


ACEND ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

ADVANCED NUTRITION AND DIETETICS PRACTICE DOCTORAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS (DrDN)

**Accreditation Council
for Education in
Nutrition and Dietetics**
the accrediting agency for the
Academy of Nutrition
and Dietetics

The logo for the Accrediting Agency for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, featuring the words "eat" and "right" stacked vertically in a stylized font with a red dot above the "i" in "right".

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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. The college or university 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).
- 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.
- 1.3** The program must demonstrate that it has the administrative, clerical or other staff, technical and financial support and the learning resources, physical facilities and support services needed to accomplish its mission and goals. If any portion of the program is offered through distance education, the program must demonstrate that technology and resources are adequate to support a distance-learning environment.
 - a. The program must demonstrate that administrative support and resources are adequate to support continued development and training for program faculty, mentors and staff.
 - b. The program must provide a description of the budgeting process for the program that demonstrates financial resources are sufficient to produce the desired short- and long-term program goals and student outcomes.
 - c. The program must report its maximum enrollment to ensure quality, viability and appropriate use of resources.
- 1.4** The program must award a doctoral degree upon completing program requirements.
 - a. Individuals entering the program must meet the following requirements:
 1. hold the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RD/RDN) credential, and
 2. have a bachelor's degree with a minimum of five years full-time post-credentialing work experience or equivalent or a master's degree with a minimum of three years full-time post-credentialing work experience or equivalent.
- 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.
 - a. Institutional policies related to faculty roles and 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 administrative functions provided by the director.
 - b. The program director must:
 1. Have earned a doctoral degree.
 2. Be credentialed as a registered dietitian nutritionist by the Commission on Dietetic Registration.
 3. Have a minimum of five years full time professional experience post credentialing or equivalent.
 4. Be a full-time employee of the sponsoring institution.
 5. Not direct another ACEND-accredited nutrition and dietetics education program.

- c. The program director responsibilities must include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Provision or delegation of responsibilities to assure 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 all 12 months. In programs where the program director assigns some responsibilities to other individuals, the director must ensure that all program director responsibilities are accomplished throughout the year.
 - 2. Development of policies and procedures for effectively managing all components of the program and to ensure fair, equitable and considerate treatment of prospective and enrolled students (such as program admission, retention and completion policies).
 - 3. Student recruitment, advisement, evaluation and counseling.
 - 4. 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 requirements for doctoral degree completion;
 - c. Maintenance of complaints about the program received from students or others, including disposition of the complaint;
 - d. On-going review of program's curriculum to meet the accreditation standards;
 - e. Communication and coordination with program faculty, mentors and others involved with the program and its students; and
 - f. Facilitation of processes for continuous program evaluation.

1.6 The program must establish its length and provide the rationale for the program's length after taking into consideration didactic learning, research and residency needed by students to demonstrate the required competencies and state and institutional mandates.

STANDARD 2: Program Mission, Goals and 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 advanced 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, distinguishes it 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 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.
 - a. ACEND required objective. The program must develop an objective for program completion.
 - b. Program specific objective: The program must establish one or more program specific objectives.
 - 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 relevant groups must be represented (such as graduates, administrators, faculty, mentors, 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 target set for ACEND-required Program Completion objective is met.
 - d. Program changes have been made to improve outcomes for unmet objective(s).
 - e. 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, mentors, 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.

STANDARD 3: Curriculum and Learning Activities

The competencies must be the basis on which the program curriculum and learning activities are built within the context of the mission and goals of the program. Demonstration of competence must be integrated in the coursework, scholarship, research and residency activities throughout the program.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

3.1 The Curriculum Map template must be used to document:

- a. Each competency (see Appendix A).
- b. Performance indicators (see Appendix A) for each competency on which summative assessment occurs in the curriculum.
- c. Course(s) (including residency and scholarly activities) in which summative assessment of performance indicators will occur.
- d. How the curriculum:
 1. is sequentially and logically organized, and
 2. builds on previous knowledge, skills and experience to achieve the expected depth and breadth of competence by completion of the program.

3.2 The program's curriculum must provide learning experiences to attain the breadth and depth of the required curriculum competencies. Syllabi for courses (including those for residency and scholarly activities) taught within the academic unit must include the relevant competencies.

- a. Learning experiences must prepare students for advanced nutrition and dietetics practice.
- b. Learning experiences must address and build competency in diversity, equity and inclusion. The program must ensure that students have the skills to recognize biases in self and others and adapt to, understand and embrace the diversity of the human experience.
- c. Learning experiences must incorporate a variety of educational approaches necessary for delivery of curriculum content to meet learner needs and competencies.
 1. If any portion of the program is offered through distance education, the program assures regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty.

3.3 The program and student must collaborate to identify and design a clearly defined area of interest.

- a. At least two competencies for each student must be developed that build on the program's core competencies.
- b. The competencies must allow for additional depth necessary for advanced proficiency through coursework, residency and/or research.

STANDARD 4: Competency Assessment and Curriculum Improvement

The program must continuously assess student achievement of required competencies. The program must collect and analyze aggregate data on student competency attainment. The results of the assessment plan must be used to evaluate and improve the curriculum to enhance the quality of education provided.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 4.1** The program must have a plan for assessment of competencies (Appendix A). The plan must identify summative assessment methods used, as well as courses and residency activities in which assessment will occur and the process for tracking individual student's demonstration of performance indicators/competencies.
- 4.2** The program must document that data on student competency achievement are collected, summarized and analyzed for use in curricular review and improvement.
- 4.3** Formal curriculum review must routinely occur and:
 - a. Use results of program evaluation and competency assessment to determine strengths and areas for improvement.
 - b. Include input from students and other relevant individuals and groups, as appropriate.
 - c. Include assessment of comparability of educational experiences and consistency of competency achievement when different courses and delivery methods (such as distance education) are used to accomplish the same educational objectives.
 - d. Result in actions to maintain or improve student learning.

STANDARD 5: Faculty and Mentors

The program must have qualified faculty and mentors 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 and mentors are sufficient to ensure implementation of the program's curriculum and the achievement of program goals and objectives.
- a. At least one full time member, or equivalent, of the program's faculty, in addition to the program director, must be credentialed as a registered dietitian nutritionist.
- 5.2** The requirements for program faculty (faculty within the academic unit) must include:
- a. Program faculty, including the program director, must meet the sponsoring organization'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.
 - b. Program faculty, including the program director, must show evidence of continuing competence and ongoing professional development appropriate to their teaching responsibilities.
 - c. Program faculty and instructors must be provided orientation to the mission, goals and objectives of the nutrition and dietetics program, the ACEND Standards and required competencies. Program faculty must be trained in the use of distance education pedagogy and recommended practices.
 - d. Program faculty must be trained on strategies to recognize and monitor biases in self and others and reduce instances of microaggressions and discrimination.
- 5.3** The requirements for program mentors must include:
- a. The education and experience needed to provide appropriate guidance for the residency. Programs must demonstrate that mentors are qualified to serve as advanced level coaches, advocates, and role models.
 - b. Orientation to the mission, goals and objectives of the nutrition and dietetics program, the ACEND Standards and required competencies.
 - c. Program mentors must be trained on strategies to recognize and monitor biases in self and others and reduce instances of microaggressions and discrimination.
- 5.4** Formal evaluation of program faculty and mentors must routinely occur:
- a. The program must have a process for the periodic review, including input from students, of the effectiveness of faculty and mentors.
 - b. Program faculty, instructors, and mentors must receive feedback, and training as needed, based on program evaluation and input from students.

STANDARD 6: Residency Sites

The program must have policies and procedures to maintain written agreements with institutions, organizations and/or agencies providing residency experiences to meet the competencies. The policies and procedures must address the selection and periodic evaluation of the adequacy and appropriateness of facilities to ensure that sites are able to provide residency experiences compatible with the competencies that students are expected to achieve.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

6.1 Residency site requirements:

- a. The institution/organization must establish policies that outline the issuance and maintenance of written affiliation agreements and the selection criteria, evaluation process and timeline for evaluation of the adequacy and appropriateness of residency sites.
- b. Agreements must delineate the rights and responsibilities of both the sponsoring organization and affiliating institutions, organizations and/or agencies.
- c. Agreements must be signed by individuals with appropriate institutionally-assigned authority in advance of placing students.

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. Program shall demonstrate by tangible action their commitment to enrolling a diverse student body.
- 7.2** All information to prospective students and the public must be current, accurate and consistent. Each information source must provide a reference to where complete program information can be found.
- 7.3** Information about the program must be readily available to prospective students and the public via a 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 description of the program's focus area, if applicable.
 - d. A statement that program outcomes data are available upon request.
 - e. Estimated cost to students, including tuition and fees, necessary books and supplies, transportation, typical charges for room and board or housing, and any other program-specific costs.
 - f. Application and admission requirements.
 - g. Academic and program calendar or schedule.
 - h. Graduation and program completion requirements.
 - i. Availability of financial aid and loan deferments (federal or private), scholarships, stipends and other monetary support, if applicable.
 - j. Guidance about distance education components, such as technology requirements, if applicable.
 - k. If students are required to locate their own residency sites and/or mentors, requirements for this must be described, including the program's role and responsibility to assist students to ensure timely completion of the program.
 - l. A description of the criteria and policies and procedures used to evaluate and award credit for prior learning experiences, such as coursework, and the types and sources from which credit will not be accepted.

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 are required to have policies and procedures for program operations including:

- a. **Student Performance Monitoring:** The program's system of monitoring student performance must provide for the early detection of academic difficulty and must take into consideration professional and ethical behavior and academic integrity of the student.
- b. **Student Remediation and Retention:** Concerns about a student's performance in meeting program requirements are addressed promptly and adequately to facilitate student's progression in the program.
- c. **Equitable Treatment:** The program must establish policies to support the diverse needs of students, ensure an inclusive environment, and to ensure equitable treatment by program faculty and preceptors of students from all backgrounds, including with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, size, socioeconomic status or age.

8.2 The following policies and procedures specific to nutrition and dietetics programs must be provided to students, such as in a single comprehensive document, such as in a program handbook or on a program website.

- a. Insurance requirements, including those for professional liability.
- b. Liability for safety in travel to or from assigned areas.
- c. Injury or illness while in a facility for residency.
- d. Drug testing and criminal background checks, if required by the residency sites.
- e. Requirement that students in their residency must not be used to replace employees.
- f. When students are paid compensation as part of the program, policies must be in place to define the compensation practices.
- g. The process for filing and handling complaints about the program from students and preceptors that includes recourse to an administrator other than the program director and prevents retaliation. The program must maintain a record of student complaints for a period of seven years, including the resolution of complaints.
- h. Process for submission of written complaints to ACEND related to program noncompliance with ACEND accreditation standards after all other options with the program and institution have been exhausted.
- i. If the program grants credit or hours for students' prior learning, it must define procedures for evaluating equivalence of prior education or experience. Otherwise, the program must indicate that it has no policy for assessing prior learning or competence.
- j. Process for assessment of student competence and regular reports of performance and progress.
- k. Program retention and remediation procedures; students must have access to remedial instruction such as through tutorial support.
- l. Disciplinary/termination procedures.
- m. Graduation and/or program completion requirements, including maximum amount of time allowed for completing program requirements applicable at the time student enrolls.
- n. Institutional process for students to withdraw from the doctoral program which includes consideration to complete a master's degree. Otherwise, the program must indicate that it has no policy for consideration of a master's degree.
- o. Programs using distance instruction and/or online testing must employ strategies to verify the identity of a student.
- p. Withdrawal and refund of tuition and fees.
- q. Program schedule, vacations, holidays and leaves of absence.

- r. Protection of privacy of student information, including information used for identifying students in distance learning.
- s. Student access to their own student files.
- t. Access to student support services, including health services, counseling, tutoring and testing and financial aid resources.

Appendix A: Competencies Performance Indicators,

Unit 1: Advanced Nutrition and Related Science
<i>RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics investigate emerging and evolving topics in nutrition science and integrate these findings into practice.</i>
<p>1.1 Analyze and synthesize evidence-based information and emerging and evolving science to inform and transform advanced nutrition and dietetics practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Synthesize a body of evidence, information, and concepts related to emerging nutrition sciences such as nutrigenomics, epigenetics, or the microbiome to optimize the health and quality of life of individuals and populations.b) Acquire scientific knowledge by analyzing and evaluating a range of phenomena and research.c) Integrate advanced knowledge in physiology, pathophysiology, and pharmacology to inform advanced nutrition practice in complex situations.d) Analyze interrelationships of dietary habits, evolving biomedical, clinical, epidemiological, or social-behavioral sciences, including scientific inquiry, in the care of individuals, groups or populations. <p>1.2 Conduct an advanced assessment of individuals, groups or populations to inform discovery, decision-making, recommendations and conclusions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Collect data from multiple sources and determine the accuracy and validity of the data.b) Critically analyze the assessment findings to identify potential gaps in the data and to prioritize issues and approaches.c) Synthesize knowledge of biomarkers, biochemistry, body composition, and physiology to guide complex nutrition decision-making.d) Integrate concepts related to well-being and social determinants of health into complex nutrition decision-making.e) Formulate a recommendation, an opinion, or a diagnosis integrating critical inquiry and complex assessment findings.f) Articulate an evidence-based rationale for decisions, recommendations, or diagnoses. <p>1.3 Recommend, develop, or implement evidence-based practices, processes, resources, or instruments based on established and evolving science.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Create and implement evidence-based tools, algorithms, guidelines, or pathways to inform a targeted intervention or practice change.b) Evaluate practices, processes, instruments or tools, and recommend evidence-based improvements. <p>1.4 Explore and integrate advanced technology and artificial intelligence to achieve desired outcomes and to advance nutrition and dietetics practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Explore the artificial intelligence landscape and evaluate the risks, ethics, validity, reliability, and potential use.b) Evaluate the strengths and limitations of various technologies and integrate new or advanced technology used in practice.

Unit 2: Leadership

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics apply higher-order thinking, emotional intelligence, creativity, and innovation to lead individuals, groups and programs.

2.1 Demonstrate advanced leadership skills to achieve goals or desired outcomes.

- a) Navigate political and cultural systems within an organization to achieve a specific goal efficiently and effectively.
- b) Apply cognitive and non-cognitive attributes to address situations (e.g., emotional, social and cultural intelligence, self-regulation, and self-awareness).
- c) Anticipate and strategically manage crises.
- d) Design and lead strategic planning.
- e) Apply systems thinking to critically analyze problems and solutions.

2.2 Apply principles of inclusive leadership.

- a) Actively seek and incorporate different perspectives.
- b) Take action to support equitable access to services, programs, and systems.
- c) Collaborate to create culturally safe environments to promote diverse, inclusive, authentic, and transparent relationships.
- d) Develop intra- and inter-professional opportunities to achieve common goals.
- e) Mentor others to promote professional growth.
- f) Challenge biases and social structures that impact equitable outcomes for individuals, groups, and populations.
- g) Recognize and strive to address personal and systemic unconscious bias and power imbalances.

2.3 Model high-level interpersonal and communication skills in complex situations.

- a) Constructively challenge communications and relational practices of individuals and organizations.
- b) Articulate situational awareness when conducting a critical analysis of individual, team, and organizational functioning.
- c) Use conflict resolution and mediation skills during difficult situations or crucial conversations.
- d) Critically reflect on experiences to encourage learning and to create new perspectives.

2.4 Apply ethical frameworks to support decision-making and to guide others to resolve ethical issues.

- a) Critically evaluate and apply ethical frameworks to provide professional guidance.
- b) Apply bioethics to identify and critically analyze moral questions and to manage ethical dilemmas.

Unit 3: Advocacy

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics advocate for change and address issues related to the wider social, cultural, and political environment.

3.1 Develop, evaluate, modify, and implement policies.

- a) Examine the efficacy of existing policies, regulations and legislation, and identify gaps and opportunities to inform program and legislation changes.
- b) Evaluate interests, environment, and trends to inform strategies and policy revision and development.
- c) Articulate and justify a policy position.

3.2 Advocate for the profession of nutrition and dietetics, individuals, groups, and populations to influence equity and policy.

- a) Participate as a subject matter expert when collaborating with partners in the development and modification of policies and legislation.
- b) Provide evidence-based data and information when engaging with decision-makers to influence policy or practice change.
- c) Identify and advocate for research to contribute to the body of evidence.
- d) Plan and guide advocacy efforts to address social injustice and disparities, and to support equitable access to food, nutrition and health services.

Unit 4: Critical Inquiry, Research, and Scholarship

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics lead and engage in research initiatives and scholarly activities.

4.1 Engage in critical inquiry to challenge practice and the status quo.

- a) Critically evaluate research and nutrition information to verify and identify gaps, trends, and patterns.
- b) Incorporate scientific reasoning, higher-order thinking, and inquiry into the decision-making process.

4.2 Conceptualize, design, and implement research to contribute to nutrition and dietetics.

- a) Differentiate among research methodologies including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.
- b) Identify funding sources and conceptualize and develop a research or program proposal (including budget and timelines) that aligns with guidelines or standards.
- c) Apply human subject protection requirements, navigate ethical issues and comply with legal and regulatory requirements.
- d) Conduct research using valid and reliable methods including performing statistical or qualitative analysis.
- e) Synthesize and interpret research findings to draw valid conclusions and make evidence-based practice decisions and recommendations.
- f) Disseminate scholarly findings utilizing knowledge translation frameworks.

Unit 5: Education

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics lead educational initiatives or programs.

5.1 Design and deliver educational content, that incorporates concepts of cognitive sciences, inclusivity, innovative approaches and emerging technology.

- a) Design, analyze and deliver educational content or curricula by applying various learning theories and methods.
- b) Apply instructional design principles and models.
- c) Apply universal design for learning (UDL) principles to accommodate the needs and abilities of all learners and eliminate unnecessary barriers to learning.
- d) Incorporate various technology in the development and delivery of education.

5.2 Implement and evaluate educational programs or courses for learners in various settings.

- a) Establish strategies to support inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse learners.
- b) Identify potential or actual barriers to learning and access to education, and work to minimize or overcome barriers.
- c) Create processes and instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of the education.
- d) Demonstrate understanding of legislation, regulation, and accreditation standards related to education programs.