**Guidelines for Preceptors and Students**

**Nutrition and Dietetics Technician Program**

**Gaston College**

Thank you for agreeing to provide oversight and direction to the student enrolled in the Nutrition and Dietetics Technician (DET) program. The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) requires that students receive at least 450 hours of supervised practice (SP) under a registered dietitian (RD) in addition to the didactic component. We are here to offer support to you as well as the student. We would like to review what is expected.

**Overview of the Nutrition and Dietetics Technician Program**

Gaston College’s program is structured as an online program. Most of the core dietetics courses are 1 to 5 credit hours and covers five semesters. The core courses contain both, the didactic and experiential components, also known as the supervised practice activities (SPA). Students who are local to the campus may take the class and satisfy the SPA component under an RD who serves in both roles (instructor and preceptor). Distance students may take the online course, but are required to have an agreement with an RD to serve as the preceptor during the core courses. ACEND requires that programs insure that students satisfy the SPA and maintain proper documentation and evidence of this experience.

**Responsibilities of Student**

The student is responsible for completing all required assignments including online assignments and extra readings, as well as at least four semester tests and a final comprehensive online exam. All of the tests must be proctored and are provided through Blackboard. The Blackboard online site has many resources to augment the student’s learning experience including PowerPoint presentations, audio resources, external links, videos, etc. Because the core courses are 1 to 5 credit hours students will have at least one textbook for each course and additional supplementary material. The volume of material to learn in a semester is rather challenging, and requires a self-directed and extremely motivated student. The pace is rapid and the student must not fall behind in assignments in order to be successful.

The student should sit down with his/her preceptor at the beginning of the semester and review the SPA**.** These activities are consistent with the learning outcomes for each course and are developed to meet the knowledge requirements that are specified by ACEND. While local students may follow one schedule to complete all the activities within a semester, we recognize that certain resources may not be available in other areas and the distance student may not be able to follow the same schedule. The student and preceptor should agree on a time frame to complete each activity and schedule. The distance student is required to communicate with the instructor as well as the preceptor on material that is not clearly understood. It is strongly recommended that distance students work closely with the preceptor and online instructor to insure that all activities are completed in a manageable time frame.

Some of the activities are self-directed (i.e. research, online readings, developing material, etc.) and the student may use this time toward the SPA. Other activities require coordination and collaboration, mostly with the RD. The instructor has the prerogative to require that certain activities be completed by a specified deadline. If it is foreseen that an activity cannot be completed for ANY reason, the student is required to communicate with the instructor well in advance, so an alternate activity may be agreed upon.

The student is required to provide sufficient evidence that the SPA is completed. The student should read each activity very carefully and submit ALL information to the instructor since she/he is not on the premises to observe the actual experience. The summaries should be typed in 12-font Arial, Calibri, Tahoma, or Times New Roman whenever specified and clearly describe how the activity was completed with dates, locations, preceptor(s) name etc. and are to be submitted to the instructor as they are completed. This will allow the instructor adequate time to provide feedback and to return for revisions if necessary and to determine if the student has satisfied the knowledge requirement. The completed activities should be uploaded into the Blackboard designated area.

**Responsibilities of the Preceptor**

The program recognizes that RDs are busy professionals. The goal of our Nutrition and Dietetics Technician program is to develop well prepared and qualified individuals who provide support to RDs and the profession of nutrition and dietetics. This requires that an RD provides guidance, direction, and support onsite to the nutrition and dietetics student. The SPA requires an average of 6 to 12 supervised practice hours per week.

Some activities may require observation; others require application of knowledge and new skills (i.e. medical record documentation, patient education, planning events, in-service training, calculation of calorie needs, developing modified menus, etc.). The preceptor will need to oversee the student’s experience and provide feedback to the student.

**The preceptor is requested/required to:**

1. Provide a copy of his/her Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) card.
2. Provide a copy of the state licensure or certification.
3. Provide contact information to the instructor at the beginning of each semester.
4. Be onsite and accessible to the student.
5. Communicate with the Gaston College instructor or program coordinator if there are concerns or questions about the student’s learning experience.
6. Complete a comprehensive appraisal of the student’s abilities, strengths, and areas for improvement at mid-semester and end of semester evaluations (available online on Blackboard site). These must be signed by both preceptor and student, dated and reviewed with the student.
7. Provide other evaluations as necessary (i.e. nutrition education) to assess student’s abilities.
8. Review the student’s field experience verification log of SPA hours and initial log periodically.
9. Provide a signature on the verification log that the student completed the hours in full at the end of the semester.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

***“Our student is a full time employee in our foodservice department. Do work hours count towards the SPA experience?”***

Not necessarily--possibly no. Our accredited curriculum covers a wide range of material including community, clinical nutrition, and foodservice. It is desired that an employer will support the student in seeking higher level certification and see the benefit of supporting the student in completing the SPAs during courses. As an example: if a student works in a foodservice department and they are required to complete a supervised practice experience in WIC. If the employer does not allow the student to go during the work day, he or she will not be able to satisfy the course requirements. The program requires the student to gain perspectives in a variety of settings. This requirement cannot be satisfied by traditional “book learning”.

***“I’m a consulting dietitian and I have been asked to be preceptor for a student who is employed in foodservice and enrolled in the Nutrition and Dietetics Technician program. I only go into the student’s work setting a few hours once a month. Does this satisfy the SPA requirements in the courses?”***

Likely no. The student should meet with the employee’s director as well as the RD and clearly review the expectations of the program and SPA requirements each semester. If the employer is not supportive of the time the RD may need to spend assisting the student, this may need to be negotiated. Again, some of the SPAs are self-directed and the student will need to complete on his/her own time. Others require direct guidance from an RD. Good communication and a clear schedule for completing the activities are essential. Often if employers know in advance what is expected then adjustments may be made in the work schedule.

**“*Do I have to be 100% responsible for everything the student has to learn each semester? I’m not sure I have time to help.”***

No. The student has learning material, assignments and online support and is responsible for completing all assignments. The most successful and qualified students are self-directed, self-motivated, and have good communication and professional skills. Students may speak up and ask the RD questions when they need to, but should be prepared from readings and assignments before they ask. Students will ask for advice and guidance; however, they should not place the burden of education on the RD. Also, the student needs to plan ahead to make sure that they will complete the SPAs by the end of the semester.

**The Nutrition and Dietetics Technician program of Gaston College appreciates you taking the time out of your busy schedule to serve as a role model and influence future DTRs in the profession of nutrition and dietetics. We value your expertise as an RD. Please let us know how we may assist you in making the partnership successful.**

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