



# **Dietetic Internships 101**

**What You Need to  
Know to Become a  
Dietitian**

**By Jenny Westerkamp, RD  
Founder, All Access Internships**

# The Pep Talk

---

*Dear confused dietetics student,*

*I know how you feel. I was there too. I was confused about dietetic internships and didn't think it would be a "big deal". Luckily, my advisor enlightened me and pushed me to giddy up and get experience and good grades before it was too late. I somehow made it through the process, even without the help of All Access Internships (I hadn't created it yet!). I hope that by reading this book, you will see how truly important it is to put 100% of your effort into getting a dietetic internship.*

*The rumors are true. The DI application process will be a **stress-bomb** destroying weekend plans, fun with friends, and relaxation time. Preparation really is key, so why wait? Well, you could be swamped with school, busy with extra-curricular activities, or exhausted by your part-time job. These are tough times! What I have realized, though, is that sometimes when you have a lot on your plate, you can prioritize and be more productive than if you just had one or two things to manage. I hope this book gives you ideas of things you can be working on right now.*

*Start by making to-do lists and checking things off. DONE DONE DONE. You might find you have some extra time on your hands! Use that time for career planning and figuring out what you want to do, who you need to talk to, and what steps you have to take to get to where you want to be. All the sweat and tears you are going to put into the process will absolutely be worth it.*

*The time is now to set goals. And you have to give yourself the confidence to succeed and reach those goals. Each time you meet a goal, the next one is more challenging, but also more rewarding, and gets you closer to bigger things-- like your DREAM CAREER.*

*Right now, creating a competitive dietetic internships application should be your goal. I'm here to tell you that life is only going to get busier, so you will never have time 'later on' to do something. Never push things off, just DO IT! Take a big, deep breath. Begin with small, action steps EVERYDAY. And no matter what...just. keep. going. LET'S DO THIS.*

*Your future dietitian colleague,  
Jenny*



# What is a Dietetic Internship?

---

Dietetic internship programs consist of supervised practice, which is required (in addition to didactic coursework) to become a registered dietitian. DIs are extremely competitive“My secret to internship matching success was an early start. I began compiling my application a year prior to the due date. I volunteered often and acquired a hostess position within a local hospital. I put time

---

# Student Tip #1

“My secret can be summed up in one word: "initiative." I researched DIs and the application process three years before I actually applied, and chose UC San Francisco as my top choice to strive for. My university nutrition faculty members were impressed when I approached them for internship advice a year and a half before I would begin applying. I ‘interrogated’ previous UCSF interns who taught at my university, and asked them for their help writing my personal statement. I prepared myself for a rigorous internship by devoting my time to studying, volunteering, and part-time jobs. Reach for the stars! I did!”



# Introduction

### 5 Things You Must Know About Dietetic Internships

---

- 1. Dietetic internships are very competitive and you might not get matched.**
- 2. The application process starts months, even years, before the deadline.**
- 3. All dietetic internships meet the same basic requirements, but have unique qualities that can make it a better fit for you.**
- 4. Most internships have tuition and fees. Very few have stipends. Prepare financially.**
- 5. Use all the resources available to you to fully understand the application process.**

### Dietetic Internships 101

According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, “To apply to a DI, individuals must complete at least a bachelor's degree and ACEND-accredited coursework requirements (Didactic Program in Dietetics). Currently all DIs must provide at least 1200 hours of supervised practice. This is usually completed in 8-24 months depending on the availability of a part-time schedule or requirement of graduate credit. Individuals completing the program who are verified by the program director are eligible to write the CDR registration examination for dietitians.”

“Appointments to DIs are awarded on a competitive basis and most use a national computer matching process. Programs not participating in computer matching accept applications only from individuals employed by the sponsoring organization. Prospective applicants must contact program directors for current information, including application deadline dates. Programs will provide application forms and detailed information on program requirements, tuition, and financial aid upon request.”



---

## The Scary Truth About DIs

Let's be realistic about the challenges involved in getting a DI. Some of us may believe that the process is easy and the internship is guaranteed. With the 50% match rate, and the expectation that it will go down this year, it is pretty scary. Looking on the bright side, this dismal match rate should be an eye-opener for students and should motivate them to become competitive and take their future as seriously as they can.

It is clear that there are simply not enough DI spots available to the thousands of applicants that wish to obtain one. While this book does not solve the problem of the shortage of internships, it does provide the information you need to reach your potential.

The DI is the transition between student and professional. Looking at the bright side of an additional year (or more) of training, you are lucky to have this time to evolve without diving head first into the real world. With that being said, the responsibilities of both a student and a professional are given to you. You will have projects and homework assignments on top of clocking in from 9-5 (for most full-time programs, anyways). Balance will be a running theme throughout the internship—balancing work, as-

signments, projects, and fun too! Overall, it is an experience that will help you grow both personally and professionally and prepare you for your first career move.

Scared? Nervous? My best advice for surviving life as a dietetics student is summed up in this quote by John Wooden:

***“Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.”***

No matter what happens on the road to the RD—searching tirelessly for experience, struggling through tough science courses, or stressing out over the application process—having a positive mental attitude every step of the way will be one of the most important keys to your success as a student, intern, AND registered dietitian! Are you ready?

# What Can I Do Now?

---

2

It's never too early to start improving your chances of getting matched to a dietetic internship. Not only will the following strategies make you more competitive, they will help in preparing for your future career in dietetics!



---

# Student Tip #2

“My secret to internship matching success was an early start. I began compiling my application a year prior to the due date. I volunteered often and acquired a hostess position within a local hospital. I put time and effort into my personal cover letter. It made a difference researching the individual internships to tailor my cover letter to the program’s emphasis. Networking was a major factor in finding influential individuals to write my letters of recommendation. I interviewed previous interns for tips and guidance. I dressed to impress for the interview and created a portfolio to show the internship committee.”



# Start Early

## Obtain a Solid GPA

Grades are extremely important in your quest to secure a dietetic internship. Many students don't realize this until it is too late. Programs will list their GPA requirements for overall, DPD, and science on their websites. Visit a few to get an idea of what GPA numbers you should be hitting. Schedule in retaking classes in order to meet these minimums.

In general, programs are looking for a 3.0 minimum overall, DPD, and science GPA, but remember that each program can set their own requirements. Also, when it comes to GPA, the higher the better!

## Network Within Dietetics

**True or False:** "Dietetic Associations and Dietetic Practice Groups are for registered dietitians only." False. Joining your local dietetic association or a dietetic practice group is another

very effective avenue for networking with RDs and even other students. It also shows involvement in profession—what selection committee doesn't like that?

Volunteer, network, attend meetings, or take on small projects. If your state doesn't have much opportunity for students, ask how you can change that! Dietetic association board members are leaders that you should get to know. Reach out to them immediately. Involvement with this group early on will allow you to create a foundation of experience that you can use to prove you are devoted to the profession. You will inspire other students to follow your lead and before you know it, you have cultivated passionate and enthused group of students to promote and advance the profession in the right direction! Do you see why this is so important? Hey, it looks **AWESOME** in your application too. :)

## Make it Happen:

- Ask your local dietetic association if they need any student volunteers.
- Spearhead a state student dietetic association or increase the association's student participation.



- 
- Help start a mentorship program or get a mentor through their established program to develop connections.

## Create Leadership Opportunities

When I was a junior in college, I made the degree switch from biology to dietetics. I had some catching up to do with gaining leadership experience. My university's student dietetic association already had an executive board selected for senior year, so no luck there. I had an executive board committee position during my junior year on the Human Interest Professionals group on campus, but I still wanted something more nutrition-related.

At the end of my junior year, I was assigned a group business plan project in a business communications class. My group decided on creating a partnership between the University of Illinois and the Eastern Illinois Food Bank. After hours of research and a successful presentation, I decided to take a risk and turn this project into a reality. During my senior year, I started a chapter of Students Team Up to Fight Hunger (STUFH), a national organization that links college campuses to their local food banks. I filled out all the paperwork necessary to make it an official organization. Then, I recruited my executive committee and developed goals to work toward during the year. For the next year, I coordinated food drives, ran fundraisers, and increased

awareness of food insecurity on campus. Without a doubt, leadership was essential to getting this STUFH chapter off the ground. Starting this group allowed me to improve that skill and feel more confident in leadership positions.

Why is leadership essential to the application? Well, time and time again, directors are stating that this is what they look for in an applicant. It is plastered all over their websites, requested in the application letter, and often comes up in an interview. A career counselor once advised me that if you are going to put down that you are in an organization, you should only list it if you had a position with responsibility, as opposed to just a membership. This advice really stuck with me. Most selection committees would agree that being a leader in the field of dietetics is important, since it is the leaders that can impact the field in a positive way.

Also, note that there are about 226 didactic programs in dietetics (DPDs). Let's assume half of them have student nutrition clubs. Let's again assume that there are 5 executive board members. This is about 565 applicants that will have nutrition club leadership on their application. While this is impressive for any applicant, consider how you can be even more competitive by showing both leadership AND entrepreneurship. You can do it!



---

## Make it Happen:

- Determine your community's or university's needs (i.e. hunger insecurity, nutrition education, and food policy awareness).
- Develop a business plan to define your focus for starting an organization and recruit other like-minded people to supplement your efforts.
- Cultivate your leadership skills, take risks, and learn from your experience.

## Prepare Financially

True or False: "DIs are paid positions because we are like employees, right?" Most of the time, this is false. A very popular thought to ponder is how you are going to pay for a DI. Possible expenses include: application fees, computer matching fees, printing costs, mailing costs, travel expenses, and then eventually the tuition, insurance, books, lab coats, room and board and other program-related costs. This is astronomical for interns and college students who do not get paid! It's unfortunate that there are financial limitations in many programs. And even with a stipend, some students still find it hard to cover even the most basic of costs.

I vividly remember hearing about a DPD director telling a class of dietetic seniors about the time she was on food stamps during her DI. My mouth dropped immediately. What? Is it that bad? Well for me, I survived on all student loans, and knew many interns that did the same. I lived in a comfortable apartment and COULD afford groceries, thank goodness. I'll be in some debt, but I look at my loans as an "educational investment." I am confident that my return on investment will be exponential! Even so, financial costs for DIs seem to be high on the list of deciding factors for many applicants.

## Here's a rundown of financial sources:

**Scholarships** – First, complete the American Dietetic Association Foundation scholarship application. Next, check out your local and state dietetic associations. This includes the state you are leaving and the state you are entering if they are different. Scholarships are a GREAT way to get your school paid for without having to pay it back. Be creative with Google too - try "nutrition scholarship" or "dietitian scholarship" and see what might come up. Throw in names of your respective states or cities too. You just never know.

---

Some programs have scholarships specifically for their interns. Others have state scholarships that are not as competitive as national scholarships. They are definitely worth applying to. Let's say you work on an application for 5 hours. Then, you get awarded a \$500 scholarship. You basically just got paid \$100 per hour! NICE!

**Loans** – They could be federal student loans, private student loans, or personal loans. Ask the program directors which loans are available to you during the internship. Do you know if the internship program has applied to the government for educational loan status? Also, is deferment possible for your undergraduate student loans?

*Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program:*

- Low interest rates
- Loans deferred while student is enrolled in an eligible program of study at least half time
- Can be subsidized or unsubsidized

*Subsidized Loans:*

- Awarded on basis of financial need

- Federal government pays interest on the loan until you begin to pay it off (when you become less than a half time student)

*Unsubsidized Loans:*

- Not awarded on basis of need
- Interest begins to accrue at the time you receive the loan (the "disbursement date")
- Interest accrues from the disbursement date until you pay off the loan in full
- You can pay the interest or allow it to accumulate and capitalize

**Part-time Jobs** – It is wise to ask graduated interns if they thought it was possible to have a part-time job during the internship. You can find internship reviews on All Access Internships that mention specific examples like waitressing, babysitting, weekend jobs as a diet technician, or jobs offered by the internship institution itself (Perhaps, help in the catering department?).

You might suspect there is no easy solution for the financial burden that comes with DIs, but definitely explore your options.



---

You might find that it IS possible to get a little financial help and also feel settled about the fact that your bank account contains only borrowed money. Maybe then you will want to soak up everything the internship has to offer and get your money's worth!

I have one last piece of advice on money: I hear a lot of interns say that one of the challenges of an unpaid internship program is that you feel like you are working for FREE. If they are having a bad day, it is easy to complain about that fact that they are free labor. It basically becomes the scapegoat for their frustration. But I have a thought for you that will nip this bad attitude in the bud: Remember that this internship is the one last step you need to take until you reach your goal of becoming a registered dietitian. You are still paying for an education. Did you complain that you weren't getting paid to study in college? As you move along through the program, focus on the end goal of the internship: to be a competent entry-level registered dietitian.

Also, think about all of those people who didn't get matched. How lucky you are to even be in an internship? Many institutions lose money on providing a DI through liability or lost time teaching, among other reasons. In fact, that is part of the reason that there aren't enough spots available to everyone that applies. Therefore, you know the people guiding and teaching you at the hospital are dedicated to the advancement of the

field. Be thankful for this. Stay motivated, positive, and complaint-free. This should make for a more beneficial experience.

## Have a Wide Variety of Experiences

**True or False:** "I need to have clinical experience in order to be competitive for an internship." This may be true if the emphasis of the program is clinical. However, broad and unique experiences may sometimes outweigh clinical experience, depending on the selection criteria that the program director sets for its applicants. And since "a wide variety" implies having more than one dietetics experience, you must seek out experiences before your application year. Let's get moving!

If you ask any dietetics student about what it takes to be more competitive with their internship applications you may hear, "Start volunteering soon and often!" Then, he or she will emphasize that you should get as many experiences as you can before you are in the process of applying. Your experience says a lot about your interests as well as your personality traits. Be

---

proactive about gaining experiences by taking the initiative. Show that you have the ability to juggle multiple things at once. A great example is holding a part-time job during the semester. You also want to convey your willingness to learn new skills and show your enthusiasm for learning. Take on a position that may be extra challenging. As directors review your experiences, they will notice qualities like professionalism, multitasking, leadership, and solid communication (just to name a few).

### **Create Experiences worth Writing About**

Your experiences are what you will use to show that you have the skills to excel in the internship. If you can't find good experiences offered through your school or within your community, start a new club or work with an RD that can be your mentor and provide invaluable one-on-one experience. It shows that you are a go-getter and are not afraid to take initiative!

### **Variety is Key**

During the internship, each rotation may be very different from the others. Racking up exposure in a lot of different areas will make your internship year less intimidating. Getting experience in basic clinical, food service, and community areas is crucial, since these are required rotations for every DI. Once you've done that, expand to more specialized areas like research, business, entrepreneurship, sports nutrition, pediatrics, or communi-

cations. Not only will you have your bases covered with "typical" student positions, you can bolster your application with impressive add-ons that allow you to rise above the crowd.

### **Making the Ask**

How exactly are you supposed to go about finding these impressive add-ons? Let me be the first to tell you that Google can only take you so far! As dietetics students, we all crave opportunities to prove ourselves in the professional world. However, you must be willing to take some risks. I want to let you in on my own personal secret called “making the ask”. Here’s how it works. If you haven’t already spent some time on the Internet researching companies, hospitals, professional organizations, dietitians in private practice, etc., then it’s time you got started. First, do the obvious. Check and see if they offer established internships or volunteer experiences. If they don’t, make the ask! If you don’t ask, your answer is always NO.

Not quite “experience-hungry” yet? Keep in mind that a wide variety of experiences will allow you to:

- Decide what you are interested in
- Gain contacts in the field



- 
- Show your willingness to learn and commitment to the profession
  - Expand your skill set
  - Prove to directors that you take initiative to gain as much experience as possible

### **Take Advantage of Breaks**

If you are lucky enough to have them, utilize those month-long winter breaks to squeeze in more experience or even get started on applications! Here are some ideas to stay busy in between semesters:

- Volunteer at a food bank or soup kitchen. It will be especially busy during the holidays.
- Help an RD set up his/her blog and contribute posts regularly (nutrition communications!).
- Volunteer at a hospital for any holiday events, especially in the food service department.
- Start a blog of your own nutrition-related experiences.
- Reconnect with your summer job supervisor to see if they could use an extra hand.

- Use this time to set up shadowing appointments with a variety of RDs to get to know more about the field.
- Research and apply for summer job options. Many summer internships are filled by January.
- Collect awards, past work, and projects and create an online résumé using Blogger.com, Wordpress.com, or VisualCV.com. Put this link on your application résumé. It's all the rage!

# Where Should I Apply?

---

What do you want out of an internship? Take the time to investigate your options and think about what you want to get out of your DI.

3



---

# Student Tip #3

“My secret to success was organization. In September, I printed out the application checklist and "About" page from each internships of interest's website. These materials were placed in separate colored folders, labeled by internship. I penciled in my planner which days I would work on personal statements, request transcripts, etc., spaced out around semester exams and projects. As each item on the application checklists was completed, it was added to the appropriate folder. I had everything finished by December. Finally, I completed the sample interview questions on All Access Internships with my own answers attached in preparation for upcoming interviews.”



# Choose Your Perfect Fit

## Define What You Want

What do YOU want out of your internship? We all know by now that there is a great possibility we might not get matched with our first choice, but do you want to sit back and wonder what if? I have heard of people who decided not to apply somewhere because they thought it was too tough to get in even though it may have been their dream internship.

Please keep in mind that this is a time in your life where you can afford to be a little selfish. I realize that many people are not in a situation where they can move around the country, but if you are, embrace it! Be sure that you are choosing internships that are right for you based on your needs and wants, not based on convenience or the desires of others. If your top choice happens to be across the street or happens to be the same one that your best friend is ranking first, then that's great! If not, listen to your gut--it's usually right.

Many factors differentiate each internship program from the other. Consider what you can realistically afford to do and choose from programs that will match your interests and experiences. I was realistically willing to look across the country for internships.

I knew I wanted a general emphasis, was attracted to teaching hospitals, did not want a graduate degree yet, and wanted the option to do an elective rotation in Chicago (my hometown). Massachusetts General Hospital offered all of that to me, and that is where I got matched. When you apply to programs that match what you are interested in, your genuine enthusiasm for the program will shine through to the selection committee and will reflect well on your application. The match works two ways—both you and the program should fit well with each other. Proving you are the perfect fit is what the application is for! Let's dive deeper into defining what you want in an internship.



---

# Location

## Possible Options

1. Near Home
2. Far from Home
3. Distance Learning

## Questions to Ask

- Where do I want to get a job after the internship?
- Do I have the finances to move?
- Am I able to leave any obligations in my current location?
- Am I a self-directed learner?

This might be the most important deciding factor if you want to stay near your family, are already employed in the area, or have obligations that will not al-

low you to move to a new city. For you, deciding on the location of your program is easy! For those of you without a geographical barrier, you're able to choose from many outstanding programs all over the country! You may find an internship on the other side of the country that fits your interests perfectly.

Yes, moving to a new city can be expensive, scary, and risky, but it could be so worth it! Do not be afraid to sacrifice one or two years in an unfamiliar location if it means completing an internship that will bring you one step closer to reaching your unique goals.

Also, think about where you want to seek employment after the internship. If you stay in this area, you may develop relationships with other dietitians and facility personnel, which could lead to a job after you graduate. I encourage everyone to look at all the unique programs across the country and don't let location hold you back if it doesn't have to. I moved from Chicago to Boston knowing

only my intern classmates and the receptionist of the gym I joined, but it was absolutely worth the sacrifice.

If you do move, there is more preparation needed and it could be harder to adjust to new surroundings. If you stay near home, there are less living expenses and transportation costs. Look at all costs, since they might even out in the end. For example, if traveling means getting a stipend instead of paying tuition then it could be worth it. Also, if you need a car for an internship nearby, but can use public transportation for the internship across the country, these are the financial decisions you must consider.

Distance programs will still require transportation. You must do well with online learning and be self-motivated. There is less networking with other interns, but you can still make good connections with potential employers at local sites.

---

# Money

## Possible Options

1. Tuition/Program Fee
2. No Tuition
3. Stipend

## Questions to Ask

- Can I afford tuition?
- Can I defer existing student loans during the internship?
- What other costs do I have?
- Can I still get financial aid for living expenses?
- Does the program meet my needs, no matter the price?

Even if it seems like the internship is a financial burden, remember that you are likely to get a very good return on your educational investment. Of course, you may desire to avoid debt and if this is the case, stipend programs could be your best bet.

Don't judge a book by its cover on this deciding factor though. Some programs may have stipends, but they may also have tuition that is more than the stipend. Note that Veterans' Affairs internships are notorious for offering stipends. Living costs associated with the location on the program may end up canceling out the stipend in the end. With any financial decision, analyze all the numbers and research available financial aid by contacting the program director or financial aid office.

Undergraduate loans may be deferred, but you still might need financial aid. If there is no tuition, you might have a harder time finding financial aid (since you might not be considered a student).

Also, ask the program director for information on scholarship opportunities, especially for combined Masters and Internship programs.



---

# Concentration

## Possible Options

1. General
2. Clinical
3. Food Service Management
4. Community
5. Research
6. Sports Nutrition
7. Pediatrics

## Questions to Ask

- What are my short-term career goals?
- Am I unsure of my career goals?
- Do I desire a strong foundation in every area of dietetics?

In preparation for the next step in your dietetics journey, it is essential that you research all the different areas that a dietitian can practice in. Beware of saying, "I don't know what I am interested in!" if you have not even researched what is available to you. Talk to your advisor, other dietitians, your professors, and dietetics-related work supervisors (or check out "Research the Field"). My mentor, Julie Burns, was able to give me real-world advice on the progressive areas of dietetics that I did not know existed!

Choosing a general emphasis is great if you do not know what you are interested in yet or are interested in multiple areas. On the other hand, remember that all internships are required to have a minimum amount of hours in each area of dietetics, so you won't be missing out if you choose a specific emphasis. Finally, think about where you want to work right out of the internship, and consider if a niche emphasis would benefit you when applying.

# Pace

## Possible Options

1. Part-time
2. Full-time

## Questions to Ask

- Do I want to get done with school as quickly as possible?
- Will I need to work part-time while I complete the internship? (Or need flexibility?)

If you need to work during the internship, a part-time DI makes employment more realistic and manageable. If you have any other obligation or time commitment, part-time DIs usually offer schedule flexibility. It may take longer than the full-time internships, so it all depends on the length of time you are able to commit. You will still gain the same amount of experience in both options.

---

# Grad School

## Possible Options

1. Combined Masters and Internship
2. Some Graduate Credits
3. Internship Only

## Questions to Ask

- Is a graduate degree one of my professional goals?
- Do I know what area of dietetics I am most interested in?
- Can I handle the time and financial commitment that comes along with the combined program?
- Am I hoping that the internship will help me find my niche?
- Can I afford it?

There has been much debate over choosing a combined internship with

graduate school or just the internship. A combined program will allow you to obtain your Masters degree while simultaneously meeting the requirements to fulfill a DI program. These programs are usually longer than a DI program by itself, but you leave with a Masters degree. A combined program is a nice option to consider for advancing your education while completing your internship.

In my opinion, it all comes down to what your career goals are. You don't want to enter a combined Master's in Clinical Nutrition program, only to discover that you have no interest in practicing clinical nutrition. There are also many types of Masters programs applicable to the RD, such as public health, business administration, entrepreneurship, or nutrition communications.

Of course, it is not the end of the world and a Master's credential will still provide you with a competitive advantage for career opportunities in any area of dietetics, but it's to your advantage to

think carefully about your decision and get the most out of your advanced study.



---

# Electives

## Possible Options

1. None
2. Short (1-2 week)
3. Long (3+ weeks)
4. Flexible guidelines
5. Strict guidelines

## Questions to Ask

- Do I want options?
- Am I interested in a “non-traditional” field in nutrition?
- Is my area of interest not covered in the assigned rotations?
- Do I know what I like?

Decide if you want an internship that provides you with some options. You

may be so set on one area of dietetics, so the option to spend additional time in it is appealing. You may have no clue what area you enjoy, so the more options the better! You can use an elective experience to your advantage and gain valuable exposure to any area of your choice.

However, you may find limited opportunities or you may be restricted on what type of elective rotation you can complete. Some programs require you stay in the vicinity of the program's location and others only allow you to choose from a list of pre-selected rotations.

Figure out how personalized the internship is and how well you think it can tailor to your interests. If this factor is really important to you, make sure you talk to the director and ask how they choose rotation schedules and experiences. Talk to the past interns to find out if they were actually able to do what they wanted to do.

# Affiliation

## Possible Options

1. Teaching hospital
2. Community hospital
3. University
4. Women, Infants, and Children
5. Food and Facilities Management Company

## Questions to Ask

- Where do the actual experiences take place?
- What is the size of the hospital?
- What are the characteristics of the patient population?
- Is the area rural or urban?

---

Programs have affiliations in an array of settings from hospitals and universities to Women, Infant, and Children's programs and wellness centers. The locations of rotations are an important deciding factor and a detail you should not overlook.

Are the majority of rotations at one location? If so, you could potentially have less transportation costs, quick adjustment with personnel and organizational culture, and the possibility of great opportunities offered all in one place! On the downside, you may not prefer the way this location does things and you could also see a less diverse patient population. You just do not want to be misled by the fact that if a program is in a city with plenty of great facilities, it doesn't mean you will be able to take advantage of them.

On the other hand, a program located in a small town may set up a majority of their rotations in a nearby large and opportunistic city! My point is, it is impor-

tant to know where your actual experiences take place, and do not assume that they will all be where you send your application packet!

Make sure the patient population meets your goals too. Are you interested in pediatrics? Apply to a children's hospital. Are you interested in geriatrics? VA hospitals typically service an older demographic. An urban setting will typically have a more diverse population that could enhance your learning experience. A rural setting is typically more homogeneous, but could provide more hands-on experience. Ask the director or past interns to be sure.

## Rotation Sites

### Possible Options

1. Primarily One Location
2. Variety of Locations

### Questions to Ask

- Are all the rotations "in house"?
- Do I have to travel to different sites?
- Is each intern assigned to a different institution?
- Do I adjust to different personnel well?
- Am I interested in seeing the "big picture" of clinical dietetics?
- Are rotation sites accustomed to having interns?
- Will you be mostly observing or actually participating in tasks?



---

Many programs are completed at one facility, and typically these are clinical internships. There are also programs that rotate you through many different sites. For those who are unsure about pursuing clinical nutrition, an internship with a variety of rotation locations may better suit your needs—offering a broader array of experiences. Be sure to research all the rotations extensively. Ask the director for a sample schedule with locations.

If you have the majority of rotations in one location, it cuts back on transportation issues, you get to know the personnel in the department very well, and can connect everything together and see the “big picture” (i.e. how clinical RDs work with food service and outpatient nutrition departments). It can be a quick adjustment with organizational culture, and great opportunities offered all in one place!

On the other hand, you may find that you do not work well in this one environ-

ment. Or, you see a less diverse patient population. A variety of rotation locations will require more transportation, but you may enjoy the change in pace from one rotation site to another.

Finally, learn about the rotations and the level of responsibility you will have at these rotation sites.

Generally speaking, teaching hospitals are more accustomed to having interns. Larger hospitals may give more unique experiences. Smaller hospitals may give you more responsibility.

## Final Thoughts

Have an open mind and don't be limited by the location of the internship, unless you have a desire to live in a particular area. Also, keep that open mind as you go through your internship, you could start with a passion for pediatrics and end with a passion for geriatrics!

Also, visit the internship program if it is logistically and financially possible. Meet the internship director; let the director put a face with your name! Also, observe the surrounding location of the internship and what that city has to offer. If you don't like the location, it will make the internship that much harder. Contact previous interns and get their feedback about their experience beyond the work day. Past dietetic interns are more likely to tell you about how they de-stressed from the internship than directors. And again, have an open mind when applying and as you go through your internship program.

---

# Make it Happen:

- Develop your list of deciding factors and define what you want out of an internship.
- Keep these deciding factors in mind as you narrow down your list of worthy programs.
- Start going through options early on! The earlier you start, the better off you will be.
- Create a top-10 list, and narrow it down to your final 4-5 choices at least 2 months before the deadline.



# What if I Don't Get Matched?

---

# 4

**Expect the best, but  
prepare for the worst.  
Consider these back-up  
plans should you not get  
matched to an internship.**

---

# Student Tip #4

“I made sure to introduce myself and take a course with the program director of my university's DI program. I feel that she got to know me as a student (and a person), as well as, see my hard work and perseverance in the didactic program. Taking her course, the director was able to witness first-hand my work ethic, experience and review my projects, presentations, and test taking abilities.”



# Create a Back Up Plan

As you anxiously anticipate match day, I am sure you are hoping any internship name pops up on your screen, even if it's not your first choice. Expect the best, but prepare for the worst. It is smart to consider alternatives just in case. My first point to emphasize is that do not under ANY circumstance let a "no match" make you question your worth. I once heard about an extremely successful dietitian, who has been featured on national television and appeared in health/nutrition magazines worldwide, who did not receive a match her first time around. By not letting this small obstacle, although seemingly large at the time, keep her down, she has turned into the person she is today. Perseverance is worth its weight in gold.

If you do not receive a match, the obvious "next steps" are to see what programs do not fill spots or to participate in the next matching round. Speak with your advisor or check the DICAS system. Then, consider the following back-up plans.

---

## Begin a Master's program.

One of the schools I applied to reports that many students enter their Master's program if unmatched. Consequently, they build rapport with the faculty and staff and are accepted into the internship program the following year. Many combined DI/Master's programs may have this option.

## Try to obtain employment.

Maybe a year of experience as a WIC consultant is just the ticket to make your application letter pop. Or you can try out a fun summer or year-long internship with a magazine. There are tons of jobs out there that are nutrition-related that don't necessarily require the RD including:

- Foodservice Supervisor
- Foodservice Systems Management (contract foodservice companies)
- Sales within the health or food industry
- Jobs in public health programs such as WIC or Head Start



- 
- Wellness jobs

Take some time to gain additional experience. An extra bonus: you can stash away extra cash in case you decide to apply again, making it a little more comfortable living than your peers.

## Improve your grades.

Retake classes that may have lowered your GPA. If you feel that your GPA was the main deterrent for you, feel no shame in retaking these classes. You will gain a better appreciation for the subject and your hard work will be evident to the review committees.

## Become a DTR.

Consider a Dietetic Technician Program to become a Registered Dietetic Technician. Although DTRs and RDs may differ in some levels of responsibilities, this is still a chance to practice in the field of dietetics at a professional level. It could give you more experience for the next time you apply to an internship. It may ALSO be a way to decide if this is the right career path for you!

## Look into an ISPP.

An Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) is an option you are eligible for only after you do not successfully get matched. You will need to set up your own preceptors and have an ISPP program sponsor you. It might be more work, but is your “second chance” at completing your supervised practice!

## Get application help.

On your next attempt, work with an All Access Internships coach or attend a bootcamp. This is an excellent investment if it means getting a dietetic internship and reaching your goals as a dietitian!



# About The Author

---



Jenny began her career during her senior year of college when she started All Access Internships (AAI) in April 2008. She has been dedicated to meeting the needs of the dietetic student community through free resources, newsletters, internship profiles, webinars, e-books, one-on-one coaching and workshops across the country.

Jenny is currently the Nutritionist for [Kitchfix](#), an organic, real food prepared meals company in Chicago. Previously, she was a sports nutritionist at a private practice where she worked with the Rockford IceHogs, Chicago Blackhawks, and NBA Development League. In November 2012, she released *You Are What You Retweet: 140 Social Media Rules to Eat By*. She is the co-author with previous *Men's Fitness* editor-in-chief, Michael De Medeiros for the book *Green Foods for Men*. Jenny also serves as an Advisor for REAL Dietitian, a progressive telemedicine company that provides tele-MNT.

She has been interviewed for a variety of media outlets including *Good Morning America*, *Huffington Post*, and *Redeye Chicago*. Jenny is the Past-President of the Chicago Food and Nutrition Network and was on the Executive Board for the Academy's Nutrition Entrepreneurs from 2010-2012.

Jenny graduated with high honors from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and earned a Bachelor's degree in Food Science and Human Nutrition. She was honored as the most outstanding dietetics student in the program and also was the recipient of the Senior Honorary 100 for the top 100 seniors at the university. In 2009, she was awarded the Nutrition Entrepreneurs' Student of the Year. Jenny completed her dietetics training at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.

Connect with Jenny: [jenny@allaccessinternships.com](mailto:jenny@allaccessinternships.com) | Twitter: @jennywesterkamp

# Less than 50% Don't Get Matched. We Can Help.

---

## Coaching

The stakes are high. The match rate is low. Your dream career as a registered dietitian is officially on the line. Luckily, we are here to help you reach your dreams.

**Compared to the current 49% match rate, our coaching clients had an 80% match rate last year, according to our annual client survey.**

We know what applicants need to do to MAXIMIZE their chances of getting matched! We offer application coaching via email and phone to help you turn in the best possible DICAS application! Our coaches are trained to improve your materials and help you feel 100% confident.

***Lose the stress, confusion, and self-doubt!***

**Happy Matched Clients...**





---

© All Access Internships LLC 2014

Dietetic Internships 101 is copyrighted. Duplication of any content in this document is not authorized. These materials are for the exclusive use of the individual downloading this e-book. To re-post any of this content, please contact Jenny Westerkamp at [jenny@allaccessinternships.com](mailto:jenny@allaccessinternships.com). Thank you!