

## Food, Nutrition and Dietetics at Illinois State University

### Current Undergraduate Program:

The undergraduate Food, Nutrition and Dietetics (FND) option in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at Illinois State University is focused on dietetics and preparing graduates for dietetic internships and careers as registered dietitians (R.D.s).

The undergraduate food, nutrition and dietetics option, a CADE-accredited didactic program in dietetics (DPD), provides the courses required to be eligible for a post-graduate supervised practice program, commonly known as a dietetic internship (DI).

### **DPD Program Accreditation Status**

The DPD program is currently granted accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Dietetics Education (CADE) of the American Dietetic Association, 120 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000, Chicago IL 60606-6995, (312) 899-0040 ext. 5400. Accreditation is granted following evaluation of program compliance with the CADE "Standards of Education" for dietetics programs.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Dietetics Education Requirements and Programs

[What dietetic programs are offered at ISU?](#)

[Does ISU offer an undergraduate DPD program \(FND\)?](#)

[What are the steps to becoming a registered dietitian \(R.D.\)?](#)

[What is the process to apply and get accepted by a dietetic internship \(DI\)?](#)

[How do DIs vary in type and competitiveness?](#)

[What is the M.S.-dietetic internship at ISU and what is required for it?](#)

[What is required to apply to DIs?](#)

[What are DIs looking for in their \*idea\* applicant?](#)

[How does one get matched to a DI?](#)

[What are the options for students who are not matched to a DI?](#)

[What is required to complete an internship?](#)

[What is the R.D. exam, and how can I prepare to successfully pass it on my first attempt?](#)

[What if I have a previous bachelor's degree or coursework?](#)

[What do \*\*international students\*\* need to know to become a R.D. in the United States?](#)

[What is required to complete the B.S degree and DPD program requirements?](#)

[How do I get matched to a DI?](#)

## Dietetics Programs Offered by Illinois State University

Illinois State University (ISU) offers both an accredited undergraduate DPD program and an accredited combined master's degree – dietetic internship.

## The Undergraduate DPD Program (Food, Nutrition and Dietetics):

The accredited **DPD program at ISU** offers the courses needed to be eligible for a dietetic internship. The **Food, Nutrition and Dietetics** (FND) option in the B.S. degree in Family and Consumer Sciences meets the American Dietetic Association (ADA) *Standards of Education* degree and course requirements for dietetic internship (DI) eligibility. The FND curriculum has few electives and requires a broad range of courses with emphasis in the life sciences, social sciences, food, nutrition, and dietetics practice. Dr. Robert Cullen, the DPD Program Director, evaluates your coursework and issues a *Verification Statement of Program Completion* when you successfully complete your degree from ISU. This satisfies the first two [steps to becoming a registered dietitian \(R.D.\)](#). Additional information about our DPD program and courses is available at our [DPD program website](#) and in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#). An excellent source of information about dietetics careers, resources and educational requirements to become a R.D. is available at the following [American Dietetic Association website](#).

## The Steps to Becoming a Registered Dietitian (R.D.)

The following steps are required to become a registered dietitian (R.D.)

- 1) Complete a bachelor's degree from a U.S. regionally-accredited university or college.
- 2) Complete the coursework required by a CADE-accredited DPD program to satisfy the American Dietetic Association (ADA) *Standards of Education*. Upper level dietetics courses are generally only offered at one of the [228 accredited Didactic Program in Dietetics \(DPD\) programs](#).

Upon successfully completing steps 1 & 2, you will receive a *Verification Statement of Program Completion* from an accredited DPD Program director and are then eligible to begin a dietetic internship. **Completion of a DPD Program is not a guarantee of being matched to a CADE-accredited supervised practice program, commonly referred to as a dietetic internship (DI).**

- 3) Apply by the February or September deadlines, be accepted, and successfully complete a CADE-accredited supervised practice program (dietetic internship)
  - applying to dietetic internships (DI) is a **highly competitive process** – your GPA, dietetics-related work experiences and the quality of your application materials are important. **Completing a DPD Program and receiving a *Verification Statement* is not a guarantee of being accepted by a dietetic internship.**
  - students graduating in May or August generally apply to DIs in February, while December graduates generally apply in September.
  - applicants are either matched to one DI through the national D&D Digital matching system or not matched to a DI.
  - most DIs provide clinical, community and foodservice experiences and are referred to as having a *General* emphasis, while some DIs specialize in one of the areas of emphasis.
  - DIs last a minimum of 6 months, but can be 21 months or longer if part of a master's degree program.
  - there are currently [253 accredited DIs](#) in the United States mostly located in major cities or affiliated with colleges and universities with food and nutrition graduate programs.

Upon successfully completing step 3, students will receive a *Verification Statement of Program Completion* from the accredited Dietetic Internship Program director and are then eligible to apply to take the R.D. exam.

- 4) **STUDY**, register for, take, and pass the national R.D. exam administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). **It is important that you to pass the R.D. exam on your first attempt because your performance on the national R.D. exam is an important criteria in the DPD and DI Programs you completed maintaining their CADE accreditation status.**
- 5) Maintain your R.D. status by completing the required continuing education activities.

## Applying and Getting Accepted by a Dietetic Internship

### Dietetic Internship Types and Their Competitiveness:

Dietetic internships are quite varied in their competitiveness, location, cost, and length. You need to consider each of these factors in deciding where to apply. In general, there are two main types of internships. Those offered by:

- 1) medical centers or other dietetics facilities/organizations; and
- 2) colleges and universities.

The stand-alone internships at a **medical center** or similar institution are generally 10 - 12 months long. Their shorter length and lack of required coursework make these internships highly competitive. These internships are usually affiliated with large teaching hospitals and located in large cities. Their medical team approach of patient care, with daily rounds involving a wide variety of medical personnel (MDs, PharmDs, RNs, RDs, social workers and other health professionals) with differing levels of training (residents, interns and students), provides a stimulating and challenging environment.

Internships offered by **colleges and universities** can be located in a wider variety of locations, including smaller communities. These internships often use area hospitals and a variety of other dietetics-related facilities, such as school lunch programs, community health clinics, WIC clinics, etc. These programs vary in their graduate level course requirements and length. A few of these internships do not require additional academic coursework; however, most require at least some coursework. The courses required can vary from a few to requiring interns to earn a master's degree. The university-based internship experiences are as challenging as those provided by internship at major medical centers.

Dietetic internship competitiveness varies with the institution and its location. Major hospitals affiliated with medical schools, large universities in major metropolitan areas, and internships in the Sunbelt or Western states are generally the more competitive programs, while college and university programs requiring a master's degree and located in less populated areas are generally less competitive. Applying to dietetic internships is a **competitive process** and **completing a DPD Program and receiving a Verification Statement is not a guarantee of being accepted by a dietetic internship.**

### The M.S.-DI Program at Illinois State University:

The [Dietetic Internship at ISU](#) is an accredited, 21 month internship program that combines both the internship with a master's degree. Completion of the master's degree is required to complete the dietetic internship and be eligible to take the R.D. exam. The combined M.S.-DI program at ISU participates in the D & D Digital matching process, the February application deadline, and begins in August. Additional information is available at the [Dietetic Internship website](#). The master's degree coursework includes the three departmental core courses, advanced courses in nutrition and medical nutrition therapy, two internship seminars, the three professional practice experience rotations in the Clinical, Community and Foodservice areas, and other elective course(s). Additional information about the master's degree and courses is available in the [Graduate Catalog](#). Interns have the option of either a 33 sem hr thesis option and gain experience planning, conducting, writing and presenting their research or a 39 sem hr non-thesis option, requiring additional academic coursework.

**A unique feature of our internship is that interns gain experiences from more than six different practice sites with a minimum of two in each of the professional practice areas of clinical, community and foodservice.** This variety of experiences provides the opportunity for our interns to learn different systems and practice styles. This helps interns identify their preferred area of practice and establish their own approach to practice in their careers. Successful completion of both the M.S. degree and all of the internship experiences is required to be eligible to take the R.D. exam. Additional information is available at the [Dietetic Internship website](#).

#### **DI Accreditation Status**

The graduate M.S.-DI programs is currently granted accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Dietetics Education (CADE) of the American Dietetic Association, 120 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000, Chicago IL 60606-6995, (312) 899-0040 ext. 5400. Accreditation is granted following evaluation of program compliance with the CADE "Standards of Education" for dietetics programs.

#### Applying to Dietetic Internships:

The application materials requested by dietetic internships typically include the official national application, a typed or handwritten 1-2 page letter of application, transcripts from schools attended, letters of recommendation from two professors and a work supervisor, and a \$25-50 application fee per internship. A few internships will request additional materials or have specific questions to be addressed by the applicant. Several internships conduct in-person or telephone interviews of their top candidates. Check the internship website or contact the DI director to learn the specific requirements for each internship. Applicants are not limited in the number of DIs to which they can apply; however, applying to more 4-6 DIs does not necessarily increase an applicant's chances of being matched. It is more important to apply to internships appropriate for the applicant's qualifications. Applying to DIs in more than one geographic region is recommended. Matching to an internship is based on the quality of the application materials, and qualifications and professional interests of the applicant.

#### The *Ideal* Applicant for Dietetic Internships:

Three main factors determine success in being accepted by the dietetic internship of your choice. These include **1) academic performance in all college courses; 2) dietetics-related work experiences; and 3) quality of the internship application.** An internship's committee evaluates applicants on the quality of their application materials, GPA in dietetics courses, science GPA, overall GPA, dietetics-related work experiences and letters of recommendation. A high quality application and well written letter of application are important factors in how each applicant is ranked by an internship committee. Dietetic internships are professional training programs that transition the intern from school and its course requirements to being an independent, competent, entry-level professional ready to assume a career in dietetics. Internship committees are looking for qualified applicants who will fit well with their internship and institution, and the preprofessional practice (internship) experiences they have to offer. **Successful applicants generally have a GPA of 3.0 or higher, quality work experiences that suggest success in the challenging internship environment and knowledge of dietetics, and application materials that indicate that the applicant is mature, competent, adaptable, can work independently and in groups, and understands the demands of the internship and the profession of dietetics.**

#### Being Matched to a Dietetic Internship:

**The matching of DI applicants to a DI is a competitive process with typically about 60-80% of applicants nationally being matched to an internship each year.** Grades, especially in dietetics-related courses and the science classes, and dietetics-related work experiences are two key criteria considered by internship committees in deciding who they are willing to accept and in ranking applicants. Other important criteria include the quality of your letter of application and your official application. Any

experience working in jobs dealing with the public is also valuable. Volunteer experience is considered and helpful if work has not been possible; however, this experience is valued less than work experience.

Almost all dietetic internships use the national matching system conducted by *D & D Digital* to match applicants with internships. Applicants are either matched to one internship or not matched to an internship. Applicants rank their preferences for the internships where they have applied and each dietetic internship committee ranks all the applicants who are acceptable. **If an applicant is acceptable to an internship and ranked highly enough, the applicant will be matched to an internship. If an applicant is acceptable to an internship committee but not ranked highly enough, the applicant will not be matched to an internship. *Completion of a DPD Program is not a guarantee of being matched to a dietetic internship.* Applicants are notified of the results of the national matching process in April or November following the application submission in February or September, respectively. Once matched, the applicant has the choice to either accept or reject the match. Rejecting the internship match means that the applicant will not have an internship placement unless the applicant can find an internship of interest with unfilled spots and is admitted to that internship.**

#### Options for Students Not Matched to an Internship:

Directors of internships with one or more unfilled openings following the matching process often seek qualified applicants after the matching results are announced. Students who do not receive a match can contact the internship directors that release their names and investigate the appropriateness of the internship and the requirements for submitting their application materials for consideration. Students who are not accepted by an internship or who decide after graduating that they want to become a R.D. can apply during this application period. Several actions can improve the possibility of being matched. Dietetics-related work experience, especially as a diet tech in a hospital or long-term care facility, is especially helpful experience prior to applying for an internship. Working in a food, nutrition and dietetics-related area is important for students planning to apply to internships in the future. Additional or repeated coursework to improve earlier grades, especially in the sciences, can also increase the chances of being matched to an internship in the future.

#### Requirements while Completing a Dietetic Internship:

Internships are much different than taking courses at a college or university. You work directly with individual preceptors who train you to do their professional jobs. Through learning on the job while doing the work of the preceptors, you are trained to be competent in performing their job duties and, through the internship, become a professional. Internships are typically full time and require working 40 hours a week or more at the internship site. Assignments, projects, or learning what you need to know to do the job must often be accomplished in your free time at night. Travel among various sites may be required by an internship, and a car may be helpful or required for transportation. The distances and lack of available public transportation often make a car necessary to complete internships located outside larger urban areas. Most internships charge a tuition fee, and it is important to consider all of the costs of doing an internship before deciding where to apply. A small minority of internships offer a stipend, or monthly income, to you while completing their internship.

#### The R.D. Exam:

The national registration exam is the final step to becoming a R.D. and becoming eligible for employment in every state as a dietitian. The R.D. exam is an objective, multiple-choice question, exam, about 250 questions, that requires application of your knowledge learned in the DPD program and the DI to a wide variety of dietetics scenarios. The exam is administered by computer at selected testing centers typically in cities with a large university or in larger metropolitan areas throughout the United States. The exam has a time limit and only one question is shown on the screen at a time. Each question must be completed or skipped to proceed with the exam. You can not go back and have a second chance to complete questions that are skipped. **It is important for you to pass the exam on your first attempt. A high pass rate on the R.D. exam, by first time test takers, is required for your DPD and DI programs to keep their accreditation status and remain in existence.** There are several classes and

study guides to assist in reviewing and studying for the exam. **These review classes are strongly recommended for individuals prior to taking the R.D. exam.**

#### Students with a Previous Bachelor's Degree or Coursework:

Generally a student with a **life science-related bachelor's degree** can complete the required coursework in two years or possibly less time with up to 3 – 4 courses taken during their last fall and spring semesters. Students with a **non-science degree** will generally require two to three years because of course prerequisite requirements with one year for the general science courses and other possible deficiencies and then two years for the upper-level science and food, nutrition and dietetics related courses. Some of the lower level courses may be offered at local community colleges, upper level courses are generally only offered at four-year schools, while only accredited DPD programs, like ISU, offer the dietetics courses. If you have another degree, or prior degree or coursework from another school, Dr. Robert Cullen, the DPD Program Director, must evaluate your past courses to determine what classes you must take to complete the *CADA Standards of Education* requirements and be eligible to receive a *Verification Statement of Program Completion* from ISU. Additional information about the DPD program and courses is available at our [DPD program website](#) and in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#). An excellent source of information about dietetics careers, resources and education requirements to become a R.D. is available at the following [American Dietetic Association website](#).

If you want to complete your undergraduate DPD coursework at ISU you have three options for enrolling and taking the required DPD courses:

- 1) if you have a closely related bachelor's degree, enroll as a limited status graduate student;
- 2) enroll as an undergraduate student seeking a second degree in food, nutrition and dietetics (B.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences; Food, Nutrition and Dietetics option); or
- 3) enroll as a master's degree student and count up to 21 semester hours of your DPD course requirements toward your master's degree.

**You do not want to choose option 3 if you are considering the ISU M.S.-DI program.** Since our internship is a combined internship and master's degree, you must follow the 21-month M.S.- DI course sequence requirements and not have previously taken any of the required master's course requirements of this program. **Option 1 is recommended for students with a previous bachelor's degree.** Additional information about the master's degree and courses is available in the [Graduate Catalog](#). The following [American Dietetic Association website](#) provides additional information about career options in dietetics, steps to becoming a registered dietitian (R.D.) and the application process and acceptance procedure for internships.

### International Students Wanting to Become a R.D.

If you are a dietitian trained in another country you may be eligible for reciprocity with the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). Information about reciprocity is found at the [Fact Sheet for Individuals with Foreign Degrees](#) available on the American Dietetic Association website

International students who are not eligible for reciprocity with the Commission on Dietetic Registration and want to become a R.D. must complete the five [steps to becoming a registered dietitian](#) to become a R.D. and practice dietetics in the United States. An excellent resource describing the requirements is the [Fact Sheet for Individuals with Foreign Degrees](#) available on the American Dietetic Association website. Specific considerations for international students include:

### B.S. Degree and DPD Program Completion for Those with International Degrees:

The first requirement to becoming a R.D. in the United States is the bachelor's degree, and you can complete an equivalent degree in another country. Transcripts from foreign universities must be evaluated by one of the evaluation services for verification of degrees and courses from outside the United States. A five-year college degree in some countries is equivalent to a bachelor's degree in the United States.

A *Verification Statement of DPD Program Completion* from the director of an accredited DPD Program is the second requirement. All DPD programs must meet the national standards of education and have established a DPD curriculum that meets each requirement. A DPD director must evaluate your previous coursework and determine what requirements you have met or not met within the DPD curriculum. DPD curriculums must meet many education standards so that graduates have the foundation knowledge and skills needed for success in a dietetic internship. DPD curriculums generally require eight semesters (four years) or courses to meet all of the standards. The DPD director determines what course work you must complete to meet the requirements of the program curriculum within the policies established for issuing *Verification Statements* by their department. Receiving this *Verification Statement* may require retaking courses in the United States to learn the unique aspects of food, nutrition and dietetics as practiced in the United States. The practice of dietetics involves working with people in an educational and management role and requires knowing all aspects of food, differing food customs of people throughout the United States, food purchasing and preparation, and the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. Through the issuing of a *Verification Statement* by the DPD Director, the DPD director is verifying that you meet the national education standards needed to begin and perform successfully in a DI.

As a dietetic intern, and later as a R.D., you must be able to successfully communicate, interact and provide quality nutrition care to all clients and patients. The practice of dietetics can differ in the United States compared to other countries. Registered dietitians are also qualified to assume management roles related to food service through their undergraduate course requirements and internship experiences. There are regional and cultural differences in food, food preparation, and menu planning in the United States. Labor laws, and food and sanitation standards and laws can also differ. Nutrition programs exist at the national, state, county, and city levels with unique program benefits and eligibility requirements. Hospitals are highly regulated, legally sensitive environments where professionals provide healthcare and the job performance of healthcare professionals is evaluated against benchmarks to measure the quality of the care they deliver. **The content and experiences of courses taken outside the United States do not necessarily provide the foundation knowledge and skills, and adequate understanding of the full scope of dietetics necessary to be successful in a dietetic internship in the United States.** The practice of dietetics as performed by R.D.s in the United States can differ from the responsibilities of dietitians in other countries. Not receiving an adequate education in a DPD Program can lessen your chances of being matched by an internship, hinder successful completion of your internship and R.D. exam, and limit your future employment and career success.

### Getting Matched to an Internship:

As covered in an earlier section, the matching of DI applicants to a DI is a highly competitive process with typically about 60-80% of applicants being matched to an internship each year. **Completion of a DPD Program is not a guarantee of being matched to a dietetic internship.** Grades in dietetics-related courses and work related experience are two key **criteria considered by internship committees in ranking their applications.** Volunteer experience is also considered and important if work is not possible, perhaps due to visa restrictions. Internships are rigorous training programs where you learn on the job by working with individual preceptors who trains you to do their job. Work, or volunteer experience, helps the internship committee determine if applicants understand dietetics and would be successful in their DI.