

MS in Nutrition and Dietetics: Dietetic Internship Option

Self-study Executive Summary

Historical Perspective

The development of a precursor program for the Dietetic Internship (DI) began in Fall 1978. A combined master's/supervised practice program was piloted in 1979 with a final approval by the Illinois Board of Higher Education in November 1981. Building from this successful program, a Pre-professional Practice Program (AP4) was approved by the Council of Education in April 1988 with the program being granted developmental accreditation status in 1994 as a DI. The DI began with one affiliated medical center and has grown to nine sites, today. Each site has a DI Site Director who coordinates the interns' rotations and is the liaison between the medical facility and the University.

In 1993, following a restructuring of all academic units on campus, the Lumpkin College of Business and Applied Sciences (LCBAS) acquired the School of Family and Consumer Sciences. The LCBAS also houses the School of Technology, the School of Business, and the Department of Military Science. In 1995, the school name was changed from the School of Home Economics to the School of Family and Consumer Sciences. In the early 2000s, the graduate dietetics program separated from the MS in Family and Consumer Sciences program and began the Master of Science in Dietetics. In 2012, the program name changed to include Nutrition and Dietetics to mirror a name change within the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. In 2016, two options were approved within the MSND program: Dietetic Internship Option and Nutrition Education Option. The DI is only offered as a part of the Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics: DI Option.

Program Overview

Initially, all graduate students who apply to the MSND program are admitted into the MSND: Nutrition Education Option. When the student is matched with our DI, through the external D&D Digital process, the student's option is changed to the DI Option. As this is the only option that includes the DI, the MSND: Nutrition Education Option is not be discussed further in this self-study. Once matched, the student completes two semesters of graduate-level coursework before beginning the DI. During the student's first semester of coursework, the student is placed in one of the program's nine affiliated medical centers. The majority of the DI rotations is completed in the medical facility where the student is placed. When the graduate coursework and the DI are successfully completed and the degree is conferred, the student earns the DI Verification Statement, which enables them to take the Registration Examination for Dietitian Nutritionists. This credential is the main goal of many dietetic students.

Based on a critical review of the DI coursework by the dietetics faculty, several curriculum changes were implemented in 2015. These changes were based on assessment data and comments from current interns and alumni, faculty, and to a lesser extent, the SFCS Advisory Council. A variety of teaching methods are utilized within the classroom, including problem-based learning, laboratory experiences, role playing, and case scenarios. In both the classroom and the Dietetic Internship, communication skills are assessed via written work (themed meal presentation, systematic review, and various nutrition education program plans) as well as orally (cooking demonstrations, video productions, and major case studies).

Program Strengths and Challenges

As a result of the self-study process, which began in earnest in Spring 2015, the dietetics faculty have reflected on the strengths, challenges, and weaknesses in the MSND: DI Option, which includes the graduate coursework that assists in preparing the interns for the DI as well as the DI curriculum. Several strengths are noted throughout this self-study document, including the relationships built and maintained between the faculty and student/alumnus, in part due to the smaller class size; the continuous support of the Graduate School with graduate assistantships that allow for more out-of-state students being able to afford the program and travel funding; and a growing number of educational and volunteer opportunities within the Student Dietetic Association. The main challenges are related to the fiscal changes of Illinois public higher education institutions as a result of the two-year budgetary impasse. Moving forward, administration will be prioritizing in order to restore the University's operations to balance effectiveness and efficiency to deliver the best possible education to EIU's students. Managing the effects of the turnover in DI Site Directors and hospital preceptors is a noted issue with a plan in place to develop an online EIU DI Preceptor Training program during this academic year. Overall, the strengths outnumber the challenges as the dietetics faculty and preceptors are flexible and creative in creating and sharing learning opportunities with the students.

Current Program Mission, Goals and Objectives

Mission

The MSND: Dietetic Internship Option with its Nutrition Education Emphasis combines research with theory-driven nutrition education through supervised practice experiences to prepare entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists to enter the diverse workforce and devote their careers to improving and empowering individuals, families and communities through lifelong learning and professional engagement and service. (<https://www.eiu.edu/dieteticsgrad/mission-goals-outcomes.php>)

Program Goals

1. The program will develop competent, graduate level, entry-level dietitians with the knowledge and skills needed to provide professional service targeted at improving the overall health and well being of individuals, families, and communities through theory-driven nutrition education.
 - a. Within one year of completing the DI, at least 80% of graduates who seek employment in fields related to nutrition and dietetics will have obtained employment.
 - b. At least 80% of students are expected to complete the DI within 150% of the program length (45 weeks).
 - c. At least 80% of the employers surveyed will indicate satisfaction with the DI graduate's entry-level competence as a RDN.
 - d. Within one year of completing the DI, at least 80% of program graduates will take the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists.
 - e. Over a five-year reporting period, at least 80% of graduates will pass the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within one year following the first attempt.
2. The program will prepare graduates to engage in professional service and lifelong learning.
 - a. One year post graduation, 50% of graduates who respond to the alumni survey will indicate they are serving as a preceptor.

- b. One year post graduation, 50% of graduates who respond to the alumni survey will indicate involvement in at least one professional organization.

Program Objectives

1. Program Completion: The program must develop an objective that states at least 80% percent of program interns complete program/degree requirements within 150% of the program length (as defined in academic units).
2. Graduate Employment: The program must develop an objective that states the percent of program graduates who are expected to be employed in nutrition and dietetics or related fields within 12 months of graduation.
3. Graduate Performance on Registration Exam:
 - a. The program must develop an objective that states the percent of program graduates who are expected to take the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within 12 months of program completion.
 - b. The program must develop an objective that states at least 80% of graduates over a five-year period pass the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within one year following first attempt. If less than five years of pass rate data are available, programs will be evaluated on data available.
4. Employer Satisfaction: The program must develop an objective for employer satisfaction with graduate's preparation for entry-level practice.