

Submission date: February 10, 2020

Program/s in this review: Dietetics and Nutrition M.S., Dietetic Internship GC

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage (delivered statewide through distance technologies)

Members of the program review committee:

- Carrie King, Professor, Dietetics & Nutrition (chair), Anchorage
- Melissa Chlupach, Assistant Professor, Dietetics & Nutrition, Anchorage

1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)

Program Relevancy

The mission of the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression. UAA's School of Allied Health's mission is "to educate and develop allied health professionals to serve all Alaskans," while the College of Health's mission is "Advancing the health and well-being of people and communities."

The mission of the UAA graduate certificate in dietetic internship program is "to guide the future of dietetics and nutrition in Alaska." The mission of the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition is "to guide and advance the practice of dietetics and nutrition in Alaska."

Each of these elements of the institutional mission are necessary for the development of dietetics professionals. Both the COH and the School of Allied Health have increasingly specific missions which relate to improving the health and wellbeing of Alaskans. The DN graduate program mission statements carry out a specific aspect of these missions in preparing entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) for the Alaskan health care workforce.

UAA has offered a graduate certificate in dietetic internship since 1994. This program has partially met State of Alaska workforce demand for RDNs, as this was formerly the final education requirement for entry-level RDNs.

The M.S. Dietetics and Nutrition provides education and training for workforce development in high demand dietetics and nutrition careers, thus aligning with UAA's mission to serve the higher education needs of the State of Alaska. The COH first offered the graduate degree, M.S. Dietetics and Nutrition in the fall of 2018. The new degree was developed in response to a mandate from the Commission on Dietetic Registration (credentialing body for the dietetics profession) for the advancement of entry-level dietetics education to a graduate degree. Beginning in 2024, a graduate degree will be required to take the national entry-level registration exam. Without offering a graduate degree in dietetics and nutrition, the UAA Dietetics and Nutrition program could no longer contribute to the 2017 UA Board of Regents' goal of doubling health graduates by 2025 to fill Alaska's dietetics and nutrition workforce needs.

The program faculty are working to merge the graduate certificate in dietetic internship and the M.S. Dietetics and Nutrition into one externally accredited program. This work is ongoing and planned to be completed in AY22.

Specialized Accreditation

The Dietetic Internship is externally accredited through the Accreditation Council on Education for Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). The current accreditation status is "accredited" and the term ends December 31,

2022. The M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition meets all requirements for UAA's institutional accreditation through NWCCU but does not require specialized external accreditation in its current format.

Workforce Development/Employment Opportunities

The *Alaska Occupational Forecast 2016-2026* predicts 19.5% employment growth for RDNs and an average of 13 annual employment openings. This is approximately double the average number of certificates awarded in the graduate certificate in dietetic internship (see section 2 of this report), which is the final educational requirement to take the national registration exam until 2024.

Graduates are employed in hospitals and clinics throughout Alaska, foodservice management roles, private practice, public health and consultant settings. RDNs already working in Alaska also benefit from access to our graduate program to meet their professional development needs.

Support of Other Academic Programs

The graduate DN programs support other academic programs through students selecting DN courses for elective coursework in their programs, providing DN expertise as graduate committee members, implementing interdisciplinary education in simulations and in team-taught interdisciplinary course offerings.

Partnerships

The program advisory committee, referred to as the Preceptor Council, is composed of industry representatives from 30 sites across the State of Alaska, (i.e. Anchorage, Fairbanks, Palmer, Wasilla, Kenai, Sitka, Kodiak, Bethel, Kotzebue and Nome). Members of the Preceptor Council supervise practicum rotations for dietetic internship graduate certificate students, employ program graduates and offer feedback that guides program development.

High Demand Job Designation

The University of Alaska Board of Regents has a goal of doubling the health graduates by 2025. RDNs are in the priority one category of the Alaska Health Workforce Development Plan.

2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)

The following 2020 IR Program Review data reflects the enrollments of the graduate certificate in dietetic internship through AY18, then the addition of the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition students in AY19. All graduates in FY13 through FY19 were students in the graduate certificate dietetic internship. The first graduates of the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition will be in spring 2020.

The graduate certificate in dietetic internship is restricted in capacity due to limited availability of the clinical rotation sites that are mandated by the program's external accreditor. The program has expanded from 5 interns in AY14 to a current high of 9 interns in AY20. Ongoing program expansion is being pursued through the addition of remote sites in rural locations in combination with shorter rotations at urban clinical sites that expose interns to a higher level of patient acuity.

Each of the UAA Dietetics and Nutrition programs were developed in response to industry requests for assistance with recruitment and retention of dietetics professionals within Alaska. This aligns with the 2017 UA Board of Regents' goal to double health graduates by 2025. One hundred percent of graduates who seek employment as a RDN in Alaska are employed within one year of graduation, and additional openings remain.

Student credit hours (SCH) produced by the DN graduate programs have increased substantially with the implementation of the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition in AY19. It is anticipated that the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition will eventually be self-supporting through tuition and fees, which will occur once the program is at full admission capacity (12 students admitted each fall). Until full capacity is achieved, however, TVEP funding

and general funds in the College of Health support the program. These funds, in part, come from a surplus in the undergraduate DN tuition.

In order to further increase SCH production, as part of the COH marketing effort, DN graduate courses are also marketed to other academic programs for selection as electives. Currently, students in the graduate programs in Social Work and Public Health are enrolled in DN graduate courses.

3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

Currency of the Curriculum

The DN graduate program is in a time of transition. Starting in 2022, the existing graduate certificate dietetic internship program requirements will be incorporated into the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition, which will combine didactic and internship requirements. The undergraduate degree in dietetics will be retained to prepare students for admission to the graduate degree, as well as to provide an option for students who plan to enter other health careers for whom a degree in DN would be of benefit, though not directly related to their chosen field of study. Currently, both the graduate certificate and the undergraduate degree are externally accredited by ACEND. The newly merged M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition will be classified as a program reorganization by ACEND. The DN faculty are actively working on updating the program curriculum to incorporate the new ACEND requirements. This work will be completed in fall 2020 and the new curriculum will be delivered in AY22.

Innovative Program Design

The M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition offers all courses in an online format that incorporates integrated experiential learning experiences, (i.e., simulation,) during a 1-3 day on-campus intensive each semester, and also in the geographic location of the student, (i.e., shadowing RDNs in specified practice settings). This allows statewide delivery of the program supplemented with student and faculty collaboration through innovative technology such as Zoom and Voice Thread. The DN faculty are very experienced in online education delivery and modalities and participate in Quality Matters programs offered at UAA.

Program Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

M.S. Dietetics and Nutrition:

The M.S. Dietetics and Nutrition uses the following data sources for program assessment:

- Course assignments
- Mid- and end of course evaluations completed by students
- National RDN exam pass rates (for the students completing both the M.S Dietetics and Nutrition/graduate certificate dietetic internship)
- Exit interview (to be implemented Spring 2020)

The October 2019 Assessment Report covered the five program student learning outcomes (SLOs). Key findings included that the program mission, all program goals and objectives, and required competencies were being met. Highlights include:

- *Note: the first graduates of this program will be in spring 2020.*
- All major assignments used to assess student achievement of program SLOs were met with an 85% or higher score.
- Course evaluation student feedback:
 - Students need additional resources to guide the development of and progression in their graduate research projects.
 - The research proposal writing process in DN A630 Applied Research in Nutrition and Dietetics would benefit from several revisions, to better communicate expectations to students.
 - Elective credits are a requirement in the program and additional courses are needed.

Actions taken to improve student learning:

- The DN graduate student thesis and graduate project handbook were substantially revised to provide additional guidance in graduate project development and progression, based on student and faculty feedback.
- COHI A690 Selected Topics: A new program elective was developed in partnership with faculty in the HPER program to utilize the human performance lab.
- The research proposal writing process was substantially revised in DN A630 to improve student learning.

Evidence that actions taken in AY19 and Fall 2019 are working to improve student learning include:

- Students in the first student cohort (pending graduation in spring 2020) are progressing in their graduate research projects, and are on track for on-time program completion.
- Student feedback in DN A630 in Fall 2019 positively reflected the changes in the research writing requirements.

Graduate Certificate Dietetic Internship:

The graduate certificate dietetic internship uses several data sources for program assessment:

- Rotation evaluations (documenting professionalism and achievement of external accreditation required competencies)
- Beginning, mid-year and end of academic year program evaluations completed by current interns
- One-year post graduation alumni surveys
- One-year post graduation employer of alumni surveys
- National RDN exam pass rates
- Preceptor Council feedback
- Program Evaluation Plan (required for external accreditation, evaluates achievement of program mission, goals and objectives and three-year trends in intern achievement of required competencies).

The October 2019 Assessment Report covered the five program SLOs. Key findings included that the program mission, all program goals and objectives, and required competencies were being met. Highlights include:

- The 3-year average RDN exam pass rate within 12 months of graduation is 98.1%.
- 100% of interns (3-year average) complete the program within 8 months.
- 100% of program alumni, on a 3-year average, who seek employment in dietetics are employed in nutrition and dietetics, or related fields, within 12 months.
- 100% (3-year average) of employers rate alumni knowledge base of at least “satisfactory” (mid-point on a 5-point Likert scale).
- 93% of program alumni, one-year post graduation, indicate they felt “prepared” or higher for practice as a RDN (mid-point on a 5-point Likert scale).
- Preceptor Council feedback:
 - Requested electronic program evaluation system be implemented (for evaluations of and by interns)
 - Suggestions for additional rotation sites were provided to meet the program goal of increasing the number of RDNs in Alaska
- Student survey feedback:
 - Requested improvements in the coding and billing and research proposal assignments
 - Requested additional instruction in the Nutrition Focused Physical Exam.

Actions taken to improve student learning:

- In Fall 2018, DN A601 Professional Practice in Dietetics and Nutrition (2 credits, online) became a required course and replaced the intern seminar class in the fall semester (DN A692A). This was done to decrease the burden of a three-week on-campus class at the start of the program for students from outside of Anchorage.

- In Spring 2019, two major assignments (coding and billing case study and research proposal) were revised in Seminar: Current Issues in Dietetics: Community Nutrition (DN A692B) to improve student learning.
- A national continuing education conference on the Nutrition Focused Physical Exam was held at Providence hospital in Anchorage. It was coordinated, in part, by the Dietetic Internship program director in April 2019. This was done to provide hands-on training for preceptors and current interns because of their request for additional practice in these skills.
- In Summer 2019, ten rotation sites were added to the program for AY20: SEARHC - Juneau, Bean's Café, Fairbanks WIC, VA clinic, Anchorage, Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Center of Alaska, UAA Student Commuter Services, Alaska Regional Hospital, MatSu Regional Medical Center, Fresenius Renal Care, and UAF Center for Alaska Native Health Research. These rotation sites were added to increase program capacity and to accommodate students in locations outside of Anchorage.
- In August 2019, an online evaluation and time keeping system were implemented to reduce the paperwork burden on preceptors and interns.

Evidence that actions taken in AY19 and the Fall 2019 semester are working to improve student learning include:

- DN A601 is well-received by the interns. They appreciate being able to complete the competencies assigned to this class in the location of their choice.
- Intern feedback is positive on the revised coding and billing assignment, and indicates interns feel better prepared for future work in a private practice setting. The revised research proposal assignment has also been well-received and intern achievement of scientific information competencies is consistently strong.
- Interns report greater confidence with highlighting their Nutrition-focused physical exam findings in their case study presentations.
- The new rotation sites have been received very well that have had interns prior to the writing of this report.
- Preceptor and intern feedback about the online evaluation and time keeping system indicates the system is positive.

Student Success

The DN graduate program is doing well with Student Success and many things are being done to facilitate it including:

- All students in the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition complete a faculty-mentored research project or thesis.
- Students readily volunteer at community events, including the twice-annual health screening at the Special Olympics under the direction of Carrie King.
- Interns in the graduate certificate dietetic internship complete online portfolios to showcase evidence of competency achievement. The competencies are mandated by the program's external accreditor, ACEND.
- All interns in the graduate certificate dietetic internship complete up to 1200 supervised practice practicum hours in locations around the State of Alaska.

Student Accomplishments

The students in the DN graduate programs have numerous accomplishments including:

- The one-year national certification exam pass rate is 95% for the UAA dietetic internship. The national one-year average is also 95%.
- Students have been accepted for funding as a Community Engaged Student Assistants from the UAA Center for Community Engagement and Learning to participate in faculty research and teaching projects.
- In Fall 2019, two graduate students were selected to participate in Center for Alaska Native Health Research-sponsored data collection in remote villages.

- Students have presented research posters at national conferences including the Food and Nutrition Conference and Exhibition and Health Meets Food (culinary medicine).
- Interns have presented evidence-based practice projects at the Alaska Dietetic Association conferences.
- Students have been selected for the Alaska Dietetic Association Outstanding Student award
- The majority of students in the M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition (n = 15, 88%) are alumni of the undergraduate DN program
- More than half of the preceptors for both graduate programs are alumni of the UAA DN programs.

4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

UAA offers the only degree programs (undergraduate and graduate) in Dietetics and Nutrition in the UA system, and in the State of Alaska.

5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)

The Dietetics and Nutrition (DN) graduate programs expedited review committee recommends program **continuation**, with future merging of the graduate certificate dietetic internship and M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition programs.

The missions of the graduate certificate dietetic internship and M.S. in Dietetics and Nutrition, are to “*guide the future of dietetics and nutrition in Alaska*” and to “*guide and advance the practice of dietetics and nutrition in Alaska.*” All program goals, objectives and required student competencies are being met. The DN graduate programs will continue to seek continuous improvement through the assessment of program outcomes.

There are many strengths in the graduate programs:

- Integrated experiential learning (i.e. simulation, case studies, role play) that incorporates applied learning within courses, often times in an interdisciplinary format
- Students from other academic programs take DN graduate courses as electives with enriches learning experiences for DN majors
- Practicum placements around the State of Alaska, permitting students to preview employment opportunities
- Current curriculum that implements external accreditation requirements focused on advancing the profession of dietetics
- The one-year national certification exam pass rate is 95% for the UAA dietetic internship; the national one-year average is also 95%.
- Employer and alumni feedback is positive and indicates graduates are well-prepared for practice
- One-hundred percent of program graduates who seek employment are employed within one year of graduation

Ideas for moving forward within the DN graduate program include:

- Continue to expand rotation sites to increase program capacity to meet the occupational forecast an average annual RDN employment openings
- Explore offering continuing professional education for RDNs within Alaska and nationally
- Evaluate expanding our role with other academic programs through elective course offerings
- Advocate for sharing program administrative functions with other health programs (i.e., facility intake requirements, processing memorandums of agreement)
- Pursue the development of additional DN elective courses to highlight selected topics in dietetics professional practice as program electives