Preparing for a Dietetic Internship

The Dietetic Internship is the supervised practice component of dietetics education. All accredited Dietetic Internship programs must provide at least 1200 hours of supervised learning experiences that allow students to achieve the competencies and learning outcomes for entry-level dietetics practice. See attached list of competencies/learning outcomes. Access the list of supervised practice programs at http://www.eatright.org > become an RD > accredited programs.

Dietetic Internships are found primarily in hospitals, universities and public health programs. All internships offer experiences in clinical, management and community dietetics but the percentage of time spent in each area of practice varies from program to program.

Acceptance into a DI has historically been competitive. In recent years, the competition for DI positions has increased. Data on the April 2014 first-round match reported 5140 applicants for 2836 DI positions (ACEND Update, May 2014). 49% of applicants were unmatched. This outcome reflects a growing increase in applicants for a fairly stable number of DI positions. Please see the “Availability of DI Positions” summary included in the DPD Handbook for more information. Completion of DPD requirements does not guarantee placement in a supervised practice program.

To position yourself to compete successfully for an internship, you need to have strong academic performance, nutrition-related work experience and strong, supportive letters of recommendation. If you are unable to find a paid job in nutrition, volunteer to work in the nutrition department of your local hospital or with the WIC Program, Cooperative Extension, school lunch program or Meals on Wheels program. Your county health department may have health promotion programs where volunteers are welcome. If you have a food company or a food service related business near you, check to see if internships are available. The National Association of College and University Food Service (NACUFS) and the contract foodservice organizations, Sodexo-Marriott and ARAMARK, have summer internships. Public relations and marketing experience is valuable. Volunteering in a soup kitchen or a food pantry or with an after-school program can be a good experience. Often volunteer positions lead to paid positions - never underestimate the influence of the contacts you make. In addition, your supervisors may be willing to write letters of reference for you for your internship application.

It is wise to join the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics as a Student Member. This shows commitment to the profession of dietetics. Once you join, you will have access to many benefits, including the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a research journal, access to the online student newsletter and free access to Academy’s Evidence Analysis Library. You can subscribe, for free, to “On the Pulse”, an e-mail newsletter about legislative issues important to dietetics. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation has many scholarships that are awarded to students in dietetics programs every year. Only Academy members are eligible for these scholarships. Paid membership fees also cover your membership to an affiliate (typically state) of Academy. Typically students choose state dietetic association membership where they live or go to school. For membership forms and information go to www.eatright.org and click on “Join Academy.”
The Academy website also provides excellent information pertaining to preparation for supervised practice and applying to dietetic internships. Visit www.eatright.org/ACEND for computer matching for links to these helpful topics:

- Programs Participating in Dietetic Internship Centralized Application System
- FAQ: Top 10 Questions about Computer Matching for Dietetic Internships (DIs)
- Availability of Dietetic Internship Positions
- Suggestions to Improve Your Chances at Getting a Dietetic-Internship Position
- Computer Matching: Applicant Responsibilities
- Video for Dietetic Internship Centralized Application System

For more information on the field of dietetics, it is recommended that you read Winterfeldt, E., Bogle, M., Ebro, L. Dietetics: Practice and Future Trends, 3rd edition, 2010, Jones and Bartlett, Inc. This book provides an excellent overview on the history and current issues and opportunities in the field of dietetics. The book is available in the campus store in the fall. You may also order it on-line.