



**Welcome Preceptors!** Thank you for agreeing to work with a Utah State University dietetics student as they complete a minimum of 1000 hours of supervised experiential learning to qualify for the RD Exam. The Utah State University Dietetic Master of Dietetics Administration is an accelerated 1-year program that combines a master's degree in leadership and management and supervised experiential learning. We appreciate your contributions to students and the profession. Those of you who are new to working with our program, welcome! If you have worked with our students before, welcome back! With your time, energy, and invaluable knowledge and experience, we can prepare future dietitians. You have an important impact on our students, and we appreciate you going above and beyond your regular duties to provide experiences for them.

## USU MDA Mission

The mission of the Utah State University Master of Dietetics Administration is to prepare entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists in a distance format to empower them to be future leaders through learning, critical thinking, discovery, and engagement who utilize their experience and individual perspectives to improve the health and well-being of the communities they serve.

## Goals and Objectives

Please review the USU MDA program goals:

- Program Goal #1: USU MDA graduates will demonstrate competence in the knowledge and skills required of entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists.
- Program Goal #2: USU MDA graduates will participate in nutrition and dietetics-related leadership opportunities within the communities they serve.

Specific objectives used to measure the achievement of the USU MDA goals can be found on the website at <https://caas.usu.edu/mda/mission-goals>

The USU MDA was recently reorganized from our historic Dietetic Internship. The Dietetic Internship was founded and accredited in 1999, and we are a leader in online and distance dietetics education. In 2022, the program was reorganized to a Future Education Model under the accreditation standards of the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). This unique model allows us to offer this accelerated program. Each year, we accept up to 50 students. We have three full-time faculty members, two teaching assistants who are registered dietitians, and a full-time contracts specialist dedicated to our program and student success. Our program is based in Salt Lake City, Utah, but we train students nationwide. At the end of the program, students will earn a master's degree in Dietetics Administration focused on leadership and management in all areas of dietetics.

## Rotations and Schedules

Each student's schedule is unique, and students work directly with preceptors to finalize their rotation dates. The required supervised experiential learning hours for USU MDA students is 1080 hours. These hours are completed in the fall and spring semesters of each academic year (August-May). The rotations provide students with a diverse range of hands-on and in-depth experiences and prepare them for entry-level work in all areas of dietetics. Students are expected to be in rotations full-time, 40 hours per week.

The rotation types and distribution of hours are as follows:

Clinical	520 hours	13 weeks
Food Service Management	320 hours	8 weeks
Community	160 hours	4 weeks
Master Project	80 hours	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1080 hours</b>	

The USU MDA also provides students with additional learning activities such as worksheets, lectures, modules, case studies, quizzes, and comprehensive exams on various nutrition topics. These are intended to prepare them for rotations, the RD Exam, and future practice. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out. We are always available to answer your questions and provide support for both students and preceptors. **Contact information is below.** We also have a team member who manages all the affiliation agreements and student requirements.

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## Preceptor Expectations

Preceptors should provide students with an orientation to the facility at the beginning of the rotation. The orientation should include a general overview of the experience, how the student should communicate with preceptors, the facility dress code, where to find necessary policies/procedures, an overview of accessibility to areas of the facility the student will be working in, expected daily arrival and departure times, general anticipated daily schedule, required facility identification tags or materials, patient chart access and documentation procedures, access to facility resources and any other information that will help the rotation run smoothly. We also encourage preceptors to provide specific guidance related to expectations for student learning at your facility.

As a preceptor, you will guide, and mentor students related to your knowledge, skills, and abilities. Dietetics students are enthusiastic and excited to take this step in their education. They are intelligent and have gained experience in an academic setting. Some have relevant work experience in dietetics-related positions, and others bring skills they have gained in other capacities. Although many have had limited opportunities to work with patients or clients, they are eager to apply their knowledge to real-life situations. As you guide the students, provide opportunities for them to put their knowledge into practice and strengthen their problem-solving skills. Help them build their foundation of knowledge and consider the “why” behind the decisions. Working with you will help them build confidence and assurance in their abilities. Students also like to know about resources (Nutrition Care Manual, guidelines, book, journals) that are generally used in your area of dietetics.

We encourage you to share your perspectives about being a dietitian, manager, or director in your current role as well as past professional positions. You can help the student identify the information that is essential to their future career as a dietitian and additional professional insight you have gained with experience. Students benefit most from preceptors who are accessible, observant, provide regular constructive feedback, and evaluate performance objectively. Your unique perspective is valuable as students embark on their careers.

## Competency-based Education

Traditional education programs primarily use a time-based learning and training approach with a focus on the successful completion of the required courses and internship hours. Competency-based education is a system where core competency levels must be achieved and demonstrated by the students. In a competency-based education (CBE) framework, the focus is on defining and measuring progress toward reaching the required competencies (the described knowledge, skill, judgment, and attributes) needed to perform professionally related functions. All USU MDA students have a curriculum they will complete as part of their supervised experiential learning hours. The competencies are the drivers behind the organization of the curricula and the learning assessments. Since the USU MDA is a Future Education Model, we place additional emphasis on

learning experiences and assessments. Preceptors conduct some of these assessments through evaluations, and some assessments are conducted by faculty.

## Teaching Approaches

Being an effective preceptor and mentor to college students requires a combination of teaching skills, empathy, and fostering a positive learning environment. Here are three essential teaching principles to help you become a better preceptor and mentor:

- 1- **Active and Engaged Learning:** Encourage active learning strategies that involve students in the learning process rather than just passively receiving information. Facilitate hands-on experiences to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Encourage students to ask questions and explore topics further. Active learning not only enhances retention and understanding but also fosters a sense of ownership in their education.
- 2- **Individualized Support and Feedback:** Recognize that each student has unique strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. Tailor your approach to meet individual needs and provide personalized support. Regularly offer constructive feedback to help students improve their skills and knowledge. Create an open and non-judgmental atmosphere where students feel comfortable seeking guidance and discussing their challenges. Remember that constructive feedback should be specific, actionable, and delivered with a focus on improvement.
- 3- **Modeling Professionalism and Growth:** Lead by example and demonstrate professionalism in your interactions with students. Show respect, patience, and empathy in your communication and behavior. Encourage a growth mindset by emphasizing that mistakes are opportunities for learning and development. Share your own experiences of overcoming challenges and how you continue to learn and grow in your field. This openness to growth will inspire students to embrace lifelong learning and professional development.

## Additional Preceptor Resources

The USU MDA website has a variety of preceptor resources available, including various resources and preceptor training, support videos, program curriculum, evaluations, and program policies. We also send out a preceptor newsletter twice a year.

For registered dietitians, there are CPEU opportunities for being a preceptor. The website links to a preceptor training produced by CDR that can be completed for free CPEUs. Additionally, CDR has approved CPEU credits for preceptors. Information for both opportunities is available on the website.

Preceptor Website: <https://caas.usu.edu/mda/preceptors>.

## Strategies to Recognize and Monitor Bias

The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics requires that program preceptors be trained on strategies to recognize and monitor biases and reduce instances of microaggressions and discrimination. As mentioned, the USU MDA website contains preceptor training videos, one of which includes specific information on fostering diverse viewpoints and recognizing implicit bias. We ask you to review [this video](#) and contact us if questions arise.

## Implications Due to COVID-19

Because COVID-19 has affected dietetic programs, healthcare facilities, community agencies, and schools nationwide, we understand that rotation dates and training methods may be impacted. If virtual work is

necessary to complete rotation requirements, we are happy to work together to make these accommodations. We welcome open communication regarding rotation adjustments, as well as any COVID policies your facility might have in place, so we can support the health and safety of students, preceptors, and clients, as well as facility compliance. We do ask that students be onsite as much as possible, as this facilitates better learning. The student should not ask to work remotely at any time unless it has been planned ahead of time with program approval.

## Accreditation

The USU MDA is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics is the accrediting agency for education programs preparing students for careers as registered dietitian nutritionists. For more information about ACEND please refer to ACEND's website: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/>.

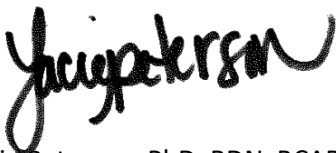
Effective January 1, 2024, the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) will require a minimum of a Master's degree to be eligible for the credentialing exam to become a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN). In addition, CDR requires completion of coursework and supervised practice in program(s) accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). In some states, graduates also must obtain certification to practice. If you would like to learn more about the changes to dietetics education, please refer to the ACEND website: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/public-notice-and-announcements/acend-update>

## Contact Us

Thank you again for your willingness to share your knowledge and expertise with our students. The USU MDA faculty is available for assistance and to answer questions or concerns at any time. We want to ensure that each of our preceptors has the support they need as they work with USU MDA students. Please contact us if there is anything we can do to support you in your role as a preceptor.

Sincerely,

Utah State University MDA Faculty



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