Suggestions to Improve Your Chances at Getting a Dietetic-Internship Position
Student-Guidance Document
August 1, 2009

Competition for Dietetic Internships is extremely fierce\(^1\), so if you are an existing student or are considering applying to a dietetics program to become a Registered Dietitian, try to get as much information as possible to improve your chances at getting the internship experiences required to sit for the RD exam:

- The first place to go for a wealth of information is your DPD program director and DPD faculty. They are on the front line, helping students decide where to apply, navigate the application process, and deal with computer matching.

- We encourage you to learn about as many DI programs as you can to understand what is available and to refine your area of interest. Some DI programs schedule open houses for students, so be sure to ask them if this is an option.

CADE staff members are also available to answer your questions, so we are providing the following list of suggestions based on our experience with students and programs.

**Prospective Students**

If you intend to become a Registered Dietitian, but have not enrolled in a program, you may choose from one of two pathways to get an education to be eligible to sit for the RD exam. You may either enroll in 1) a Coordinated Program (CP) or 2) a Didactic Program in Dietetics and then apply for an Dietetic-Internship position (DPD+DI):

**CP**
A CP integrates classroom learning and internships experiences within one program. If you graduate successfully from a CP program, you will be eligible to sit for the Registered-Dietitian exam or Dietetic-Technician-Registered exam without having to apply to a separate Dietetic-Internship or Dietetic-Technician Program.

**DPD+DI**
The Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) portion of the pathway consists of in-class instruction while the Dietetic Internship (DI) portion consists of supervised-practice experiences in real-life work settings. The majority of students who go through a DPD+DI pathway apply for a Dietetic-Internship position through a competitive, on-line matching process. During the first round of the April 2009 matching process, approximately 50% of students who applied for a Dietetic-Internship position did not get one. So, if you are considering applying to a Didactic Program in Dietetics, ask whether the program has placement agreements such as "pre-select matching" that will provide you with a Dietetic Internship position as long as you maintain the Didactic Program in Dietetics' requirements. If not, you will be required to compete for a Dietetic-Internship placement through the on-line matching process.

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\(^1\) See [http://www.eatright.org/internship_availability](http://www.eatright.org/internship_availability) for more information.
Current DPD Students

In the April 2009 match, twice as many students applied for internship positions as there were positions available. So, it’s critical that you do everything possible to make your qualifications and application stand out from the others:

**GPA**

*Make sure that your GPA is above the minimum required by the internship,* the higher the better. Although GPA is not the only factor considered by directors, it is one of the most highly weighted. A GPA of 3.0 (B) is often listed as the minimum considered by most DI programs; however, remember that this is only a *minimum.* So, if given a choice between a 3.0 or a 3.8 GPA, chances are that the applicant with 3.8 GPA will be selected.

- If your GPA is not competitive (i.e., low or close to the minimum required), consider retaking courses to bring it up to the highest possible level.
- If your GPA is below what is required by the internship, it is very unlikely that you will be given a placement.

**GRE**

Check to see if the program that you are applying to requires a Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score. If so, you must take the GRE. The same advice applies to GRE scores as does to GPAs. *Make sure that your GRE score is above the minimum required by the internship.* A score that is just at the minimum will get your application reviewed, but your chances of being accepted are much better if your score is well above the minimum.

- If your GRE score is not competitive (i.e., low or close to the minimum required), consider retaking the GRE to bring it up to the highest possible level.
- If you haven’t taken the GRE exam or your score is less than what is required by the internship, it is very unlikely that your application will be reviewed.

**References**

Make sure that your *letters of recommendation and references are from individuals who really know the quality of your work and your character,* and are willing to put positive recommendations in writing and say them to others. Vague or mediocre letters of recommendation are clues to internship programs that either your work or character is not good or that the person who wrote the letter of recommendation does not know you well.

- Always do your best work, and always cultivate good relationships with your advisors, teachers, employers, peers, patients, clients and students.
- Ask for letters of recommendation from people who know that you do high-quality work, have a strong study and work ethic, and behave in a professional and ethical manner.
- Make sure that that people who are writing letters of recommendation or serving as references are doing so, because they truly believe in you, not because they feel obligated to do so.
- Make sure that the people you ask to write a letter of recommendation or serve as a reference are considered by others to be honest and professional.
- Never ask for a letter of recommendation or a reference from someone for whom you have done poor or mediocre work or with whom you have been in trouble.
Communication  Pay attention to how you communicate, whether verbally or written, because this conveys much about your sense of organization and attention to detail.

- First and foremost, give yourself enough time to write good cover letters. Unlike GPA, your letters are among the few things that you can change during senior year! Personalize your messages. Avoid using a generic cover letter or one that is the same for every application that you submit. Carefully read the directions on what each internship program wants included in the letter. Study the internship where you plan to apply, and make sure that your cover letter and application documents highlight your strengths and experience that directly relate to the internship.

- Ask others who know dietetics to proofread your writing and seriously consider their comments. When possible, let documents sit as long as possible before making changes to enable you to revise them with a fresh perspective.

- Make sure that any documents submitted for your application (letters, CV, publications, writing samples, and other documents) are flawless. Use standard conventions for spelling, grammar and punctuation. Make sure that all printed documents are neatly prepared on clean, high-quality paper.

- Communicate thoughtfully, honestly and politely whether in writing or verbally.

- Speak well of your DPD program and your experiences. Disparaging remarks or gossip about advisors, teachers, employers, peers, patients, clients and students is unprofessional.

- Always keep your writing professional, cordial, and factual. Under no circumstances should you ever write or communicate in a tone that could be construed as derisive or complaining.

Stand Out  There are many things that you can do as a student to make your application stand out from the others that will not only improve your chances of getting admitted into an internship, but also propel you in your career as a Registered Dietitian.

- Volunteer and provide community service, especially in areas related to health and nutrition. If possible, volunteer at a facility that serves as a practice site for an internship program, so that preceptors and the program director can become familiar with your abilities.

- Get practical, paid work experiences, especially in areas related to your desired area(s) of practice. If possible, seek employment at a facility that serves as a practice site for an internship program, so that preceptors and the program director can become familiar with your abilities.

- Become actively involved in professional organizations, such as college dietetics clubs; and district-, state- and national-dietetics associations; especially at the leadership level.

- Publish and present any relevant research, projects or work that you have done in journals and at conferences or in poster sessions.
Along with implementing the recommendations above, you can also increase your chances at getting an internship by making sure that you do the following.

- Apply to internship locations that receive a lower ratio of applicants to the number of available positions. This information may be available by contacting the internship directly, or by reviewing the Applicant Guide to Supervised Practice (available for purchase at http://www.depdpg.org).

- Apply to several internship programs and do not limit yourself to only one geographic region when searching for programs.

- Read the program’s Website information or contact the program director well in advance of preparing your application to determine what qualifications and documentation you need to make your application the most competitive.

- Research the requirements for each internship and make sure that you are qualified before you apply. Do not apply to an internship if your GPA or GRE score is lower than the internship requirements; if you don’t have all the required experiences and documentation; or if you cannot afford the tuition, relocation or local living expenses.

Although many decisions and experiences can increase your chances of getting accepted into an internship, a few may actually jeopardize your chances and negatively affect your entire professional future!

- Avoid posting embarrassing or unsavory personal information or photographs on the Internet. Such information may be seen as an indicator of poor professional judgment.

- Avoid criminal behavior. A criminal record may make you ineligible to work in many health-care facilities and prevent you from completing your education.

- Never misrepresent or falsify information regarding your education, work experiences, or credentials. If you are discovered doing this, you could ruin your professional reputation and jeopardize your career.

Regardless of the shortage of internship sites, failed matches for any Dietetic Internship usually occur as a result of two conditions:

1) The applicant was qualified, but the qualifications of other applicants were ranked higher
2) The applicant was not qualified, because of insufficient preparation or documentation

In some cases, a different internship with more positions, fewer applicants, or different entry requirements might have selected an applicant who was not accepted elsewhere. However, the chances of being accepted may increase if the applicant takes steps to improve her or his qualifications and documentation using the suggestions for Current DPD Students in the section above and also follows the recommendations listed below:
Reapplying Computer matching occurs in April and November of each year. A second round match occurs a few days after the April and November matches if any unmatched internship positions remain.

- To participate in another computer-matching process, look through CADE's directory of internships at http://www.eatright.org/CADE-DI to see which internships are participating in the month when you plan to reapply (April or November); then register with D&D Digital.

- To participate in second round match, check the D & D Digital Web site to view the list of internship programs that still have openings; then contact the program directors at the internships to see if you can submit an application.

Improvements You can also **increase your chances at getting an internship** by using the suggestions for **Current DPD Students** in the section above and by following the recommendations listed below:

- Talk with the program director of programs where you submitted an application to get suggestions for making future applications more competitive.

- Consider seeking employment in a food-and-nutrition department at a facility that serves as a practice site for an internship program, so that preceptors and the program director can become familiar with your abilities.

- Repeat classes to achieve higher grades in those dietetics courses or supporting courses that may be contributing to a less competitive GPA.

- Improve your GRE score by taking the examination again.

- Begin a graduate degree before reapplying for the internship placement.

- Obtain certifications and credentials that are related to your work, such as the Dietetic Technician Registered (DTR). Changes in eligibility requirements for the Dietetic Technician Registered exam now allow DPD graduates to sit for the DTR exam. To increase your chances of passing the exam, you should consider getting supervised-practice hours toward the DTR through an accredited Dietetic Technician Program that is specifically designed for DPD graduates who would like to become certified as DTRs. If one is not in your area, you may want to consider a distance Dietetic Technician Program. For more information, please visit http://www.eatright.org/CADE-DTP.

If you have questions about the information presented in this document, please contact CADE:

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