DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

FAQ About Dietetics

This information covers most of the basics you need to know about the dietetics curricula at Delaware State University. This information is NOT meant to replace counseling sessions with your advisor. With your advisor, you can plan a schedule to fit your individual needs, based on the course sequence for the major. **ASK YOUR ADVISOR** any questions you may have regarding dietetics.

**What is a Registered Dietitian?**
The Registered Dietitian (RD) credential is the only credential nationally recognized in foods and nutrition. The RD is marketed as the nutrition expert, and the credential is required for most employment in the healthcare industry and preferred for many other employment opportunities in foods and nutrition. The credential is particularly important when nutrition counseling/advice is a component of the employment. Due to the marketing of the RD credential, expect to see it required even more in the future as necessary for employment.

**How do I become a RD?**
The RD credential is earned after successfully passing a nationally administered exam. Exam eligibility requires completion of two different components of study:

1) a classroom component (didactic)
2) a supervised practice component (experience).

**What's a Didactic program in Dietetics (DPD)?**
The Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) gives you the classroom component, culminating in a B.S. degree. When you complete the DPD, you will receive a Verification Statement. This verification is required for you to enter a dietetic experience program. The DPD must be followed, as a post-baccalaureate program, by a supervised practice (experience) program to qualify you to take the RD exam. Current supervised practice programs are Dietetic Internships (DI) or Graduate level CPD's.

Applications to the practice programs occur in the senior year. The RD exam is taken after the experience program is completed. Experience programs are normally 10 - 12 months long. Therefore, this option requires a total commitment of about five years. During the DPD, you have sufficient elective hours to accommodate other interests or to even double major.

**What's a Coordinated Program in Dietetics (CPD)?**
The Coordinated Program in Dietetics (CPD) combines the classroom and supervised practice component within the B.S. degree program, enabling the student to take the RD exam after graduation. If a student plans for the CPD beginning the first semester of the freshman year, and is accepted into the CPD, then they can complete the CPD in four years and two summers. When you complete the CPD, you will receive a Verification Statement, which then admits you to take the RD exam. Although the CPD can be completed in four years plus two summers, the program may change in the future to a five-year program. The experiences occur during the last year of the curriculum, including a summer session. The program requires a separate application during
the completion of the DPD course work. The pre-requisites for the CPD are the same basic courses as the DPD. Approximately 1100 hours of experiences outside the classroom provide the supervised practice component. If you wish to combine the CPD with another interest or major, you may do so by adding additional semesters to your program.

**How do I decide between the Didactic Program and the Coordinated Program?**
Students choose between the DPD and the CPD for many different reasons. During your first two years, you will have the opportunity to meet with and discuss both programs with students, faculty, and graduates. Some students may choose a program based on the academic competitiveness for admission. Others may choose a program depending on the location of the program or the finances needed for the different programs (CPD = 8 semesters and two summer financial commitment; DPD = 8 semesters plus the experience year = a minimal five year financial commitment. Discuss these reasons with your advisor and students in each program).

**Does an employer prefer one kind of preparation (Didactic plus experience OR Coordinated) to another?**
No. Both routes are required to meet the same national standards and both routes culminate in taking the same examination and receiving the same credential.

**How do I find out about Dietetic Internships or Other Post BS Experience Programs? How many are accepted?**
A list of supervised practice programs, by state, is filed with the Program Director. The listing is updated every fall. There are several hundred programs. The listing of programs can also be found on the ADA web site: [http://www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org). The Program Director provides assistance during the application process, including a detailed “How to Apply” packet. Applications are usually submitted in the spring of the senior year for notification in April. (There is also a fall application period for December graduates.) Approximately 50 percent of seniors in the DPD apply for experience programs. The programs are very competitive. In a 1992-93 U.S. study, more than 89 percent of accepted applicants had greater than a 3.0 GPA in their science courses. Nationally, approximately 70 percent of students who apply are accepted into practice programs. Students may re-apply during subsequent application periods if they are not initially accepted.

**How important are grades for a future Registered Dietician?**
Although the total picture of your record (grades, work experience, recommendation, activities, etc.) is important, the aspect of grades cannot be minimized. Both the CPD and Dietetic Internship programs publish minimum GPA’s to apply, and to remain, in the programs. Because the acceptance may partially depend on the applicant pool, usually the GPA’s of those accepted is higher than the published minimum. In general, internship programs have primarily accepted students with GPA’s that average 3.0. Additionally, internship providers seem to prefer grades above a C in major courses. An internship provider must accept students from many different DPD curricula as well as by computer match, although they control which students are put on their match list.

**What is the current job demand for dietitians?**
The job demand is primarily for the RD credentialed professional. Job demand in dietetics has been very good and is expected to increase. Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor reported the employment of dietitians is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations. The web site to check for updates is [www.bls.gov/oco/ocos077.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos077.htm). Like all majors, some areas of the
country may be more saturated than others. Check the bulletin board outside the Human Ecology office regularly for job postings.

**How much money will I make as a RD?**

ADA surveyed more than 13,000 dietetics professionals in 2002 and found the median total cash compensation for a full-time RD, with at least one year's experience, is $45,800. The survey also found that 25 percent of the RDs earn at least $56,000 per year and 10 percent earn at least $72,000 per year. According to the survey, many registered dietitians earn more in different employment areas such as higher education, administrators, directors of nutrition, research and development nutritionists, sales representatives and executive-level professionals. The highest salaries are for career employment and these often require more education and/or specialization. For example, if you are going to always live in one location, and that location is limited in upward mobility employment for RDs, you may receive yearly adjustments, but your salary may see slow growth. If you are mobile, can move into different aspects of the dietetics profession, your salary will usually grow with you. Employment that is career-oriented, specialized, and administrative generally commands a higher salary ($50,000-$100,000). These positions are usually not entry-level.

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

Join your professional association, The American Dietetic Association, as an associate member. For a small fee, you will receive the monthly *Journal of The American Dietetic Association* as well as other mailings sent to dietetic professionals. Articles in the journal are often assigned in junior/senior classes. Other informative articles specific to students are often included in the journal. As a member of ADA, you will also have the opportunity to join practice groups that specialize in various areas in dietetics. This is a good way to help you decide if you have a special inclination for one area of practice over another. You may join ADA on the web site at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

**What about graduate school and this major?**

The dietetics curricula are very good preparation for graduate school and a large number of our graduates have completed graduate degrees at both the MS and PhD levels. Several have even returned to school to complete the pre-requisites and then entered medical school. Nationally, a large percentage (more than 50 percent) of RDs have graduate degrees. A graduate degree is not necessary for entry-level employment in dietetics, but it will provide additional opportunities for the RD, particularly career opportunities. In some areas of the country, having an advanced degree may be standard, as many RDs in that area may have earned one. Some types of employment that normally require graduate degrees include federal and state government, educational institutions, clinical specialists (e.g., nutrition support specialist), and selected industry and management jobs.

**What's a dietetic technician?**

A dietetic technician completes an Associate degree (two year program of study), which includes classroom (didactic) work as well as an experience component. The graduate of these programs also takes an examination to be credentialed as a Dietetic Technician Registered (DTR). These individuals generally work under a RD to perform routine duties at the technical level. Some hospitals will employ B.S. dietetics majors without the DTR credential as a dietetic technician. Other health care positions require the actual DTR credential for employment.
What is the difference between a "nutritionist" and a Registered Dietitian?
When you hear the term "nutritionist", you must ask for more information to verify the qualifications of the person using this title. Unlike the RD credential, there is no national standard and credential associated with “nutritionist”. This means anyone can legitimately call themselves by this title with or without any educational preparation in foods and nutrition. The term nutritionist could be appropriately used if the person were educated in nutrition. For example, a RD is also a nutritionist, as are university professors and researchers in foods and nutrition. Sometimes the title is actually used for employment titles for RDs in some settings (e.g., public health, clinical specialties, and in state and federal government). However, since the term is not regulated or credentialled, it is also often used by people without any training who may actually do harm by giving inappropriate advice. Therefore, when you hear the term "nutritionist" you need to request more information about the person's qualifications before you can feel secure with the advice you are getting.

What's a licensed dietitian or a certified dietitian?
Licensure is a state mandated requirement for selected professionals. States vary as to which professionals they require to be licensed. For example, a pharmacist, physician, nurse or lawyer must have a state license to practice their professions. Licensure generally specifies the kinds of services the bearer of the license can give, thus protecting the public from receiving those services by a person that is not licensed. Certification is a state credential, which recognizes, or certifies, the professional credential. Currently about 50 percent of states have licensure and/or certification for dietitians. You may see a dietitian use the initials LD or CD after their RD to indicate this status.

At this time, a RD is automatically qualified to make application to be a LD or a CD. The RD must pay for the state application and it will be required for most practice settings in the state, but the RD does not usually need to do additional qualifying coursework or experience. State and federal regulations often specify that a professional be licensed or otherwise recognized by the state for delivery of services when state and federal monies are involved. Therefore, it is generally seen as beneficial for RDs to also be additionally state credentialled, if the state in which they work offers it.

What is required for an RD to maintain their credential?
Evidence of continuing growth related to the profession is required to maintain the RD credential in addition to a fee assessed annually by the Commission on Dietetic Registration, the credentialing agency of The American Dietetic Association. Continuing education activities have included attending professional meetings and seminars, taking additional course work, doing individual self-studies on topics related to dietetics, etc. The RD credential maintenance has changed to include self-assessment and evaluation with individual plans on how to show growth in one’s individual professional area. The expansion of ways to show evidence of continual growth is monitored on a five-year basis.