

Rationale for Future Education Preparation of Nutrition and Dietetics Practitioners

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Focus: Current and Proposed Education Model

- [2012 Model for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics](#)
- [Proposed Model for Future Education in Nutrition and Dietetics](#)

2012 MODEL FOR EDUCATION IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics

The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND®), the accrediting agency for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy), serves the public by establishing and enforcing standards for the educational preparation of nutrition and dietetics practitioners and by recognizing nutrition and dietetics education programs that meet these standards. The mission of ACEND is to ensure the quality of nutrition and dietetics education to advance the practice of the profession and its strategic goals include: assuring the quality of dietetics education through a peer review process, effectively communicating the accreditation process and expectations and fostering innovation in nutrition and dietetics education.

As shown in Table 1, in 2015, there were more than 570 active US-based and international accredited programs.

Table 1: Number of accredited dietetic programs

Total Number of Active US-Based ACEND Programs	572
US Dietetic Technician Programs	42
US Coordinated Programs	55
US Didactic Programs	223
US Dietetic Internships	252
US Programs Seeking Candidate Status	10
International Programs Seeking Candidate Status	1
International Coordinated Programs	4

Nutrition and Dietetics Education

The educational preparation of dietitian nutritionists and dietetic technicians includes didactic and supervised practice components completed through ACEND-accredited programs. Figure 1 includes the current model of dietetics education based on the 2012 Standards and depicts the multiple ways that students can complete the didactic and supervised practice components for the education to become a dietetic practitioner.

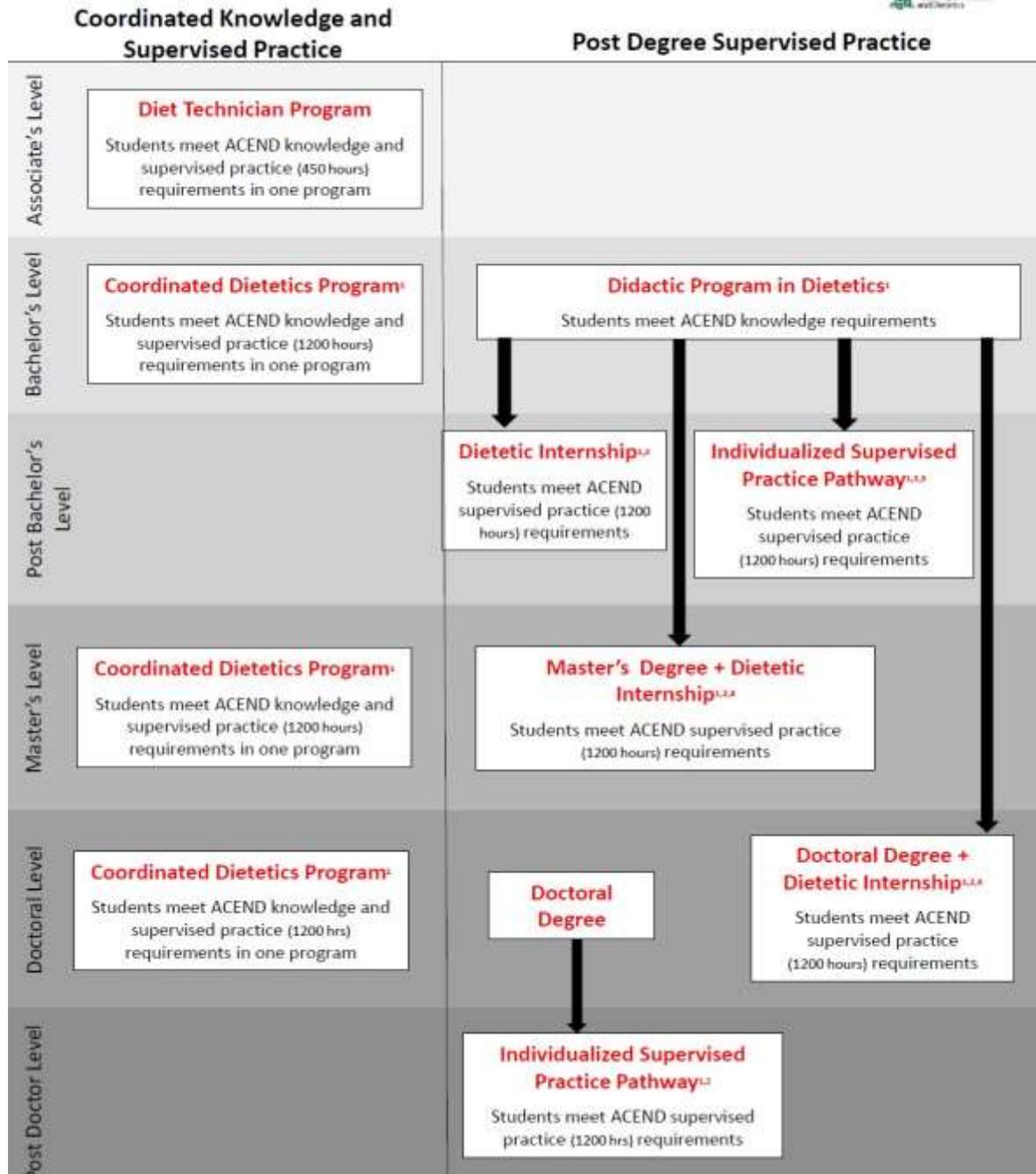
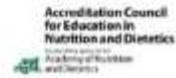
The educational preparation of dietetic technicians is at the associate's level and the preparation of dietitian nutritionists is typically at the bachelor's level, combined with or followed by a supervised practice experience. Some master's and doctoral level programs also exist. The most common route has the required core knowledge for practice being included in didactic programs in dietetics (DPD) and the competencies in dietetic internships (DI) or individualized supervised practice pathways (ISPP).

Coordinated programs include both the required knowledge and competencies in one program.

Standards, which include the required core knowledge and competencies, have been developed for each type of dietetics program. These standards can be found on the ACEND website at

www.eatrightpro.org/acend.

Nutrition and Dietetics Education



¹ All programs, regardless of degree level, meet the same ACEND didactic knowledge and/or supervised practice requirements

² Requires acceptance through application process

³ Only available to students are not matched with a dietetic internship

⁴ Program may or may not require completion of the graduate (master's, doctoral) degree

Figure 1. 2012 ACEND accreditation standards model of nutrition and dietetics education

ACEND has developed two types of standards for overseas programs: International Dietitian Education (IDE) and Foreign Dietitian Education (FDE) programs. Students in a program accredited under IDE standards are required to meet the same competency and supervised practice requirements as US students, including the requirement to complete supervised practice hours in the US, its territories or protectorates and are eligible to sit for the Commission on Dietetic Registration credentialing exam for dietitians. Students in programs accredited under FDE standards are prepared for nutrition and dietetics practice in their country. Graduates under FDE standards may participate in computer matching and be accepted into a US-based Dietetic Internship.

ACEND also has developed Advanced Practice Residency Program Guidelines. These Guidelines provide information for advanced practice residency programs across the spectrum of dietetics practice.

ACEND Review and Revision of Standards

ACEND is required by the United States Department of Education to review and revise if needed, its educational standards at least once every five years. The ACEND Standards Committee is charged with undertaking this review and recommending any needed standards revisions to the ACEND Board.

In 2006, an American Dietetic Association Education Task Force recommended a review of the educational competencies to allow more opportunity to meet future practice needs through a graduate degree. In 2012, the Academy's Council on Future Practice released a visioning document recommending that the level of educational preparation for dietitians be elevated to a graduate level to provide a greater depth of knowledge and skills needed for future practice in the profession. In response, ACEND began conducting a thorough review of the current standards for nutrition and dietetics education. An expanded standards workgroup was formed to develop recommendations for the ACEND board related to future education standards. The group elicited input from a visioning group during the process.

This document offers recommendations for the future education of nutrition and dietetics practitioners and provides rationale for those recommendations. ACEND believes the education model being presented meets the needs of the public, protects the public, prepares competent practitioners, is based on evidence and is feasible to implement.

2017 MODEL FOR EDUCATION IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

Every five years the ACEND Standards Committee reviews and revises the ACEND Accreditation Standards, as mentioned above. The 2012 Accreditation Standards were revised to the 2017 Accreditation Standards. The Standards were condensed to reduce redundancy and a Guidance Information document was developed to provide detailed instructions to program directors and reviewers. The model for nutrition and dietetics education remained the same, however, graduates of a Foreign Dietitian Education (FDE) program were allowed to participate in computer matching for placement in a dietetic internship.

The updated program types as of June 1, 2017 are listed below:

Total Number of Active US-Based ACEND Programs	581
US Dietetic Technician Programs	35
US Coordinated Programs	61
US Didactic Programs	215
US Dietetic Internships	259
US Programs Seeking Candidate Status	6
International Programs Seeking Candidate Status	0
International Coordinated Programs	5

PROPOSED MODEL FOR FUTURE EDUCATION IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

The environmental scan and additional data collected by ACEND revealed an emergence of many non-traditional practice settings for the field of nutrition and dietetics and an expanding scope of practice for those working in the profession. There is an increased focus on disease prevention and integrative healthcare and the need for more knowledge in emerging areas such as genomics, telehealth, behavioral counseling, diet order writing and informatics. This work requires that health care professionals work more interprofessionally. Employers indicated the need for improved communication skills in nutrition and dietetics practitioners and an improved ability to understand the patient’s community and cultural ecosystem. Practitioners need to be able to read and apply scientific knowledge and interpret this knowledge for the public. Employers also expressed a desire for stronger organizational leadership, project management, communication, patient assessment and practice skills. Many of the stakeholders identified gaps in current competencies in areas of research, communication, leadership/management skills, cultural care, interprofessional work, basic food and culinary preparation and sustainability. Employers indicated that more time might be needed in the preparation of future nutrition and dietetics practitioners to assure application of knowledge and demonstration of skills needed for effective practice. Stakeholders identified the importance of associate and bachelor level prepared graduates for roles in community health, wellness and management. Employers identified the need for preparing undergraduates with transferable skills in leadership, business and management and expressed the need for faculty prepared at the doctoral level.

As a result, ACEND is recommending the development of new graduate level standards to prepare generalist and specialist dietitians for these future roles. The recommended new model also includes new associate and bachelor level standards to better prepare graduates for emerging roles in community nutrition and health, wellness, business and industry and management.

Figure 2 depicts the recommended future model for education in nutrition and dietetics. Education at the high school and associate’s degree levels focus on the development of skills to work in community nutrition, health and wellness settings. The bachelor’s level preparation is recommended to include a science base and courses core to nutrition and dietetics practice, elevate preparation of dietetic technicians and may provide prerequisite preparation for graduate study. Preparation for practice as a

dietitian nutritionist is recommended to move to the graduate level with generalist preparation occurring at the master’s level and specialized preparation at the doctoral level.

Core knowledge and competencies will be identified for each degree level and experiential learning would be integrated into each degree program. Each degree level would build on the knowledge base of previous degrees and prepare students for employment. ACEND’s initial focus will be to develop standards, which will include the required core knowledge and competencies, for the associate, bachelor and master level programs. Once the new standards and competencies are finalized, ACEND will release them for voluntary adoption by demonstration programs. Outcomes data on graduates of these programs will be collected and analyzed before ACEND makes a decision about implementation of the recommended future model for all programs.

Total Number of Active FEM Demonstration Programs	3
Future Graduate Program	3
Future Bachelor Program	0
Future Associate Program	0
US Programs Seeking Candidate Status	6

Proposed Model for Nutrition and Dietetics Education



Integrated Knowledge and Experiential Learning

High School Level

Community Nutrition and Health Worker

(Visioned for future exploration)

Program will contain knowledge and experiential learning requirements in one program; program will prepare students for support roles in community health.

Associate's Level

Nutrition Health Associate

Program will include integrated knowledge and experiential learning requirements in one program; program will focus on topics of general nutrition, health, wellness, cultural competence and communication

Bachelor's Level

Food and Nutrition Practitioner

Program will include integrated knowledge and experiential learning requirements in one program; program will include coursework in sciences and dietetics core to prepare graduates for identified careers; may provide prerequisite preparation for graduate study, and will meet nutrition and dietetic technician registration examination eligibility.

Master's Level

Generalist Dietitian Nutritionist

Program will include integrated knowledge and experiential learning requirements in one program; program will include preparation in client clinical care; team work, communication, research, professional practice; community and population health; leadership, management, food, and foodservice skills necessary to function as a generalist dietitian nutritionist and will meet dietitian nutritionist registration examination eligibility.

Doctoral Level

Specialist Dietitian Nutritionist

(Visioned for future exploration)

Program will include integrated knowledge and experiential learning requirements in one program; program will provide preparation for specialized practice.

Figure 2. Proposed model for future education in nutrition and dietetics