

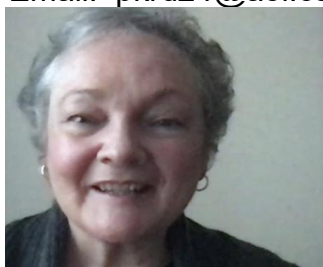
NDEP-Line

Fall/Winter 2025

NDEP's mission is to advocate for and empower educators and preceptors to lead the profession of nutrition and dietetics

From the Chair...

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NDEP Chair 2025-2026
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Dear NDEP Community,

As we wrap up our fall semesters and program activities in our many roles as educators, faculty members, program directors, and preceptors, I am humbly thankful for all of you involved in the education and training of our future colleagues in the profession of nutrition and dietetics.

As I mentioned during our NDEP 2025 Membership Meeting at FNCE in Nashville, NDEP is undergoing a number of changes associated with Academy leadership's decisions to support its current strategic plan. While we remain closely aligned with and will continue to work closely with ACEND, Academy leadership has assigned our organizational unit's oversight to the Academy's Practice Excellence Department. Anne Coltman (Senior Director for Practice Excellence) has been working with Colleen McCrief to take on the myriad responsibilities and tasks that Colleen has provided for us through ACEND as our Staff Liaison. Welcome to Anne as transition continues with tremendous support from both Colleen and ACEND Executive Director Rayane AbuSabha, PhD, RD as she becomes more familiar with all the work and activities of NDEP throughout every year. Tremendous thanks to Colleen from all of us for all your work on so many fronts.

Included in updates that we're planning for the coming months is identifying and initiating updates to our NDEP website, portal, and listserv. We want and need to provide more effective communication and access to resources to advocate for and support all the work in education and training needed in multiple roles and settings in the practice of nutrition and dietetics.

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As you may have heard, ACEND will soon share a survey for our review of the proposed 2027 ACEND Standards. That full review will take place during a 60-day period beginning by December 12. Please watch for information regarding several discussion sessions in the coming weeks that are being planned by NDEP Council members to provide opportunities to ask questions and share views of proposed standards, which include updated competencies, incorporation of Competency Based Education (CBE), and a requirement for a doctoral degree for graduate program directors. Several discussions regarding these proposed 2027 Standards took place during the NDEP Member Meeting/Breakfast and the ACEND Forum during October 2025 at FNCE in Nashville.

Your feedback and input regarding these proposed 2027 Standards are incredibly valuable and very much needed for the successful future of our profession.

In order to prepare for ACEND's upcoming review survey, please consider the following and share widely:

(1) Review both the September 16, 2025 and September 24, 2025 ACEND Town Hall Meeting recordings and minutes/Q&A documents regarding the proposed 2027 ACEND Standards via these links:

- [September 24, 2025](#) (Draft 2027 Accreditation Standards for DIs)
- [September 16, 2025](#) (Draft 2027 Accreditation Standards Rationale)

(2) Watch for announcements coming soon regarding NDEP Council discussions via Zoom regarding the proposed 2027 Standards. Dates and time frames for these discussions are being scheduled now.

(3) Register for and attend the upcoming December 2025 ACEND Town Halls:

ACEND will be hosting two town halls in December regarding the release of the 2027 Accreditation Standards for public comment. ACEND will review and share the draft standards, highlight major changes from the current ACEND Accreditation Standards, and provide time for Q&A.

- *Tuesday, December 16, 2025 from 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM Central Time*
- *Thursday, December 18, 2025 from 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM Central Time*

The town halls will be recorded and follow-up Q&As will be posted on the ACEND Town Halls website within 1-2 weeks if you're not able to attend.

For additional information and to register, please click on the links below or here

<https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/public-notice-and-announcements/virtual-town-hall-meetings>

- [December 16, 2025](#)
- [December 18, 2025](#)

Our NDEP Regional Directors (*please see the list of our current NDEP Council members on page 3*) are busy planning our upcoming 2026 NDEP Annual Meeting, to be held in Pacific Grove, California at Asilomar from March 12–14, 2026. Please watch for emails and listserv posts for more details as registration, lodging, and agenda information are being finalized. For any questions, reach out to Michael Kirtsos, Lead Regional Director, at mkirtsos@umes.edu.

Thanks to everyone for all that you do in your integral roles as educators and preceptors of our future colleagues, and for all the contributions that you make to the future of our profession.

With warm regards,



2025-2026 NDEP Council Members

Chair: Patricia M. Knisley, RD, MS

Vice Chair: Victoria Fischer, PhD, MS, RDN, CDN

Past Chair: Carrie King, PhD, RDN, LD

North East Regional Director: Josephine Connolly-Schoonen, PhD, RD

South East Regional Director: Michael Kirtsos, MS, RDN, CSSD, LDN

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West Coast Regional Director: Dorothy Chen-Maynard, PhD, RDN

Preceptor Director: Cyndia (Cindy) Kanarek Culver, MS, RDN, LD

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Public Member: Jay Whelan, PhD, MPH

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Graduate Student Representative: Kayleen Whitley, MS, RD, LD

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CDR Liaison: Emily Patten, PhD, RDN, CD

ACEND Staff Liaison: Colleen McCrief, MS, RDN, CDN

Academy Staff Liaison: Anne Coltman, MSHA, MS, RDN, LDN, FAND, FACHE

2025 Preceptor Pulse

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Virtual Journal Club for Preceptors

One of the highlights of attending the NDEP spring conference in Memphis, TN, this past spring was joining one of the round table sessions led by Hillary L. Roberts, EdD, RDN, LD, and Sarah Murray, PhD, RDN, LD, both from Missouri State University. The topic discussed was based on research on the *Impact of Virtual Journal Club on Dietetic Preceptor Self-Efficacy and Perceived Support*. As a preceptor, I know the value of guiding interns and helping them on their path to becoming a registered dietitian. However, sometimes preceptors need support and camaraderie from each other. Hillary and Sarah, along with Stephanie Mitchell Urich, MS, EDN, LD and Jaime Gnau, MS, RD, LD, CHES conducted a study to assess the changes in self-efficacy and perceived support among current dietetic preceptors, former dietetic preceptors, and non-preceptor dietitians after participating in a virtual journal club. I encourage you to read the full study posted on the [NDEP Preceptor Resource](#) section.

At the time of the spring meeting, I was the NDEP Preceptor Director, and I brought the material to the preceptor committee. As a group, we decided to include this research and the accompanying “How to Guide” to the NDEP Preceptor Resource section of the NDEP website. This material is available to all members and non-members. We hope that educators and program directors find this resource valuable. A big thank you to Hillary, Sarah, Stephanie, and Jaime for sharing their research.

Impact of Virtual Journal Club on Dietetic Preceptor Self-Efficacy and Perceived Support

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In the nutrition and dietetics profession, having a preceptor—and serving as one—are valuable and necessary experiences. Health professionals choose to mentor interns for a myriad of reasons, including increasing job satisfaction, earning required continuing professional education units (CPEUs), and strengthening leadership skills.^{1,2} Evidence shows dietetic preceptors have a desire to reinvest in their profession and find precepting personally rewarding.³⁻⁶

Despite these benefits, there are demonstrated barriers to precepting dietetic students. When these barriers are not identified and addressed, preceptor recruitment and retention may decrease.⁷ Non-preceptors may feel a lack of confidence in their experience level and teaching or mentoring skills which can prevent them from precepting. Even current preceptors can struggle with self-efficacy in these areas, paradoxically, while actively mentoring interns.^{4,6,7} Precepting requires a wide-range of skills to effectively mentor students; however, preceptors report knowing very little about adult education principles and express a desire for training to improve their teaching abilities.^{7,8} Current preceptors, former preceptors, and non-preceptors alike report a perceived lack of support both in the workplace and through their institutions, although current preceptors were more likely to report having support.^{3,4,6,9}

Providing ongoing training to address the needs and barriers to precepting is a beneficial practice. Virtual journal clubs (VJCs) may offer an opportunity to meet specific training needs of preceptors and cover a wide variety of topics for discussion and development, while simultaneously improving self-efficacy and perceived support. Evidence shows that asynchronous, online journal clubs can provide professional development, continuing education,

and networking opportunities while removing time barriers.^{10,11} VJCs have been successfully used to provide professional development, continuing education, networking opportunities, and strengthen relationships between preceptors and interns, as well as mentors and mentees across healthcare professions, including occupational therapy, pharmacy, and others.¹⁰⁻¹³ Despite the growing evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of VJCs for education in healthcare, few studies have focused on their use for dietetic preceptor development.

The purpose of this study was to assess changes in self-efficacy and perceived support among current dietetic preceptors, former dietetic preceptors, and non-preceptor dietitians after participating in a VJC.

Methods

This study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (#IRB-FY2024-157) and was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subject research. Following IRB approval, participants were recruited via email through a State Affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) electronic newsletter, a Regional AND State Affiliate member contact list, and dietetic preceptor contact list from a nutrition and dietetics graduate program at a midwestern, public university. There were no exclusions: participants could be current preceptors, former preceptors, or non-preceptors. Participants were invited to attend four, one-hour VJC sessions offering CPEU credit, hosted by the research team weekly via the web conferencing platform, Zoom.

VJC sessions were structured from a facilitator guide developed during a previous pilot study.¹⁴ Before each session, participants received via email an evidence-based journal article to explore along with discussion questions. Topics consisted of inclusive excellence, reflective practice, authentic leadership, and meaningful feedback.

Inclusion in the study was not a prerequisite to attend VJC, but informed consent was required prior to online pre- and post-surveys administered via Qualtrics. Pre-survey links were distributed prior to each VJC session and provided in the online chat feature on Zoom at the beginning of each VJC. Post-survey links were distributed following the final session via the online chat feature on Zoom and emailed to former participants who did not attend the final VJC.

Table 1. Survey Questions on Self-Efficacy and Perceived Support for the Preceptor Role

Survey Item	Response Options
I feel that I have appropriate skills and knowledge to address the needs of interns.	1 (Totally Disagree) – 5 (Totally Agree)
I am confident about my capacities to support the autonomy of interns.	1 (Totally Disagree) – 5 (Totally Agree)
I feel comfortable addressing most issues raised by interns.	1 (Totally Disagree) – 5 (Totally Agree)
I feel that I know how to foster the feelings of competence of interns.	1 (Totally Disagree) – 5 (Totally Agree)
I am confident about my capabilities to provide good feedback.	1 (Totally Disagree) – 5 (Totally Agree)
I feel adequately supported to precept interns.	1 (Totally Disagree) – 5 (Totally Agree)
How likely are you to continue serving as a preceptor in the future?	1 (Extremely Unlikely) – 5 (Extremely Likely)
Did you find the virtual journal club discussions helpful in your role?	1 (Very Helpful) – 3 (Not Helpful)
How has your self-efficacy improved since attending journal club, if at all?	Free text response
Describe a time when you felt most supported during journal club.	Free text response

Survey questions included demographics and self-reported current levels of self-efficacy and perceived support for the preceptor role (Table 1). Survey questions were adapted from the Mentors' Perceived Self-Efficacy Measure.¹⁵ Quantitative data were evaluated with descriptive statistics whereas qualitative data were evaluated using thematic analysis.

Results

Ten individuals opted in the research study, with six completing both pre- and postsurveys ($n = 6$, 100% White, 83% female, mean age = 36.17, SD = 7.43). Participants represented a wide variety of professional expertise with clinical, community, food service and academic backgrounds; 83% identified as current preceptors or have precepted within the last 12 months. The majority (66.7%) reported five or more years of experience with precepting. Most (66.7%) reported having completed preceptor training in the past. Participants attended an average of 1.8 sessions (SD = 0.898).

Pre-survey results indicated most participants “agree” with self-efficacy and support statements (e.g., I feel I know how to foster competence of interns.; I am confident of my capabilities to provide good feedback.). Post-survey results indicated many participants “strongly agree” with self-efficacy and support statements following engagement with journal club. All participants reported they were “extremely likely” to serve as a dietetic preceptor in the future. Additionally, 83% of participants reported journal club was “very helpful”.

Table 2. Identified Themes from Coding Process

Research Question	Theme	Participant Responses	Explanation
How does a VJC improve self-efficacy in precepting?	Increased Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “I feel I gained some communication ideas to help with intern relationships.” – “The information shared gives me more tools to utilize as a preceptor.” – “It was helpful to learn about ways that preceptors support and provide feedback to dietetic interns.” 	Participants reported increased knowledge through tools and experiences shared by other participants.
How does a VJC improve perceived support in precepting?	Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “...all ideas were welcomed, everyone has a voice.” – “I feel most supported during journal club when the presenter affirms my feelings on certain topics.” – “It [self-efficacy] improved due to hearing that other preceptor’s precept in a similar way to myself...” 	Participants experienced enhanced perceived support by affirmations provided and experiences shared by other participants.

Researchers analyzed the open-ended responses on the post-survey using consensus coding. Themes (Table 2) that emerged indicated self-efficacy in precepting improved due to an increase in knowledge of tools used for effective precepting such as providing feedback and communication. Participants also experienced improved perceived support as a preceptor through the collaborative nature of a VJC.

Discussion

Results from this study support previous findings that journal clubs can improve the preceptor experience related to self-efficacy and perceived support within dietetics.^{8,11} Evidence shows that for current preceptors, benefits are more likely to be salient than barriers—conversely, non-preceptors are more likely to report barriers.⁴ In addition, preceptors with three or more years of experience have been shown to experience higher levels of self-efficacy.¹⁶ Perhaps because most of the participants were current preceptors with more than five years of experience, their pre-survey responses did not reflect previously reported attitudes on self-efficacy and perceived support as barriers to precepting.^{4,6,7} However, despite entering the study

with self-reported positive feelings related to self-efficacy and perceived support, results illustrated a strengthening of those feelings with demonstrated changes in response from “agree” to “totally agree.” Additionally, we found a reciprocal relationship between self-efficacy in precepting and perceived support in precepting: participants reported improved self-efficacy as they felt affirmed (i.e., supported) in the VJC, and they noted increased perceived support as their self-efficacy increased within the VJC.

Although there was little change in participants’ intentions to precept in the future, it is noteworthy that most (who primarily identified with the host program and perceived strong support within it) already had a high likelihood of continuing to precept (83% chose “extremely likely” on the pre-survey). This may be further evidence that when internship programs offer regular professional development experiences such as VJCs, they can enhance perceived support and promote preceptor retention.⁷ This is significant because research indicates that intern enthusiasm and commitment to the profession are influenced by preceptor efficacy and attitude; this relationship is reciprocal, with preceptors positively influencing students, who, in turn, have a positive impact on their preceptors.^{2,17}

Since challenges such as lack of confidence and support are among the most significant barriers to precepting, using evidence-based strategies to preemptively address these challenges may be crucial to preceptor recruitment, development, and retainment.^{3,4,6} Overall, these findings support existing literature suggesting VJCs are a successful professional development tool in healthcare.¹⁰⁻¹³

Limitations

A significant limitation to the generalizability of this study is a small, homogeneous sample size would likely influence outcomes. Ideas for widening the participant pool include conducting a needs assessment for choosing meeting times and discussion topics that appeal to a broader audience. Although there was a state-wide recruitment effort with free CPEUs offered, the majority who responded were preceptors with an existing relationship to the host institution. This may indicate that though online preceptor trainings with CPEUs exist, there is additional value in relationships that motivate preceptors beyond receiving CPEUs.^{4,6} Therefore, individual institutions hosting professional development opportunities such as VJCs within their own sphere of influence may be indicated.

Future Directions

Future directions include dissemination of a comprehensive toolkit for facilitating a successful journal club; preceptors may find it of use within their preceptor network, offering an

opportunity for interns to shadow and improve in this skill. Indeed, research shows when interns participate in cohosting journal clubs for their mentors, it offers professional benefit to both parties.¹²

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results support previous findings that VJCs can improve feelings of self-efficacy and perceived support in dietetic preceptors, who play a vital role in shaping the future of the profession. Evidence shows even if preceptors possess a wealth of experience and knowledge, participation in the journal club can lead to a notable enhancement and provide a positive professional development opportunity—participation reaffirmed and strengthened preceptors' confidence in their abilities across the board. Despite this study's limitations, it provides valuable insights into the efficacy of evidence-based strategies like journals clubs to invest in the professional growth of dietetic preceptors and foster a culture of support and collaboration to strengthen the future of the nutrition and dietetics profession.

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Creation of an Exclusive Pathway for Dietetics Students to Advance Communication Skills and Procure Valuable University Recognition

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Abstract

Objective: To successfully establish a pathway for dietetics students to receive a university Communicator Certificate. This approach enables students to acquire the necessary knowledge in a manner that promotes engagement and learning, potentially increasing interest in the subject matter. Furthermore, it aims to boost their confidence in securing a spot in a dietetic internship program, increase the number of students applying for graduate school, maintain the 100% internship placement rate, and produce alumni who utilize advanced communication skills to elevate the profession. **Methods:** Four courses in the current curriculum were transitioned and evaluated to align with the required communication modes for obtaining the Communicator Certificate. Evaluation involved pre- and post-semester surveys to assess students' communication self-efficacy and professional readiness in utilizing these modes. **Results:** The students reported a significant improvement ($p = .018$) in their perception of being proficient communicators in professional environments and a substantial increase ($p = .050$) in their confidence in creating visually appropriate materials. Additionally, there were notable enhancements in their confidence levels regarding public speaking ($p = .011$), overcoming general challenges ($p < .001$), and successfully gaining acceptance to their graduate program ($p < .001$). The dietetic internship placement rate remained at 100% from

2019 to 2025. **Conclusion:** These changes have enabled all students in the concentration to pursue one or both CxC recognitions, improving their communication abilities, increasing their chances of securing a dietetic internship, and ultimately succeeding in their supervised practice by effectively applying their skills with patients and clients.

Keywords: communication, dietetics, education, nutrition, Registered Dietitian

1. Introduction

Communication skills are vital for training nutrition and dietetics students, enhancing their educational experience and preparing them for professional endeavors. By integrating communication training into higher education, students acquire essential skills and gain practical experiences that are crucial for their academic and career growth. Engaging in community interactions further enhances these experiences. Research indicates significant educational benefits, especially for historically marginalized groups.¹ Employers highlight the importance of communication skills across fields; knowledge and technical expertise are necessary, but strong oral skills are equally essential for career advancement and professional success.² Additionally, written communication requires active learning to enhance critical thinking and problem-solving. Visual communication, including drawings and diagrams, is vital for knowledge acquisition in specific industries.³ Dietitians utilize visual aids for effective communication. Technology can bridge communication gaps and improve health literacy, and incorporating tech-based assignments can ensure long-term student success. Mastering various communication modes is essential for dietetic professionals.^{4,5}

1.2 Communication Across the Curriculum (CxC) at Louisiana State University

LSU CxC is a multimodal program to enhance undergraduates' writing, speaking, visual, and technological communication skills. Launched in 2005 as the first program of its kind, LSU CxC emphasizes instruction in all four communication modes, acknowledging variations in styles and genres across disciplines. The LSU CxC model promotes holistic student learning by integrating certified communication-intensive (C-I) courses, faculty development initiatives, student support workshops, and recognition across the curriculum. The program offers two ways for students to gain recognition for a communication focus beyond a typical 18-hour Minor program.⁶ The LSU Communicator Certificate, a non-degree credential from the Office of Academic Affairs, is available to all LSU undergraduates meeting specific requirements, regardless of major. The certificate is noted on the student's official transcript. It aims to recognize those earning a B- or higher in C-I courses, which require three written, two spoken,

one visual, and one technological mode, along with a quality written reflection and good academic standing.⁷

The LSU Distinguished Communicator Medal helps students enhance their communication skills through a web-based portfolio demonstrating their application of these skills in their major. This portfolio provides evidence for employers, graduate mentors, and internship directors, highlighting a student's strong communication foundation transferable to their profession. Graduates earning this distinction receive a medal and a permanent commendation on their transcripts, giving them a competitive edge in the job market. Completing the program equips students with the skills needed for 21st-century leadership. To earn the Medal, students must: collaborate with a faculty advisor for at least three semesters, achieve a B- or higher in at least four C-I courses (including written, spoken, visual, and tech components), complete the LSU Communicator Certificate, attend a portfolio workshop, engage in practical communication experiences, create a public portfolio showcasing their skills, demonstrate effective communication, and maintain good academic and disciplinary standing.⁸

LSU dietetics students will follow a dedicated pathway, completing required courses, including seven mandatory modes, and submit a final reflection six weeks before graduation for the LSU Communicator Certificate. Combining four C-I courses allows students to focus on essential coursework without extra classes outside their major. This method engages students' knowledge of the DPD, potentially boosting their interest in the subject. It also aims to increase confidence in securing dietetic internships, encourage more students to apply in their senior year, maintain LSU's 100% internship placement rate, and produce graduates with advanced communication skills to enhance the profession.

2. Materials and Methods

The PI completed the required training to convert courses into communication-intensive courses.⁹ In May 2019, the PI joined the CxC Summer Institute to assess how well courses matched the C-I model, focusing on teaching, learning, assessment, feedback, and objectives, and incorporating various modes to improve course content. The PI chose two courses to transition to the C-I format. The choice to certify these courses as C-I was mainly influenced by the instructor's knowledge and the course content's suitability for adapting to the C-I method.

2.2 NFS 3025: Professionalism in Dietetics – Written & Spoken

This three-credit course in dietetics enhances students' professionalism and preparedness in

ethics, evidence-based practice, communication, public policy advocacy, and internship preparation. Offered every Fall, it is usually taken in the third year of the curriculum. To meet course objectives, faculty revamped the outline to improve written communication skills through lectures, exercises, and feedback on resumes, personal statements, and mock application videos. Additionally, students will present research posters, elevator pitches, and interviews/application videos to improve spoken communication.

2.3 NFS 3116: Community Nutrition – Technical & Visual

This is a required three-credit course in dietetics. It aims to educate students about public health policies and equip them to assess communities and develop, implement, and evaluate community nutrition programs. The course previously included a group project with four components: a community needs assessment, a marketing plan, a social marketing ad, and an oral presentation on a food assistance program. The project now includes a technical video on visual communication as the final component, allowing extra lectures on creating animated 2-minute Public Service Announcements promoting their assigned program. In 2022, additional faculty attended the CxC Summer Institute, completing the four-course pathway.

2.4 NFS 3119: Fundamentals of Quantity Food Production – Written & Spoken

This required four-credit course in dietetics covers quantity food procurement, production, distribution, service, menu development, sanitation, safety, and resource management. Students enhance communication skills through lab reports, interviews with Executive Chefs, and the professional “System Audit” project, which should address all aspects of the food service system model. The presentation must highlight unique features of the selected volume foodservice operation.

2.4 NFS 4110: Capstone in Nutritional Sciences – Written & Visual

This mandatory three-credit dietetics course teaches the research process, analyzing articles, conducting studies and creating public nutrition materials. Capstone courses help students transition from academic to professional life, fulfilling C-I course criteria in written and visual formats. The curriculum includes lectures on completing research studies, writing manuscripts, and creating educational videos. Requirements involve peer review of drafts, self-assessment of presentations, and a final reflection on communication skills and content.

3. Results

A continuous pre- and post-survey assesses students' confidence in their communication skills throughout the course. It also evaluates the significance of C-I modes, professional preparedness, and communication self-efficacy from the beginning to the end of the semester. Students showed improvements in their preparedness for dietetics careers ($p = .002$), reported increased proficiency as communicators ($p = .018$), and gained enhanced confidence in creating visually appropriate materials ($p = .050$). Their confidence in public speaking ($p = .011$), overcoming challenges ($p < .001$), and securing first-round matches with preferred DI programs ($p < .001$) also showed improvement. These results were then assessed against each student's success in obtaining a supervised practice program. Notably, the LSU DPD maintained a 100% placement rate in dietetic internships from spring 2019 to 2025. In 2022, two dietetics students earned the Distinguished Communicator Medal after completing four courses and a personal portfolio project. All four spring 2024 medal recipients from the College were from the School of Nutrition and Food Science, with two in dietetics. Three of the 2025 College of Agriculture Medalists came from the School, utilizing C-I courses to enhance their studies.

4. Discussion

A literature review on communication skills and dietetics in the past five years shows an increased use of simulation labs and mock counseling to improve interns' abilities. Professionals must prioritize patient care by utilizing advanced technology and effective methods. However, budget constraints in many DPD programs limit access to simulation labs, particularly in dietetic internship schools. Instead of waiting until students become interns to develop communication skills, it is crucial to foster these skills earlier. Interns with strong communication abilities enhance hands-on learning, reducing the need to revisit the basics. Students with solid communication skills, self-awareness, and self-regulation are better prepared for internships, bringing fresh perspectives to patient care. This approach can enhance intern performance, foster better relationships with preceptors, increase assessment and RD exam success rates, and ultimately help more graduates secure jobs within six months of completing their program. By reorganizing four courses, students can avoid searching for required classes outside the department or relying on non-aligned courses. This change has also helped enhance their communication skills, which are vital for academic and post-graduate success. With these modifications, all concentration students can pursue CxC recognitions, improve communication abilities, increase chances of securing dietetic internships, and ultimately thrive in supervised practice by effectively applying their skills with patients and clients.

5. Conclusion

This unique pathway for DPD students can serve as a recruitment strategy to attract prospective students interested in the combination of nutrition, dietetics, and communication. The ongoing program aims to broaden students' understanding of the various roles registered dietitians can assume in the profession. Organizing speakers and community events enables students to network with professionals and explore additional off-campus opportunities to apply their skills, gain practical experience, and enhance their dietetic internship application packages.

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The Use of First-Time RDN Exam Pass Rate to Explore the Potential Impact of Undergraduate Degree Type On Coordinated Graduate Program Outcomes

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Introduction

As of January 1, 2024, the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) has required a completed master's degree, along with 1,000 hours of supervised practice, and a verification of completion statement from an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) for eligibility to sit for the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) credentialing exam.¹ Coordinated Programs (CP) are accredited by ACEND at the graduate-level and incorporate both a master's degree and supervised practice, opening a pathway for students completing non-dietetics undergraduate programs to enter the field as an RDN. However, it has not been established whether programs accepting students from non-dietetics degree types should provide differentiated methods of RDN exam preparation based on the type of undergraduate preparation students have had.

RDN credentialing exam pass rates are an important benchmark used by accredited programs in assessing program outcomes. ACEND requires CPs to meet a standard of an 80% pass rate within one year of the first attempt.² Programs may choose to set individual goals for the program's first-time exam pass rate, and this metric is reported on by CDR at the national

and program-level.² The RDN exam first-time pass rate has been trending downwards in recent years, having dropped from 70-80% in the last decade to the low 60s.³ Specifically, the pass rate for all first-time examinees between July and December 2024 was 63.1%.³ Specific to CPs, the first-time pass rate in 2024 was just 67.5%.³ Understanding if an association exists between undergraduate degree type and passing the RDN exam on the first attempt could be key to ensuring that dietetics programs prepare graduates who can contribute to the health needs of the future. This study explored the association between undergraduate degree type and passing the RDN exam on the first attempt, using data from a midwestern CP. Results of this study could be used to inform program directors on whether curricula and/or pre-requisite requirements should be modified for students from non-dietetics undergraduate programs in order to increase those students' chances of success on the RDN exam.

Predictors of performance on credentialing exams: Lessons from other health professions

Researchers in nursing, physician assistant, and physical therapy programs have reported on teaching strategies, learning environment, program admissions criteria, and academic achievement as factors related to credentialing examination performance.⁴⁻⁷ Nursing education programs have linked positive coping mechanisms, hope, self-efficacy, mastery of content, and faculty tutoring to passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN).⁸ Physical therapy research has shown that undergraduate GPA was directly linked to successful pass rates on credentialing exams.⁹ For the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE), a preprofessional undergraduate degree significantly predicted success and program outcomes.⁴ Other factors associated with success on the NPTE are professional GPA, science GPA, and cumulative GPA.⁴

Physician assistant programs have found that overall GPA in first-year basic science courses, taking science prerequisite courses, and physician assistant graduate school GPA were positively correlated with the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) scores.^{6,10} Moore et al. (2019) found that physician assistant quantitative graduate record examination (qGRE) scores correlated with successful PANCE scores, which is similar to physical therapy students and success on the NPTE.¹⁰ Other variables that have been demonstrated to be associated with success in passing health care credentialing exams are online program delivery, completing a workshop preparatory course, student mentoring programs, frequent testing, and providing a credential extension to allow more time to study.¹¹⁻¹⁴

RDN exam success indicators

Historical research on RDN exam scores began with Bradley and Deaton Conner (1993), who examined the relationship between RDN exam scores and six academic admission-related variables.¹⁵ They found no correlation between RDN exam success and undergraduate GPA, a high correlation between RDN exam success and graduate level GPA and GRE verbal score, and a moderately significant correlation between GRE analytical and GRE total score and exam success.¹⁵ These authors suggested that future research should include looking at RDN exam success and undergraduate major courses instead of the cumulative undergraduate GPA.¹⁵

More recent research has investigated RDN exam performance of dietetic internship (DI) graduates based on GRE scores. These studies reported a positive correlation between GRE scores and higher first-time pass rates on the RDN exam.^{16,17}

Only one previous study has compared RDN exam success by undergraduate degree type. This study looked at Rutgers University Future Education Model Graduate Program (GP) students, comparing exam scores of those coming from a didactic program in dietetics (DPD) with those from a non-dietetics undergraduate degree with nine prerequisite courses.¹⁸ The RDN exam pass rate on the first attempt for both groups was almost exactly 90%, and there were no significant differences found between the students with an undergraduate DPD and undergraduate degree with prerequisite courses.¹⁸ This study's authors suggest that an advantage of the GP prerequisite course pathway is that it may attract more diversity of thought from students having different educational backgrounds, and that it is as effective a pathway as a DPD background in preparing students to pass the RDN exam.¹⁸

Problem statement & theoretical framework

The RDN exam first-time pass rate has been trending downwards nationally, with the negative implication of the inability of graduates to enter the profession and serve patients in need of quality nutrition care. The first-time pass rate for graduates of all CPs in 2024 was 67.5%.³ In comparison, in the CP used in this study, the first-time pass rates on the RDN exam for the years 2019-2022 were: 69.7% in 2019, 60.9% in 2020, 47.6% in 2021, and 72.7% in 2022.

The theoretical foundation for this research study is constructivism, based on the belief that students accepted into a CP are learners who are active participants in their education and construct knowledge based on their past experiences.^{19,20} In a CP, as in constructivist theory, every student begins their learning journey with some preexisting knowledge and then continues to build their understanding on top of it, which makes every learner's experience unique.¹⁹ The

possible variance in past educational experiences could be greater in a dietetics program accredited at the graduate level, because students may come from a variety of undergraduate degree backgrounds. This study attempts to better understand whether there is a corresponding difference in RDN exam success based on the undergraduate degree type of a CP graduate.

Methods

This study utilized secondary data from a midwestern CP to explore the association between undergraduate degree type and passing the RD exam on the first attempt. A G-power analysis for the Chi-square test of independence indicated that a sample size of 145 was needed to have 95% power at a $p = .05$ level of significance. The inclusion criteria were that the students graduated from the CP between 2017 and 2023 and took the RDN exam at least once.

The source of secondary data was CDR's Registration Eligibility Processing System (REPS) data at the program level. The data for each student included (a) whether the student passed the exam on the first attempt (yes/no) and (b) degree type (dietetics, non-dietetics), as determined by whether a DPD verification statement was on file with REPS for the student. A faculty member identified by the university's research compliance and integrity (RCI) office obtained the data from the CDR REPS and entered it on a spreadsheet and listed the student, if they passed the RDN exam (yes/no), and if they had a dietetics or non-dietetics undergraduate degree. The data were deidentified by this faculty member prior to being shared with the researchers. Prior to data collection, the study was reviewed by the university's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board and approved as Exempt Category 4.

Data were analyzed using SPSS v.29 to calculate Pearson's Chi-square test of independence on categorical variables exam pass (yes/no) and undergraduate degree type (dietetics/non-dietetics).

Results

From the years 2017 to 2023, a total of 154 CP graduates tested for the RDN exam and were included in the data collection for this study. Of the 154 CP graduates, 58 students (37.7%) had a non-dietetics undergraduate degree, and 96 (62.3%) had a dietetics undergraduate degree. Of the 58 students with a non-dietetics undergraduate degree, 34 (58.6%) passed the exam on their first attempt. Of the 96 students with a dietetics undergraduate degree, 58 (60.4%) passed the exam on their first attempt (Table 1). The overall first-time pass rate was 59.7%.

Table 1. Results of RDN Exam First Attempt, CP graduates 2017-2023

		Non-dietetic	Dietetic	Total
	Failed count	24	38	62
	Passed count	34	58	92
Total	Count	58	96	154

The Chi-squared results were ($\chi^2=.048$ (1); $p=.82$), indicating that there is no association between undergraduate degree type (dietetics/non-dietetics) and passing the RDN exam on the first attempt (yes/no).

Exam preparation strategies based on results

The results of this study suggest that there is no need to differentiate instructional content in a CP program based on students' educational preparation in their undergraduate major. This finding suggests that, in order to increase first-time pass rate, program directors should seek strategies that will be applied to all students in their programs.

Previous studies suggest that, to increase credentialing exam pass rates, program directors and educators can consider incorporating strategies to improve test-taking and studying skills, increase the frequency and amount of mock/practice exams, and integrate online exam simulators/discipline exam review modules.²¹ Other healthcare disciplines have found that approaches related to the student's individual belief in their capacity to fulfill behaviors play a role in passing credentialing exams.⁸ Instilling positive coping mechanisms, encouraging optimism, and providing faculty support, including tutoring, have been shown to help nursing students pass the NCLEX-RN.⁸ Faculty can encourage positive coping mechanisms to help mitigate stress and anxiety by practicing approaches to mindfulness, adequate sleep, and exercise.²² Also, promoting optimism and a positive mindset can help students stay motivated to study and retain the information they are studying.²² These strategies not only help with stress and anxiety but also contribute to exam success. Evidence suggests that helpful tools to incorporate in a credentialing exam preparation course are providing practice exams with multiple choice questions, using an online course delivery/online practice exam simulator, discipline-specific review manuals, frequent practice testing, and covering exam preparation methods.²³⁻²⁵ Improving and reinforcing student reasoning strategies for test-taking has helped students pass the NCLEX exam on the first attempt.²² By integrating these strategies and providing a supportive learning environment/experience, educators can enhance students' chances of passing their credentialing exams. This boosts the students' confidence and contributes to the overall success and reputation of the educational program and institution.

Conclusion

The scope of this study was limited to students from one dietetics CP. Although no relationship was found in this study, an association between undergraduate degree type and first-attempt pass rate may exist for students in other programs across the nation. In addition, this study was limited by not having access to the details of non-dietetics undergraduate degree majors of students, because this information is not included in the CDR's REPS. Future research could include knowing the student's academic major in their undergraduate degree, and considering that, along with other factors such as the time spent preparing and studying for the RDN exam. Results of this study suggest that CPs accepting students from non-dietetics undergraduate programs with completed prerequisites may not see differences in RDN exam performance by degree types. These results suggest that improved exam preparation is required for all CP graduates, regardless of undergraduate degree type and need not be modified based on the student's educational background. Embedding RDN exam preparation courses within the curriculum may improve pass rates for all students.

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Education Abroad as a Pathway to Growth for Dietetics Students

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In today's digital world it is easy to forget that while we have access to information at our fingertips, learning about concepts, places, and people through real life experiences is vastly different than through the lens of a classroom. Education abroad (EA) programs give university students the opportunity to step beyond their own cultural frameworks and immerse themselves in new environments. Engaging with people, practices, and places firsthand fosters deeper understanding and empathy than reading about them in textbooks.¹

For example, business students studying abroad may analyze international approaches to corporate management and innovation, while political science students observe how policymaking and civic engagement vary across nations. Importantly, this transformative learning extends beyond these fields. For dietetics students, experiencing food systems and cultural dietary practices in another country offers unique opportunities to enhance cultural humility, critical thinking, and professional competence, which are all skills increasingly emphasized in dietetics education and practice.^{2,3}

For a dietetics student, enrolling in an EA program can offer more than an opportunity to see the world, it can provide essential preparation for working with diverse patient populations. In our growing communities, it is unlikely that future dietitians will only treat patients who are from their own cultural background. Knowledge that is gained through time abroad will inevitably help increase understanding of cultural beliefs and values. The advantage of dietetics students participating in these programs is that all aspects of a person's daily life affect their health; therefore, students immersing themselves in other cultures will gain valuable insights that can aid in their future career.

When assessing the benefits for dietetic students who seek to complete an EA program it is important to look at what they are gaining on a personal level as well as a professional level. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is considered as one's ability to adapt to and function in an effective manner when they find themselves in culturally diverse settings. When Merklen and Wolfe assessed the CQ of current and former dietetics students they did so by evaluating four different characteristics; motivational, cognitive, behavioral and metacognitive.⁴ What they uncovered was that the students who participated in EA had significantly higher levels than that of their peers. They also addressed that three of the characteristics evaluated (behavioral, cognitive, and motivational) showed increasing levels of CQ as the length of the programs increased. With the increase in culture intelligence students have a greater preparedness for the future when they will be working with diverse populations due to their increase in cultural understanding.

If students can increase their CQ through these programs, they can develop skills to think critically and integrate characteristics of different cultures to best serve future patients. When looking at activities to increase cultural competency, Andrade found that while the population of dietetics students who had studied abroad was small, upon their return they were more confident in their interactions with those from other cultural backgrounds and they were able to recognize and reflect on their own biases.⁵ Health is not a "one size fits all" approach and increasing students' knowledge and understanding of multiple cultures allows them to look at problems and offer solutions in a variety of ways.

Education abroad programs are not just about what is learned but what is experienced; they can have a direct effect on each student's personal development and communication skills. The peers, instructors, mentors, guides, and professionals that a student encounters while studying abroad have the unique position of becoming part of their growing professional network. These relationships can become valuable members of one's community of support, allowing you to exchange ideas, seek guidance, and draw on others' expertise when faced with challenges in the field. As EA programs place students in areas they might not be familiar with, it allows them, and sometimes forces them, to develop their own form of independence and acquire new skills. Figuring out the navigation of public transportation is a perfect example of a challenge that many students must overcome when abroad, but the ability to adapt to surroundings, focus on the details, and arrive at a destination helps build interpersonal skills that will serve students well in their dietetic internships and professional careers.

In an increasingly diverse and interconnected world, experiences that students gain through EA can provide a competitive edge by building competencies that meet KRDN and CRDN expectations and further translate directly into their workforce readiness. The knowledge and

competence that students gain during EA programs directly supports several requirements for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists.² A few suggested examples of how some KRDNs and CRDNs could potentially be met in EA programs are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of KRDN/CRDN competencies met through education abroad experiences

Domain	KRDNs/CRDNs	How Met in Education Abroad
Domain 1: Scientific and Evidence Base of Practice	KRDN 1.1: Demonstrate how to locate, interpret, evaluate, and use professional literature.	Students research and compare nutrition practices in the host country; complete a literature review on cultural dietary patterns.
	KRDN 1.3: Apply critical thinking skills.	Analyze similarities/differences between U.S. and host country dietary guidelines, public health interventions, or food systems.
Domain 2: Professional Practice Expectations	KRDN 2.1: Demonstrate effective and professional oral and written communication.	Presentations to peers, local partners, or host faculty about nutrition issues.
	KRDN 2.6: Demonstrate cultural humility, awareness of personal biases, and respect for diversity.	Immersion in host culture, reflecting on local food customs, health policy, or health disparities.
	CRDN 2.8: Demonstrate advocacy on local, state, national, or global nutrition and health issues.	Projects or discussions around food insecurity, agricultural sustainability, or global nutrition policy.
Domain 3: Clinical and Client Services	CRDN 3.1: Perform the Nutrition Care Process (NCP) and use standardized language.	Case studies or clinical shadowing in international hospitals/clinics.
Domain 4: Practice Management and Use of Resources	KRDN 4.1: Apply management theories to the development of programs/services.	Observing or volunteering with community-based nutrition programs abroad.
	CRDN 4.4: Apply safety and sanitation principles related to food, personnel, and facilities.	Learning about the host country's food safety systems or participating in institutional food production visits.
Note: KRDN indicates Knowledge Requirements for Dietitian Nutritionists; CRDN indicates Competency Requirements for Dietitian Nutritionists. This table provides examples of activities and experiences during education abroad that align with ACEND competencies.		

When students are directly exposed to diverse cultures and food systems, they gain real-world insight into the disparities other populations face. As they navigate language barriers, they will develop strategies that help them manage cross-cultural communications and adjust to their future patients' needs. While making EA a requirement may never be financially feasible for all students, the invaluable knowledge, skills, and personal growth it fosters should not be overlooked. The experiences contribute to meaningful personal and professional development,

helping students meet essential competencies, particularly in cultural awareness, communication, and leadership. Characteristics that are increasingly vital in today's diverse and globalized workplace. Not only do these experiences contribute to more highly qualified dietitians but help to promote unique and innovative solutions, resulting in quality care for each patient and individual they will work with in the future.

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Using Simulation to Increase Graduate Nutrition Students' Confidence in Performing Dietetics Skills

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The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics issued a call to action to increase the use of simulation within dietetics education to have “increased confidence for students, who are able to practice dealing with complex situations in a safe environment before entering similar situations in actual practice”.¹ After reviewing the literature, there are limited studies to evaluate the confidence in the ability and readiness to practice of dietetics students.² There are several factors that have contributed to a decreased availability of preceptors for dietetic interns, with most revolving around limited time, high workload demands, lack of supervisor support, and insufficient incentives.^{3,4} With the ultimate goal of maximizing their time with skilled professionals, it has become imperative that dietetic students do not experience “transition shock” during their shift to becoming dietetic interns and are able to be active participants on day one of their internships.⁵ Utilizing simulation-based experiences (SBLEs) during master’s degree coursework can help increase student confidence in nutrition assessment and intervention skills and better equip them before the start of their internship.

In simulation, the use of standardized patients (SP) has previously been shown to be effective; however, the majority of these studies are focused on counseling rather than confidence in skills. Wright et al demonstrated improved confidence in monitoring and evaluation within the nutrition care process, with utilization of SPs.⁶ With the increasing need to have students prepared to start learning on day 1 of their internship, and having dietetic internship sites often needing to catch up to the 2022 ACEND accreditation standards, it is imperative that students be exposed to many of these competencies prior to reaching their internship. Demonstration of the effectiveness of the

utilization of simulation in dietetic education is limited. It is not enough for students to just gain exposure to a skill; it is imperative that they become confident with it and are willing to demonstrate their skills in front of others. Simulation offers a safe learning environment to practice many of these skills prior to proceeding to their internship. According to INACSL, “Simulation-based experiences are purposefully designed to meet identified objectives and optimize the achievement of expected outcomes.”⁷

Each SBLE was designed to mimic an acute care setting, utilizing standardized patients (SPs). The sessions were developed using best practice guidelines by an advanced practice registered dietitian and were based on the INACSL Best Practice Guidelines. Every SBLE utilized a case that was a fictional representation of patients with a fake electronic medical record to mimic real-life clinical practice.⁸ Additionally, the objectives of each SBLE were designed to meet specific CRDNs as established by ACEND. Participants were made up of 57 students enrolled in graduate nutrition coursework in the Boston University programs in nutrition who participated in the series of SBLEs. All students had previously completed DPD coursework. Students were asked to complete a pre-test and post-test questionnaire that utilized a 4-point self-efficacy scale to assess perception of confidence before and after the SBLE.⁹

Table 1. Pre-Posttest responses to confidence in skills learned through each SBLE (means \pm SD)

SBLE Topic	Category	N	Pre-lab Responses	Post-lab Responses	P-value	Drop-out, n (%)
Nutrition Focused Physical Examination	Introducing self to patients	57	2.333 \pm 0.687	2.732 \pm 0.447	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
	Performing NFPE identifying muscle wasting	57	1.455 \pm 0.661	2.518 \pm 0.504	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
	Performing NFPE identifying fat wasting	57	1.364 \pm 0.694	2.446 \pm 0.601	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
	Performing NFPE identifying micronutrient deficiencies	57	1.076 \pm 0.73	2.196 \pm 0.616	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
Enteral Nutrition	Describing NGT placement to patient	57	1.192 \pm 0.658	2.245 \pm 0.56	<0.001	49 (14%)
	Answering patient's questions about EN	57	1.212 \pm 0.605	2.061 \pm 0.517	<0.001	49 (14%)
	Participating in NGT placement	57	0.923 \pm 0.763	2.082 \pm 0.571	<0.001	49 (14%)
Dysphagia	Using a blood pressure cuff	57	1.172 \pm 0.716	2.577 \pm 0.499	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
	Performing a dysphagia screen	57	1.214 \pm 0.68	2.654 \pm 0.476	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
	Understanding the results of a dysphagia screen	57	1.5 \pm 0.632	2.769 \pm 0.425	<0.001	56 (1.8%)
Diabetes Mellitus	Describing DM to patients	57	1.679 \pm 0.575	2.313 \pm 0.589	<0.001	(15.8%)
	Answering patient's questions about DM	57	1.464 \pm 0.602	2.354 \pm 0.635	<0.001	(15.8%)
	Explaining hyperglycemia to patients	57	1.714 \pm 0.594	2.563 \pm 0.58	<0.001	(15.8%)

T-test, statistically significant $P < 0.05$

The pre- and post-test responses were collected, consolidated, and later analyzed to assess the impact of each SBLE. Both pretest and posttest scores for each SBLE were analyzed using a t-test through Microsoft Excel at the significance level of $P < 0.05$. When comparing the post-lab means to the pre-lab means, there are significant improvements in the different skills being evaluated throughout each SBLE session. The higher posttest mean indicates that students felt more confident in their skills after each SBLE and interaction with the standardized patients. It is clear that each SBLE session had an impact on students' perceived skills and confidence in applying these skills. This is seen from the p-values being < 0.01 , with a statistically significant level set at $p < 0.05$. Additionally, there was an improvement in the standard deviations (SD) of each SBLE's categories, indicating that participants felt more confident with their posttest performance as well as the existence of less variability between the groups. Comments from the students throughout the execution of each SBLE further conveyed the positive changes seen in self-evaluation of skills that were developed. Additionally, several other benefits were seen throughout the SBLEs while also effectively exposing students to experiences that will come up in the dietetic internship.

Incorporation of SBLEs into a didactic curriculum helps dietetics students build confidence in nutrition assessment and intervention skills prior to their dietetic internship. SBLEs that are tailored to meet CRDNs build confidence in areas that ACEND has recognized as key competency areas that all entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists should possess. SBLEs can successfully be incorporated into master's-level coursework for improved preparation for future interns. The inclusion of SBLEs in coursework equips students entering their dietetic internship with the necessary skills to succeed throughout various rotations and acute care settings. Subsequently, preceptors are able to focus on the development and refinement of more advanced competencies and skills that can only be obtained through the dietetic internship. Having dietetic interns who are already confident in several key skill areas allows for more room to improve in other higher-skill areas that ultimately contribute to professional growth. Although confidence does not equate to competence, increasing the confidence of dietetic interns to perform skills will lead to less coaching for dietetic interns to try by future preceptors and more ability to focus on in-depth skill building.

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Integrating DISC into Dietetics Training: A Tool for Developing Interpersonal Competence and Future Leaders

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As a clinical education director, I continually seek out innovative teaching and learning strategies that can enrich our students' preparation for professional work environments, especially with respect to communication, teamwork, and leadership. In our post-pandemic and digital landscape, I've acknowledged that some students may be entering supervised experiential learning rotations more accustomed to virtual or asynchronous interactions, and it becomes particularly important for educators and preceptors to both role model and offer practical tools that will help grow our students' professional skills and workforce readiness.

With the help of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation 2025 Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) Leadership Award, I completed a DISC Assessment Certification Course to become a Certified DISC Practitioner. DISC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness) is a very practical model that helps students conceptualize differences in behavioral styles. As a certified practitioner, I can administer DISC assessments to students, who receive detailed reports of their assessment results with valuable applications, and I lead an interactive DISC workshop initially to introduce the model and practice concepts. My goal is to scaffold learning activities throughout the graduate program so that students can apply their knowledge in tangible ways, such as flexing their behavioral styles when working on group projects with peers, communication with faculty and preceptors, interprofessional education, and real life collaboration with the healthcare team.

There are three key learning outcomes from incorporating DISC training within nutrition and dietetics programs. First, students grow their self-awareness by gaining a deeper understanding of their own communication style and behavioral tendencies, particularly with how they respond to stress and conflict. By learning their DISC profile, they can learn how it may impact their work and relationships. This self-awareness can also carryover to clinical interactions and their reflection on how this DISC style can influence patient care and even bedside manner. Second, students enhance communication skills by recognizing the DISC styles of others and adapting their own communication to match others to be more effective, thereby influencing patient satisfaction, supporting shared decision-making, and reducing miscommunication. Lastly, students can build stronger team collaboration, particularly as leaders, to leverage the strengths of each team member's DISC style, improving productivity and problem-solving while recognizing the inherent value each team member brings to the table. Within the work environment, this too can lead to more effective conflict resolution, and when it comes to patient care, support patient safety and optimal outcomes that rely on collaboration. DISC can be incorporated as learning activities mapped to competencies within a nutrition and dietetics program's curriculum, as well as support the professional development of the RDN or NDTR with respect to the CDR Professional Development Portfolio and essential practice competencies.

It's a more relevant time than ever that we prepare our future nutrition and dietetic professionals to be confident and competent in their leadership skills to drive the profession. Equipping our students with very practical models like DISC may be one easy to remember tool they can carry with them into their careers.

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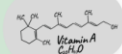
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