


**ACEND ACCREDITATION
STANDARDS
FOR
ADVANCED PRACTICE
DOCTORAL EDUCATION
IN
NUTRITION AND DIETETICS**

June 1, 2024

**Accreditation Council
for Education in
Nutrition and Dietetics**
the accrediting agency for the
Academy of Nutrition
and Dietetics

The logo for the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, featuring the words "eat" and "right." in a stylized, lowercase font with a red dot above the "i" in "right."

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Introduction

The Advanced Practice Doctorate prepares registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) as leaders, advanced clinicians, educators, practice-based researchers, administrators, and other advanced professional roles in a variety of settings. The advanced practice degree is distinct from the entry-level master's degree in nutrition and dietetics, as well as the research PhD. It incorporates advanced didactic coursework, an advanced practice residency, and applied research to achieve its core competencies. Students entering a post-credential advanced practice doctoral program are expected to hold the RDN credential and to have earned a bachelor's degree with a minimum of four years of full-time post-credentialing work experience or a master's degree with a minimum of two years of full-time post-credentialing work experience.

Degree Designator

The degree designator may be determined by the institutions. It is recommended that, where possible, the designator *Doctorate in Clinical Nutrition* (DCN) be used. The designator DCN is already in use and gaining recognition. Note that clinical in this context is meant to be interpreted more broadly to include the application of practice, such as in community nutrition. Identifying one primary degree designator should help to promote consistency across programs and reduce confusion for both the public and potential students. In addition, the DCN designator also serves to highlight that this is specifically a nutrition and dietetics degree and not a more broadly based degree. This recommendation is not intended to devalue existing degrees that use an alternative designator (e.g., DND).

STANDARD 1: Program Characteristics and Resources

All programs applying for accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND®) must meet requirements including quality assurance or oversight by other agencies, organizational structure, financial stability, sufficient resources, the awarding of degrees and/or verification statements, program length, and program management.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 1.1** The program must be housed in a college or university. The college or university must be located in the U.S. or its territories and accredited in good standing by a U.S. institutional accrediting body for higher education recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE).
- 1.2** The program must be integrated within the administrative structure of the sponsoring organization, show this structure, such as in an organizational chart, and indicate where the program will be housed.
- 1.3** The program must demonstrate that it has the administrative, clerical or other staff, technical and financial support, and the learning resources, physical facilities, and support services needed to accomplish its mission and goals. If any portion of the program is offered through distance education, the program must demonstrate that technology and resources are adequate to support a distance-learning environment.
 - a. The program must demonstrate that administrative support and resources are adequate to support continued development and training for program faculty, research advisors, residency mentors, and staff.
 - b. The program must provide a description of the budgeting process for the program that demonstrates financial resources are sufficient to produce the desired short- and long-term program goals and student outcomes.
 - c. The program must report its maximum enrollment to ensure quality, viability, and appropriate use of resources.
- 1.4** The program must award a doctoral degree upon completing program requirements.
 - a. Individuals entering the program must meet the following requirements:
 1. hold the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RD/RDN) credential,
 - a. International students must hold a credential from their own country that is established and recognized by the country's professional association or regulatory board for nutrition and dietetics, and
 2. have a bachelor's degree with a minimum of four years of full-time post-credentialing work experience or equivalent or a master's degree with a minimum of two years of full-time post-credentialing work experience or equivalent.
- 1.5** The program must have one designated program director who has primary responsibility for the program and communication with ACEND. The program director must have the authority, responsibility, and sufficient time allocated to manage the program and provide effective leadership for the program, the program faculty, and the students. The program director may have other responsibilities that do not compromise the ability to manage the program. Responsibilities and time allocation for program management are reflected in a formal position description for the program director and approved by an administrator.
 - a. Institutional policies related to faculty roles and workload are applied to the program in a manner that recognizes and supports the academic and practice aspects of the nutrition and dietetics program, including allocating time and/or reducing teaching load for administrative functions provided by the director.
 1. The program director must be assigned to the program on a twelve-month basis and at least 50% of the time devoted to program management in support of the program.

- b. The program director must:
 - 1. Have earned a doctoral degree.
 - 2. Be credentialed as a registered dietitian nutritionist by the Commission on Dietetic Registration.
 - 3. Have a minimum of five years of full-time professional experience post-credentialing or equivalent.
 - 4. Be a full-time employee of the sponsoring institution.
 - 5. Not direct another ACEND-accredited nutrition and dietetics education program.
- c. The program director's responsibilities must include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Provision or delegation of responsibilities to assure year-round coverage of director responsibilities in the absence of the director or in cases where the director's full-time appointment does not cover all 12 months. In programs where the program director assigns some responsibilities to other individuals, the director must ensure that all program director responsibilities are accomplished throughout the year.
 - 2. Development of policies and procedures for effectively managing all components of the program and to ensure fair, equitable, and considerate treatment of prospective and enrolled students (such as program admission, retention, and completion policies).
 - 3. Student recruitment, advisement, evaluation, and counseling.
 - 4. Maintenance of program accreditation including:
 - a. Timely submission of fees, reports, and requests for major program changes;
 - b. Maintenance of the program's student records, including requirements for doctoral degree completion;
 - c. Maintenance of complaints about the program received from students or others, including disposition of the complaint;
 - d. On-going review of the program's curriculum to meet the accreditation standards;
 - e. Communication and coordination with program faculty, research advisors, residency mentors, and others involved with the program and its students; and
 - f. Facilitation of processes for continuous program evaluation.

1.6 The program must establish its length and provide the rationale for the program's length after taking into consideration didactic learning, research, and residency needed by students to demonstrate the required competencies and state and institutional mandates.

- a. The program must be planned so that students complete at least 300 hours of advanced practice residency experiences. The program must document the planned residency hours.

STANDARD 2: Program Mission, Goals and Objectives and Program Evaluation and Improvement

The post-credential, advanced practice doctoral program must have a clearly formulated and publicly stated mission with supporting goals and objectives by which it intends to prepare students for advanced practice as a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. The program must have a program evaluation plan to continuously evaluate the achievement of its mission, goals and objectives, use the plan to collect data, improve the program based on findings, and update the plan accordingly.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 2.1** A program evaluation plan must be documented, reviewed annually, updated as needed with changes noted, and must include the following components:
- a. The program mission. The program mission must be specific to the post-credential, advanced practice doctoral program. The mission must be distinguished from other programs in the sponsoring organization and be compatible with the mission statement or philosophy of the sponsoring organization.
 - b. The program goals. The program must have at least two goals focused on program outcomes for graduates that are consistent with the program's mission.
 - c. The program objectives. The program objectives must measure the full intent of the mission and goals and are used to evaluate the achievement of each program goal.
 1. The program must align the following ACEND-required objectives with their program goals and demonstrate that the program is operating in the interest of students and the public. The program must set reasonable target measures when the targets are not specified. Required objectives must be evaluated annually using an average of data from the previous three years:
 - a. Program Completion: The program must establish an objective for program completion.
 - b. Research Project: The program must establish an objective that addresses the outcome of the research project.
 - c. Residency Experience: The program must establish an objective that addresses the outcome of the residency.
 - d. Program-specific objective: The program must establish one or more program-specific objectives.
 - d. Qualitative and/or quantitative data needed to determine whether goals and objectives have been achieved.
 - e. Groups from which data will be obtained; both internal and external relevant groups must be represented (such as graduates, administrators, faculty, research advisors, residency mentors, employers, practitioners, nutrition and dietetics education program directors, faculty from other disciplines, and advisory committees).
 - f. Evaluation methods that will be used to collect the data.
 - g. Individuals responsible for ensuring that data are collected.
 - h. Timeline for collecting the necessary data.
- 2.2** The program must evaluate the achievement of its goals and objectives based on its program evaluation plan and provide evidence that:
- a. Program outcomes data are collected according to the program evaluation plan, summarized, and analyzed by comparing actual achievements with objectives.
 - b. Data analysis is used to evaluate the extent to which goals and objectives are being achieved.
 - c. The targets set for ACEND-required objectives are met.
 - d. Program changes have been made to improve outcomes for unmet objective(s).

e. Programmatic planning and outcomes evaluation are integrated with institutional planning and assessment, as appropriate.

2.3 Results of the program evaluation process must be used to identify strengths and areas for improvement relative to components of the program (such as policies, procedures, curriculum, teaching methods, faculty, research advisors, residency mentors, and resources). Short- and long-term strategies must be developed, and actions must be taken to maintain program strengths and address areas for improvement identified through the evaluation process.

STANDARD 3: Curriculum and Learning Activities

The competencies must be the basis on which the program curriculum and learning activities are built within the context of the mission and goals of the program. Demonstration of competence must be integrated in the coursework, scholarship, research, and residency activities throughout the program.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

3.1 The Curriculum Map template must be used to document:

- a. Each competency (see Appendix A).
- b. Performance indicators (see Appendix A) for each competency on which summative assessment occurs in the curriculum.
- c. Course(s) (including residency and scholarly activities) in which summative assessment of performance indicators will occur.
- d. How the curriculum:
 1. Is logically organized, and
 2. The advanced practice, research, and residency components progress and are sequenced to achieve the expected depth and breadth of competence and the outcome of advanced nutrition and dietetics scholars.

3.2 The program's curriculum must provide learning experiences to attain the breadth and depth of the required curriculum competencies. Syllabi for courses (including those for residency and scholarly activities) taught within the academic unit must include the relevant competencies.

- a. Learning experiences must prepare students for advanced nutrition and dietetics practice.
- b. Learning experiences must address and build competency in diversity, equity, and inclusion. The program must ensure that students have the skills to recognize biases in self and others and adapt to, understand, and embrace the diversity of the human experience.
- c. Learning experiences must incorporate a variety of educational approaches necessary for the delivery of curriculum content to meet learner needs and competencies.
 1. If any portion of the program is offered through distance education, the program assures regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty.

3.3 The program and student must collaborate to identify and design a clearly defined area of interest for the advanced practice residency.

- a. At least two competencies for each student must be developed.

3.4 The program has the option to designate at least one program-defined focus area. The focus can be developed in one of two ways. Either by:

- a. Developing at least two new competencies to an existing unit. Each competency must include at least two performance indicators.
Or,
- b. Developing a new unit (Unit 6), which must include at least two new competencies. Each competency must include at least two performance indicators.

STANDARD 4: Competency Assessment and Curriculum Improvement

The program must continuously assess student achievement of required competencies. The program must collect and analyze aggregate data on student competency attainment. The results of the assessment plan must be used to evaluate and improve the curriculum to enhance the quality of education provided.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 4.1** The program must have a plan for assessment of competencies (Appendix A). The plan must identify summative assessment methods used, as well as courses, research project, and residency activities in which assessment will occur and the process for tracking individual student's demonstration of performance indicators/competencies.
- 4.2** The program must document that data on student competency achievement are collected, summarized, and analyzed for use in curricular review and improvement.
- 4.3** Formal curriculum review must routinely occur and:
 - a. Use results of program evaluation and competency assessment to determine strengths and areas for improvement.
 - b. Include input from students and other relevant individuals and groups, as appropriate.
 - c. Include an assessment of the comparability of educational experiences and consistency of competency achievement when different courses and delivery methods (such as distance education) are used to accomplish the same educational objectives.
 - d. Result in actions to maintain or improve student learning.

STANDARD 5: Faculty, Research Advisors, and Residency Mentors

The program must have qualified faculty, research advisors, and residency mentors in sufficient numbers to provide the depth and breadth of learning activities required in the curriculum and exposure to the diversity of practice. Program faculty, including the program director, must show evidence of continuing competence appropriate to teaching responsibilities, through professional work experience, graduate education, continuing education, and research or other activities leading to professional growth in the advancement of their profession.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 5.1** The program must provide evidence that qualified and appropriately credentialed faculty, research advisors, and residency mentors are sufficient to ensure the implementation of the program's curriculum and the achievement of program goals and objectives.
- a. At least two full-time members, or equivalent, of the program's faculty, in addition to the program director, must hold a doctoral degree.
 - 1. At least two full-time members, or equivalent, of the program's faculty, in addition to the program director, must hold the registered dietitian nutritionist credential.
- 5.2** The requirements for program faculty (faculty within the academic unit) must include:
- a. Program faculty, including the program director, must meet the sponsoring organization's criteria for appointment and have sufficient education in a field related to the subject in which they teach or must meet the institution's policy for education and/or equivalent experience.
 - b. Program faculty, including the program director, must show evidence of continuing competence and ongoing professional development appropriate to their teaching responsibilities.
 - c. Program faculty and instructors must be provided orientation to the mission, goals and objectives of the nutrition and dietetics program, the ACEND Standards, and required competencies. Program faculty must be trained in the use of distance education pedagogy and recommended practices.
 - d. Program faculty must be trained on strategies to recognize and monitor biases in self and others and reduce instances of microaggressions and discrimination.
- 5.3** The requirements for program residency mentors must include:
- a. The education and experience needed to provide appropriate guidance for the residency. Programs must demonstrate that residency mentors are qualified to serve as advanced-level coaches, advocates, and role models.
 - b. Orientation to the mission, goals and objectives of the nutrition and dietetics program, the ACEND Standards, and required competencies.
 - c. Program residency mentors must be trained on strategies to recognize and monitor biases in self and others and reduce instances of microaggressions and discrimination.
- 5.4** Formal evaluation of program faculty, research advisors, and residency mentors must routinely occur:
- a. The program must have a process for the periodic review, including input from students, of the effectiveness of faculty, research advisors, and residency mentors.
 - b. Program faculty, instructors, research advisors, and residency mentors must receive feedback, and training as needed, based on program evaluation and input from students.

STANDARD 6: Advanced Practice Residency Sites

The program must have policies and procedures to maintain written agreements with institutions, organizations, and/or agencies providing residency experiences to meet the competencies. The policies and procedures must address the selection and periodic evaluation of the adequacy and appropriateness of facilities to ensure that sites are able to provide residency experiences compatible with the competencies that students are expected to achieve.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

6.1 Residency site requirements:

- a. The institution/organization must establish policies that outline the issuance and maintenance of written affiliation agreements and the selection criteria, evaluation process, and timeline for evaluation of the adequacy and appropriateness of residency sites.
- b. Agreements must delineate the rights and responsibilities of both the sponsoring organization and affiliating institutions, organizations, and/or agencies.
- c. Agreements must be signed by individuals with appropriate institutionally-assigned authority in advance of placing students.

STANDARD 7: Information to Prospective Students and the Public

The program must provide clear, consistent, and accurate information about all program requirements to prospective students and the public at large.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 7.1** Program policies, procedures, practices, and materials related to student recruitment and admission must comply with state and federal laws and regulations. Recruitment and admission practices must be applied fairly and consistently. The program shall demonstrate by tangible action their commitment to enrolling a diverse student body.
- 7.2** All information to prospective students and the public must be current, accurate, and consistent. Each information source must provide a reference to where complete program information can be found.
- 7.3** Information about the program must be readily available to prospective students and the public via a website and must include at least the following:
 - a. Accreditation status, including the full name, address, phone number, and website of ACEND on the program's website homepage.
 - b. Description of the program, including the program's mission, goals, and objectives.
 - c. Description of the program's focus area, if applicable.
 - d. Statement that program outcomes data are available upon request.
 - e. Estimated cost to students, including tuition and fees, necessary books and supplies, transportation, typical charges for room and board or housing, and any other program-specific costs.
 - f. Application and admission requirements.
 - g. Academic and program calendar or schedule.
 - h. Graduation and program completion requirements.
 - i. Availability of financial aid and loan deferments (federal or private), scholarships, stipends, and other monetary support, if applicable.
 - j. Guidance about distance education components, such as technology requirements, if applicable.
 - k. If students are required to locate their own residency sites and/or mentors, requirements for this must be described, including the program's role and responsibility to assist students to ensure timely completion of the program.
 - l. A description of the criteria, policies, and procedures used to evaluate and award credit for prior learning experiences, such as coursework, and the types and sources from which credit will not be accepted.

STANDARD 8: Policies and Procedures for Enrolled Students

The program must have written policies and procedures that protect the rights of students and are consistent with current institutional practice.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS:

- 8.1** Programs are required to have policies and procedures for program operations, including:
- a. Student Performance Monitoring: The program's system of monitoring student performance must provide for the early detection of academic difficulty and must take into consideration professional and ethical behavior, and academic integrity of the student.
 - b. Student Remediation and Retention: Concerns about a student's performance in meeting program requirements are addressed promptly and adequately to facilitate the student's progression in the program.
 - c. Equitable Treatment: The program must establish policies to support the diverse needs of students, ensure an inclusive environment, and ensure equitable treatment by program faculty and mentors of students from all backgrounds, including with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, size, socioeconomic status, or age.
- 8.2** The following policies and procedures specific to nutrition and dietetics programs must be provided to students, such as in a single comprehensive document, a program handbook, or on a program website.
- a. Insurance requirements, including those for professional liability.
 - b. Liability for safety in travel to or from assigned areas.
 - c. Injury or illness while in a facility.
 - d. Drug testing and criminal background checks, if required.
 - e. Requirement that students in their residency must not be used to replace employees.
 - f. When students are paid compensation as part of the program, policies must be in place to define the compensation practices.
 - g. The process for filing and handling complaints about the program from students and mentors that includes recourse to an administrator other than the program director and prevents retaliation. The program must maintain a record of student complaints for a period of seven years, including the resolution of complaints.
 - h. Process for submission of written complaints to ACEND related to program noncompliance with ACEND accreditation standards after all other options with the program and institution have been exhausted.
 - i. If the program grants credit or hours for students' prior learning, it must define procedures for evaluating the equivalence of prior education or experience. Otherwise, the program must indicate that it has no policy for assessing prior learning or competence.
 - j. Process for assessment of student competence and regular reports of performance and progress.
 - k. Program retention and remediation procedures; students must have access to remedial instruction, such as through tutorial support.
 - l. Disciplinary/termination procedures.
 - m. Graduation and/or program completion requirements, including the maximum amount of time allowed for completing program requirements applicable at the time the student enrolls.
 - n. Institutional process for students to withdraw from the doctoral program, which includes consideration to complete a master's degree. Otherwise, the program must indicate that it has no policy for consideration of a master's degree.
 - o. Programs using distance instruction and/or online testing must employ strategies to verify the identity of a student.
 - p. Withdrawal and refund of tuition and fees.

- q. Program schedule, vacations, holidays, and leaves of absence.
- r. Protection of privacy of student information, including information used for identifying students in distance learning.
- s. Student access to their own student files.
- t. Access to student support services, including health services, counseling, tutoring, testing, and financial aid resources.

Appendix A: Competencies and Performance Indicators

Unit 1: Advanced Nutrition and Related Science
<i>RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics investigate emerging and evolving topics in nutrition science and integrate these findings into practice.</i>
<p>1.1 Analyze and synthesize evidence-based information and science to inform and transform advanced nutrition and dietetics practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Integrate advanced knowledge in physiology, pathophysiology, and pharmacology to inform advanced nutrition practice in complex situations.b) Analyze interrelationships of dietary habits, evolving biomedical, clinical, epidemiological, or social-behavioral sciences, including scientific inquiry, in the care of individuals, groups, or populations. <p>1.2 Create and implement evidence-based tools, algorithms, guidelines, or pathways to inform a targeted intervention or practice change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Synthesize and prioritize assessment data of individuals, groups, or populations to inform discovery and decision-making.b) Integrate concepts related to well-being and social determinants of health into complex nutrition decision-making.c) Formulate a recommendation, an opinion, or a diagnosis integrating critical inquiry and complex assessment findings.d) Articulate an evidence-based rationale for opinions, decisions, recommendations, or diagnoses. <p>1.3 Explore and integrate advanced technology to achieve desired outcomes and to advance nutrition and dietetics practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Evaluate the risks, ethics, validity, reliability, and potential use of advanced technologies.

Unit 2: Leadership

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics apply higher-order thinking, emotional intelligence, creativity, and innovation to lead individuals, groups, and programs.

2.1 Promote innovation, guide change, create vision and strategy, and mobilize people to generate desired outcomes.

- a) Navigate diverse organizational cultures and systems to achieve goals.
- b) Apply cognitive and non-cognitive attributes to address situations (e.g., emotional, social and cultural intelligence, self-regulation, and self-awareness).
- c) Apply systems thinking to analyze problems and solutions critically.

2.2 Demonstrate inclusive leadership to create a positive culture.

- a) Develop and lead intra- and inter-professional opportunities to achieve common goals.
- b) Recognize, challenge, and address personal and systemic unconscious bias and power imbalances.

2.3 Model high-level interpersonal and communication skills in complex situations.

- a) Constructively challenge relational practices of individuals and organizations.
- b) Use conflict resolution and mediation skills during difficult situations.

2.4 Apply ethical frameworks to support decision-making and to guide others to resolve ethical issues.

- a) Critically evaluate and apply ethical frameworks to provide professional guidance.
- b) Apply bioethics to identify and critically analyze moral questions and to manage ethical dilemmas.

Unit 3: Advocacy

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics advocate for change and address issues related to the broader environment.

3.1 Develop, evaluate, and justify modifications to policies.

- a) Examine the efficacy of existing policies, regulations and legislation, and identify gaps and opportunities to inform program and legislation changes.
- b) Evaluate interests, environment, and trends to inform strategies and policy revision and development.

3.2 Advocate for the profession of nutrition and dietetics, individuals, groups, and populations.

- a) Participate as a subject matter expert providing evidence-based information.
- b) Advocate and advance professional scope of practice to promote quality care.
- c) Plan and guide advocacy efforts to address social injustice and disparities, and to support equitable access to food, nutrition, and health services.

Unit 4: Critical Inquiry, Research, and Scholarship

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics lead research initiatives and scholarly activities.

4.1 Engage in critical inquiry to challenge practice.

- a) Critically evaluate research and nutrition information to verify and identify gaps, trends, and patterns.
- b) Incorporate scientific reasoning, higher-order thinking, or inquiry into the decision-making process.

4.2 Conceptualize, design, and implement research to contribute to nutrition and dietetics.

- a) Differentiate among research methodologies including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.
- b) Identify funding sources and conceptualize and develop a research or program proposal (including budget and timelines) that aligns with guidelines or standards.
- c) Apply human subject protection requirements, navigate ethical issues, and comply with legal and regulatory requirements.
- d) Conduct research using valid and reliable methods including performing statistical or qualitative analysis.
- e) Synthesize and interpret research findings to draw valid conclusions and make evidence-based practice decisions and recommendations.
- f) Disseminate scholarly findings utilizing knowledge translation frameworks.

Unit 5: Education

RDNs who complete a doctorate in advanced nutrition and dietetics lead educational initiatives or programs.

5.1 Design and deliver educational content incorporating pedagogy knowledge, inclusivity, and innovative approaches and technology.

- a) Apply various learning theories and instructional strategies in design and delivery.
- b) Apply instructional design principles and models.
- c) Apply universal design for learning (UDL) principles to accommodate the needs and abilities of all learners and eliminate unnecessary barriers to learning.

5.2 Implement and evaluate educational programs or courses for learners in various settings.

- a) Establish strategies to support inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse learners.
- b) Identify potential or actual barriers to learning and access to education, and work to minimize or overcome barriers.
- c) Create processes and instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of education.

Unit 6: Focus Area [Unit Name]
<i>If the program has focus area(s) and is developing a new competency unit, lists at least two competencies and two associated performance indicators.</i>
6.1 6.1.1 6.1.2 6.2 6.2.1 6.2.3