra calories to prevent weight loss. They attend team meals to push hydration and help the athletes build their meals properly.

During the school year, the Bobcat Fuel internship opportunity takes full force. The main focus is operating the fueling station and creating nutritional education materials. We now have a recipe book of protein shakes, smoothies and an array of foods to provide for student athletes. The fueling station has become a hub for nutritional education and is surrounded by materials and resources for the athletes. Bobcat Fuel's Instagram now offers different topic highlights. Interns have the opportunity to do a nutrition presentation for student athletes and help with hydration and body composition testing. A student, usually in the second year with Bobcat Fuel, is elected to be the nutrition ambassador for the volleyball team and is responsible for conducting body composition testing, delivering weekly education, and offering game day nutrition assistance.

I have a few students who are responsible for men's and women's basketball games—both teams get nutrition products before the game and at half-time. Volleyball, men's basketball, and women's basketball continue to fuel their athletes on game day on the road; interns are responsible for preparing these travel packs. I also give students the opportunity to help me set up pre-game and half-time snacks at football games and be on the field offering "the sauce" to the team.

Bobcat Fuel has come a long way and could not be possible without the help and commitment I get from interns. Looking back on the path that led me into sports nutrition, I wish I had had an opportunity like this in my undergraduate studies. These internship programs allow students interested in sports nutrition to gain experience in collegiate athletics and expand their knowledge in this area of the field. I hold monthly meetings during which I educate the interns on a different sports nutrition topic and help mentor them for their next step after graduation. The internship programs have allowed the athletic department to expand what it can offer to the student athletes. Football, men's basketball, women's basketball, and volleyball now implement nutrition education and utilize Bobcat Fuel in their daily regimens. I am getting more student interest, and now have 14 interns for the 2021-2022 school year! With the new facility, there are now two fueling stations in separate facilities. With all this growth, I have been able to get a Graduate Assistant, which is very exciting for the program and for students looking to increase their experience in collegiate athletics. This will now be year five for Bobcat Fuel, and it is only the beginning!



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