

# **ACEND Accreditation Standards**

## **For Nutrition and Dietetics Internship Programs (DI)**

**Adopted XX 1, 202X; Effective June 1, 202X**

**Accreditation Council  
for Education in  
Nutrition and Dietetics**

the accrediting agency for the  
**Academy of Nutrition  
and Dietetics**



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When combined with an ACEND-approved Graduate Degree Program, the Accreditation Standards for Nutrition and Dietetics Internship Program (DI) lead to eligibility to take the Commission on Dietetic Registration's examination for the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist credential.

## **Standard 1: Program Characteristics and Resources**

**All programs applying for accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND®) must meet requirements including quality-assurance or oversight by other agencies, organizational structure, financial stability, sufficient resources, the awarding of degrees and/or verification statements, program length, and program management.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

- 1.1** The program must be housed in a college or university, health care facility, federal or state agency, or offered in a consortium with a college or university, health care facility, federal or state agency.
- A consortium is defined as two or more independent institutions working together under a formal written agreement to sponsor a single program. The consortium must consider itself a single education program.
  - Colleges and universities must be located in the U.S. or its territories and accredited in good standing by a U.S. institutional accrediting body for higher education recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) or by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).
  - For programs located outside a college or university, the sponsoring institution must be authorized or exempt under applicable state law to provide postsecondary education.
  - Hospitals must be accredited by The Joint Commission (TJC), Det Norske Veritas (DNV), Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program (HFAP), or other approved national accreditation organization or state agency.
  - Facilities for individuals with developmental disabilities must be accredited by the Council on Quality and Leadership in Support for People with Disabilities or by TJC, DNV, HFAP or other approved national accreditation organization or state agency.
  - Other health-care-related facilities must be licensed by a federal agency or an agency of the state in which it is located or accredited by TJC, DNV, HFAP or other approved national accreditation organization.
  - Publicly- or privately-held corporations of health systems (e.g., hospitals, rehabilitation centers, etc.), government agencies, and existing ACEND-accredited business entities without oversight by one of the regulatory bodies listed above must meet all the requirements below:
    - Be legally organized and authorized to conduct business by the appropriate state agency for a minimum of five years.
    - Be in compliance with all local, state and federal laws and regulations.
    - Provide statements covering the past five years from a licensed public accountant that indicate a review of the company's financial statements shows no irregularities and a positive net worth.
    - Have an entity external to the program that provides oversight for the program's operations.
- 1.2** The program must be integrated within the administrative structure of the sponsoring organization, show this structure, such as in an organizational chart, and indicate where the program will be housed. In a consortium, an organizational chart must clearly show the relationship of each member of the consortium to the program and where the program will be housed.
- 1.3** The program must demonstrate that it has:
- Support of the upper-level administration.
  - Adequate resources to accomplish its mission and goals and meet the needs of students. Resources must include:

1. Clerical or other staff
  2. Technical support
  3. Learning resources
  4. Physical facilities
  5. Support services
- c. Sufficient financial resources to support program needs:
1. The program must provide a description of the mechanisms in place for participation in shared decision-making between the program director and the institution on the budgeting process.
  2. Programs offered in a consortium must clearly define financial and other resource contributions of each member to the total program.
- d. Adequate technology and resources to support a distance-learning environment if any portion of the program is offered through distance education.
- e. Adequate resources to support continued development and training for program faculty, preceptors, and staff.
- f. Sufficient supervised practice sites available to provide the quality, quantity, and variety of expected experiences to prepare students for their roles and responsibilities as nutrition and dietetics professionals.
- g. The program must report its maximum enrollment to ensure quality, viability, and appropriate use of resources.

**1.4 The program must:**

- a. Be a post baccalaureate program that:
1. Admits only individuals with a Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) verification statement and is affiliated with a graduate program to ensure students complete the ACEND-required academic competencies and performance indicators and a graduate degree by the end of the program. The graduate degree must be in a major course of study in human nutrition, food and nutrition, dietetics, public health, food systems management, or equivalent.
- and/or
2. Admits only individuals who have a verification statement from a DPD and have earned, or are in the process of earning, at least a master's degree granted by a U.S. accredited college/university or international degree equivalent and verification for the designated academic competencies and performance indicators by ACEND or an ACEND-accredited graduate program.
- b. Individuals with a conferred doctoral degree must have either a DPD verification statement or demonstrate the achievement of competencies in years 1 through 4 (Appendix A) verified by ACEND; and a verification by ACEND or by an ACEND-accredited graduate program for the designated academic competencies and performance indicators.
- c. Award a verification statement to individuals who have earned a graduate degree and completed program requirements.

**1.5** The program must have one designated program director who has primary responsibility for the program and communication with ACEND. The program director must have the authority, responsibility and sufficient time allocated to manage the program, and provide effective leadership for the program, the program faculty, and the students. The program director may have other responsibilities that do not compromise the ability to manage the program. Responsibilities and time allocation for program management are reflected in a formal position description for the program director and approved by an administrator or external entity.

- a. For programs offered in a consortium:

1. One individual must serve as the consortium program director and have primary responsibility for the program and communications with ACEND.
  2. Each member organization in the consortium must designate a coordinator (who may be the program director) for the program within that organization who is employed by the organization.
- b. The program director's responsibilities must include, but are not limited to:
1. Authority for oversight of the program, including when program management responsibilities are delegated to other faculty or individuals.
  2. Provision or delegation of responsibilities to ensure year-round coverage of director responsibilities in the absence of the director or in cases where the director's full-time appointment does not cover 12 months.
  3. Development of policies and procedures for effectively managing all components of the program and ensuring fair and considerate treatment of prospective and enrolled students (such as program admission, retention, and completion policies).
  4. Decision-making authority over the financial resources to achieve the program's outcomes and to support the academic integrity and continued viability of the program.
  5. Student recruitment, advisement, evaluation, and counseling.
    - a. During all stages of the recruitment process, program directors must comply with the Traffic Rules of the Dietetics Application Process
  6. Maintenance of program accreditation, including:
    - a. Timely submission of fees, reports, and requests for major program changes
    - b. Maintenance of the program's student records, including student advising plans, supervised practice hours, and verification statements
    - c. Maintenance of complaints about the program received from students or others, including disposition of the complaint
    - d. On-going review of the program's curriculum to meet the accreditation standards
    - e. Communication and coordination with program faculty, preceptors, and others involved with the program and its students
    - f. Facilitation of processes for continuous program evaluation
    - g. Timely submission of required documentation supporting the graduate's eligibility for a Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) credentialing exam
    - h. Completion of an ACEND training on the accreditation standards within one year of hire and every five years, thereafter
- c. The program director must:
1. Have earned at least a master's degree. If the program is affiliated with a graduate degree, the coordinator of the graduate degree must have earned a doctoral degree
    - a. Existing coordinator of the affiliated graduate degree must meet this requirement by June 1, 2037
  2. Be credentialed as a registered dietitian nutritionist by the Commission on Dietetic Registration
  3. Have a minimum of three years of professional experience post credentialing
  4. Be a full-time employee of the sponsoring institution as defined by the institution, or a full-time employee of another organization that has been contracted by the sponsoring institution
  5. Not direct another ACEND-accredited nutrition and dietetics education program.

- d. Institutional policies related to workload are applied to the program in a manner that recognizes and supports the academic and practice aspects of the nutrition and dietetics program, including allocating time and/or reducing teaching load for management functions provided by the director. There is a required minimum FTE allotment that must be devoted to program management based on maximum student enrollment (full or part time) per cohort:
  - 1. 6 to 10 students = 0.5 FTE or greater
  - 2. 11 to 20 students = 1.0 FTE or greater
  - 3. 21 students or more, an additional 0.5 FTE for every additional 10 students
- e. If the program director delegates program management responsibilities to another individual (e.g., faculty or coordinator), the individual must:
  - 1. Have earned at least a master's degree
  - 2. Be credentialed as a registered dietitian nutritionist by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR)
  - 3. Have a minimum of one year professional experience post credentialing

**1.6** The program must establish its length and provide the rationale for the program's length considering required supervised practice needed by students to demonstrate the required competencies and mandates from the program's institution and state regulation.

- a. The program must be planned so that students complete at least 1000 hours of supervised practice experiences with a minimum of 800 hours in professional work settings; the remaining hours may be in alternate supervised experiences.
  - 1. For U.S.-based programs, at least 700 of the supervised practice hours must be conducted in a work setting in the United States or its territories, possessions (including the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands), military bases, or in an ACEND-accredited international Coordinated Program.
  - 2. Supervised practice hours completed during the Diet Technician Option of the Associate Program may be assessed for prior learning.
- b. The program must document the planned hours in professional work settings and in alternate supervised experiences.
  - 1. The program must include rotations in clinical, community, and foodservice settings.
  - 2. The clinical rotation must include experiences in settings with high-acuity patients, such as hospitals, long-term care facilities, and other outpatient clinics with high acuity to ensure exposure to a varying range of clinical conditions and levels of patient acuity.
  - 3. The majority of the professional work settings hours spent in the clinical rotation must be completed onsite.

**1.7** A free-standing program:

- a. Must have a program-specific budget to support itself. The budget must document specific line-item revenues and expenses, confirming appropriate allocation and use of financial resources.
- b. That has elected to participate in Title IV student financial aid and ACEND is identified as the gatekeeper, must document compliance with Title IV responsibilities, including:

1. Maintain financial documents including audit and budget processes confirming appropriate allocation and use of Title IV funds.
2. Have a monitoring process for student loan default rates. If the program's default rate exceeds the federal threshold, the program must provide a default reduction plan, as specified by USDE.
3. Have an appropriate accounting system for management of Title IV financial aid.
4. Inform students of responsibility for timely repayment of Title IV financial aid.



## **Standard 2: Program Mission, Goals, Objectives, and Program Evaluation and Improvement**

**The program must have a clearly formulated and publicly stated mission with supporting goals and objectives by which it intends to prepare students for practice as a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. The program must have a program evaluation plan to continuously evaluate the achievement of its mission, goals and objectives use the plan to collect data, improve the program based on findings and update the plan accordingly.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

- 2.1** A program evaluation plan must be documented, reviewed annually, updated as needed with changes noted and must include the following components:
- a. The program mission. The program mission must be specific to the program, distinguished from other programs in the sponsoring organization, and be compatible with the mission statement or philosophy of the sponsoring organization.
  - b. The program goals. The program must have at least two goals focused on program outcomes for graduates that are consistent with the program's mission.
  - c. The program objectives. The program objectives must measure the full intent of the mission and goals and are used to evaluate achievement of each program goal.
    1. The program must align the following ACEND-required objectives with their program goals and demonstrate that the program is operating in the interest of students and the public. The program must set reasonable target measures when the targets are not specified. Required objectives must be evaluated annually using an average of data from the previous three years.
      - a. Program Completion: "At least 80% of students complete program requirements within \_\_\_\_ (150% of planned program length)".
      - b. Graduate Employment: "At least \_\_\_\_ percent of graduate survey respondents who report seeking employment are employed in nutrition and dietetics or related fields within 12 months of graduation".
      - c. Graduate Performance on Registration Exam:
        1. "At least \_\_\_\_ percent of program graduates take the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within 12 months of program completion".
        2. "The program's one-year pass rate (graduates who pass the registration exam within one year of first attempt) on the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists is at least 80%".
  - d. Qualitative and/or quantitative data needed to determine whether goals and objectives have been achieved.
  - e. Groups from which data will be obtained; both internal and external constituents must be represented (such as graduates, administrators, faculty, preceptors, employers, practitioners, nutrition and dietetics education program directors, faculty from other disciplines and advisory committees).
  - f. Evaluation methods that will be used to collect the data.
  - g. Individuals responsible for ensuring that data are collected.
  - h. Timeline for collecting the necessary data.

- 2.2** The program must evaluate the achievement of its goals and objectives based on its program evaluation plan and provide evidence that:
- a. Program outcomes data are collected according to the program evaluation plan, summarized and analyzed by comparing actual achievements with objectives.
  - b. Data analysis is used to evaluate the extent to which goals and objectives are being achieved.
  - c. The targets set for ACEND-required objectives are met.
  - d. Programmatic planning and outcomes evaluation are integrated with institutional planning and assessment, as appropriate.
- 2.3** Results of the program evaluation process must be used to identify strengths and areas for improvement relative to components of the program (such as policies, procedures, curriculum, teaching methods, faculty, preceptors, resources). Short- and long-term strategies must be developed, and actions must be taken to maintain program strengths and address areas for improvement identified through the evaluation process.
- a. If program objectives are not met, program changes must be identified and actions taken to improve outcomes for unmet objective(s).

### **Standard 3: Curriculum and Learning Activities**

**The Competencies must be the basis on which the program curriculum, learning activities, and experiences are built within the context of the mission and goals of the program. Demonstration of competence must be integrated in the coursework and supervised practice experiences throughout the program. The program must continuously assess student attainment of required competencies.**

#### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

- 3.1** The program must have a process for assessment of competencies (Appendix A). The program must identify:
- Summative assessment for each competency
  - Methods used, as well as courses and/or supervised practice learning activities in which assessment will occur
  - The process for tracking individual students' demonstration of competencies
- 3.2** The Curriculum Map template must be used to document:
- Each competency (see Appendix A)
  - Each performance indicator (see Appendix A)
  - Course(s) (including supervised practice, if applicable) in which summative assessment of competencies occurs and where performance indicators are covered.
  - How the curriculum:
    - Is sequentially and logically organized
    - Progresses from introductory to more advanced learning activities
    - Builds on previous knowledge, skills, and experience to achieve the expected depth of competence by completion of the program
- 3.3** The program's curriculum must provide learning activities to attain the breadth of the required curriculum competencies and to ensure depth at the graduate level.
- Syllabi for courses and rotation descriptions must include the relevant competencies.
  - Learning activities must prepare students for professional practice:
    - Include patients/clients with various conditions, including, but not limited to, overweight and obesity; disordered eating; developmental, intellectual, behavioral health, neurological, and endocrine disorders; cancer; malnutrition; and cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and renal diseases.
    - Implement the Nutrition Care Process with various populations and diverse cultures and across the life cycle, including infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy and lactation, and late adulthood.
    - Meet learner needs and competencies. The curriculum must incorporate a variety of educational approaches necessary for the delivery of curriculum content.
      - If any portion of the program is offered through distance education, the program must ensure regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty.

## **Standard 4: Curriculum Evaluation and Improvement**

**The program must collect and analyze aggregate data on student competency attainment. The results of the evaluation must be used to improve the curriculum to enhance the quality of education provided.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

- 4.1** Formal curriculum review must routinely occur. The program must collect and analyze aggregate data on how the curriculum supports student competence in preparation for professional practice. The results of the aggregate data must be used to evaluate and improve the curriculum to enhance the quality of education provided:
- a. Determine strengths and areas for improvement.
  - b. Include input from students and other individuals as appropriate.
  - c. Include assessment of comparability of educational experiences and consistency of competency achievement when different courses, delivery methods (such as distance education), or supervised practice sites are used to accomplish the same educational objectives.
  - d. Take actions to maintain or improve student learning.

## **Standard 5: Faculty and Preceptors**

**The program must have qualified faculty and preceptors in sufficient numbers to provide the depth and breadth of learning activities required in the curriculum and exposure to the diversity of practice.**

**Program faculty, including the program director, must show evidence of continuing competence appropriate to teaching responsibilities, through professional work experience, graduate education, continuing education, and research or other activities leading to professional growth in the advancement of their profession.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS**

- 5.1** The program must provide evidence that qualified and appropriately credentialed faculty are sufficient to ensure implementation of the program's curriculum and the achievement of program goals and objectives.
- a. The requirements for program faculty (faculty within the academic unit) must include:
    - 1. At least one full-time faculty member, in addition to the program director, must hold the RDN credential. (Not applicable to SPP-DIs).
      - a. The Nutrition Care Process component must be taught by an RDN.
    - 2. Program faculty, including the program director, must meet the sponsoring institution's criteria for appointment and have sufficient education in a field related to the subject in which they teach or must meet the institution's policy for education and/or equivalent experience.
    - 3. Program faculty, including the program director, must show evidence of continuing competence and ongoing professional development appropriate to their teaching responsibilities.
    - 4. Program faculty must be provided orientation to the program's mission, goals and objectives, the ACEND Standards and required competencies, and competency-based education.
    - 5. Program faculty must be trained in the use of distance education pedagogy and recommended practices.
  - b. Formal evaluation of program faculty must routinely occur:
    - 1. The program must have a process for the periodic review, including input from students, of the effectiveness of faculty.
    - 2. Program faculty must receive feedback and training as needed, based on program evaluation and input from students.
- 5.2** The program must provide evidence that qualified and appropriately credentialed preceptors are sufficient to ensure implementation of the program's curriculum and the achievement of program goals and objectives.
- a. The requirements for program preceptors must include:
    - 1. The education and experience needed to provide appropriate guidance for supervised practice experiences. Preceptors must be licensed, as appropriate, to meet state and federal regulations, or credentialed, as needed, in the area in which they are supervising students and must be qualified to serve as educators and professional role models.
    - 2. Orientation to the program's mission, goals and objectives, the ACEND Standards and required competencies, and competency-based education.

b. Formal evaluation of program preceptors must routinely occur:

1. The program must have a process for the periodic review, including input from students, of the effectiveness of preceptors.
2. Program preceptors must receive feedback and training as needed, based on program evaluation and input from students.

## **Standard 6: Supervised Practice Sites**

**The program must have policies and procedures for securing sites to maintain written agreements with institutions, organizations and/or agencies providing supervised practice experiences to meet the competencies. The program must ensure that students have secured geographically accessible rotations for timely completion of the program.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

**6.1** Supervised practice site requirements. The program must have written policies and procedures:

- a. For site selection
- b. That outline the issuance and maintenance of written affiliation agreements.
- c. Agreements must delineate the rights and responsibilities of both the sponsoring organization and affiliating institutions, organizations and/or agencies.
- d. Agreements must be signed by individuals with appropriate institutionally-assigned authority in advance of placing students.
- e. Issuance of written affiliation agreements must be the responsibility of the program and not the student.
- f. That define a timeline for the periodic evaluation of the adequacy and appropriateness of supervised practice facilities

**6.2** For programs where students identify their own supervised practice sites and/or preceptors, the program must:

- a. Ensure that all sites are secured before students begin their supervised practice component.
- b. Have written policies describing the process of securing sites when students are unable to locate a site(s) or preceptor(s) to ensure timely completion of the program.

## **Standard 7: Information to Prospective Students and the Public**

**The program must provide clear, consistent, and accurate information about all program requirements to prospective students and the public at large.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

- 7.1** Program policies, procedures, practices, and materials related to student recruitment and admission must comply with state and federal laws and regulations. Recruitment and admission practices must be applied fairly and consistently.
- 7.2** All program information to prospective students and the public must provide current, accurate, and consistent and provide a reference to where complete program information can be found. Information about the program must be readily available to prospective students and the public via a program website and must include at least the following:
- a. Accreditation status, including the full name, address, phone number, and website of ACEND on the program's website homepage.
  - b. Description of the program, including program's mission, goals and objectives.
  - c. A statement that program outcomes data are available upon request. Program contact information must also be provided.
  - d. Information about the requirements and process to become a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN), including education, supervised practice, the CDR credentialing exam, state licensure/certification, states for which the program meets State requirements for licensure/certification, and how the program fits into the process.
  - e. Estimated cost to students, including:
    1. Estimated total cost of tuition and institution fees (such as lab and technology fees)
    2. Estimated required program-specific costs, including supplies and services (such as program course fees, drug testing, lab coats, and membership fees)
    3. A description of variable costs related to the program (such as books, transportation, housing, and other expenses)
  - f. Availability of financial aid and loan deferments (federal or private), scholarships, stipends, and other monetary support, if applicable.
  - g. Application and admission requirements, including information on the Dietetics Application Process and Traffic Rules.
  - h. Academic and program calendar or schedule.
  - i. Graduation and program completion requirements, including:
    1. Requirements to earn the verification statement
    2. Maximum time allowed to complete program requirements and/or receive a verification statement
  - j. Guidance about distance education components, such as the expectations for required equipment, competence and skills related to technology, and other requirements, if applicable.



- k. If students are required to locate their own supervised practice sites and/or preceptors, requirements for this must be described, including the program's role and responsibility to secure geographically accessible sites for students before they begin their supervised practice component to ensure timely completion of the program.
- l. A description of the procedures for evaluating equivalency of prior learning and experiences to the program competencies.

## **Standard 8: Policies and Procedures for Enrolled Students**

**The program must have written policies and procedures that protect the rights of students and are consistent with current institutional practice.**

### **REQUIRED ELEMENTS:**

- 8.1** Programs must have policies and procedures specific to nutrition and dietetics programs or refer to institutional policies. The policies must be provided to students in a single comprehensive document, such as in a program handbook or on a program website. Policies must include:
- a. Student Support
    - 1. Support for the variety of needs of students from all backgrounds
    - 2. Ensuring all students are treated with dignity and respect by program faculty and preceptors
    - 3. Access to student support services, including health services, counseling, tutoring and testing, and financial aid resources
  - b. Advisement
    - 1. Advising students on all educational pathways to become an RDN, including the Dietetics Application Process and the Traffic Rules for Applicants
  - c. Student Performance Monitoring
    - 1. The process of assessment, including academic performance, academic integrity, and professionalism
    - 2. Regular reports of performance and progress
    - 3. Timely detection of concerns about academic performance, academic integrity, and professionalism
  - d. Student Remediation and Retention
    - 1. The procedure for evaluating the need for remedial instruction and other support, if applicable, to promote student's success
    - 2. The process of remediation that includes an action plan to promote student's success
  - e. Confidentiality
    - 1. Protection of privacy of student information, including students in distance learning
    - 2. When using distance instruction and/or online testing, strategies used to verify the identity of a student
  - f. Requirements for Program Completion
    - 1. Requirements to earn the verification statement
    - 2. Maximum time allowed to complete program requirements and receive a verification statement must follow the sponsoring academic institution's policy or no less than five years
  - g. Issuance of Verification Statement
    - 1. Providing verification statements, including timing, delivery method, and number issued, if applicable to all students who complete program requirements
  - h. Supervised Practice

1. Securing geographically accessible sites for students
2. Tracking individual student's supervised practice hours in professional work settings and in alternate practice activities. Hours granted for prior learning, if given, also must be documented
3. Insurance requirements, including those for professional liability
4. Liability for safety in travel to or from assigned areas
5. Injury or illness while in a facility for supervised practice
6. Drug testing and criminal background checks, if required by the supervised practice facilities
7. Requirement that students doing supervised practice must not be used to replace employees
- i. Complaints
  1. The process for filing and handling complaints about the program from students and other individuals that includes recourse to an administrator other than the program director and prevents retaliation
  2. The process for submitting written complaints to ACEND related to program noncompliance with ACEND accreditation standards after all other options with the program and institution have been exhausted
- j. Credit for Prior Education and Experience
  1. Evaluating equivalency of prior learning and experience to the program competencies
- k. Disciplinary/termination procedures
- l. Additional Policies
  1. Student access to their own student file
  2. Program schedule, vacations, holidays, and leaves of absence
  3. Compensation practices when students are paid compensation as part of the program
  4. Withdrawal and refund of tuition and fees