Master of Dietetics Administration (MDA) Assessment Report 2026

Pre-RD Master of Dietetics Administration

Program Overview and Accreditation Standards

The Pre-RD Master of Dietetics Administration (MDA) program prepares graduates for entry-level practice as registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) through an integrated curriculum combining graduate coursework, supervised experiential learning (SEL), and leadership development.

The program is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) under the Future Education Model (FEM) standards. Students must demonstrate competence in 39 competencies and more than 250 performance indicators encompassing clinical nutrition, community nutrition, foodservice management, leadership, and professional practice. The current FEM accreditation standards remain in effect through the transition to the 2027 accreditation standards, scheduled for implementation on August 1, 2027.

Program faculty work collaboratively with preceptors and industry partners to assess student performance throughout the curriculum and supervised experiential learning experiences. Preceptors evaluate students on applicable competencies, while faculty assess achievement through coursework, assignments, projects, and other performance-based assessments. Students must demonstrate competence in 100% of required competencies and performance indicators to successfully complete the program.

Program outcomes are evaluated annually to ensure continued compliance with accreditation requirements and identify opportunities for curricular and operational improvement. Assessment findings also inform the program's annual reporting to ACEND.

Program Goals and Outcomes

The program director conducts an annual systematic evaluation of program goals and objectives. Outcomes are reviewed by program faculty to assess program effectiveness, identify trends, and guide continuous quality improvement.

Program Enrollment and Trends

Graduated Cohorts:

MDA Cohort	No. of Applications	No. of students	Completion time 1 year	Completion time > 1 year	Total students graduating	Percent of students graduating in 1 year
2023-2024	54	35	35	0	35/35	100%
2024-2025	61	38	37	1	37/38	97%
2025-2026	72	38	37	1	37/38*	97%
*This student plans to complete the program but needs additional time.						

Current Cohort:

MDA Cohort	No. of Applications	No. of students	Completion time 1 year	Completion time > 1 year	Total students graduating	Percent of students graduating in 1 year
2026-2027	77	38	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

Program Outcomes

Program Goal #1: USU MDA graduates will demonstrate competence in the knowledge and skills required of entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists.	
Objective 1.1: At least 80% of program students complete program requirements within 1.5 years (150% of the planned program length).	2023-2024 35/35 100% 2024-2025 37/38 97% 2025-2026 37/38 97% 2026-2027 **/38
Objective 1.2: At least 80% of program graduates take the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within 12 months of program completion.	2023-2024 35/35 100% 2024-2025 37/37 100% 2025-2026 **/38 2026-2027 **/38 **Outcomes not yet available
Objective 1.3: The program's one-year pass rate (graduates who pass the registration exam within one year of first attempt) on the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists is at least 80%.	2023-2024 26/29 90% 2024-2025 36/37 97% 2025-2026 **/38 2026-2027 **/38 **Outcomes not yet available
Objective 1.4: Of graduates who seek employment, at least 80% are employed in nutrition and dietetics or related fields within 12 months of graduation.	2023-2024 29/32 91% 2024-2025 35/35 100% 2025-2026 **/38 2026-2026 **/38 **Outcomes not yet available
Objective 1.5: At least 80% of the employers who respond to the employer survey will indicate they are satisfied with their employees' (USU MDA graduates') preparation for entry-level practice.	2023-2024 100% 2024-2025 100% 2025-2026 ** 2026-2027 ** **Outcomes not yet available
Objective 1.6: At least 80% of graduates will rate themselves as competent and prepared for entry-level dietetics practice.	2023-2024 32/33^ 97% 2024-2025 25/25^ 100% 2025-2026 **/38 2026-2027 **/38 **Outcomes not yet available ^ Based on responses from 1-year graduation survey.
Program Goal #2: USU MDA graduates will participate in nutrition and dietetics-related leadership opportunities within the communities they serve.	

Objective 2.1: At program completion, 80% of graduates will score higher on the leadership attributes self-assessment compared to the pre-program leadership attributes self-assessment. # Leadership assessment results include students from previous cohorts who completed program requirements in a subsequent academic year, resulting in differences from cohort completion numbers.	2023-2024 34/35 97% 2024-2025 37/38 97% 2025-2026 39/39# 100% 2026-2027 **/38 **Outcomes not yet available
Objective 2.2: Within one year of graduation, 50% of graduates who respond to the one-year follow-up survey will report feeling competent in serving in a nutrition and/or dietetics-related leadership position.	2023-2024 33/33^ 100% 2024-2025 19/26^ 73% 2025-2026 **/38 2026-2027 **/38 **Outcomes not yet available ^ Based on responses from 1-year graduation survey.

Annual Assessment

The 2026 program assessment demonstrates that the Pre-RD MDA program continues to meet or exceed all established benchmarks for which outcome data are available. Program completion rates have remained at or above 97% over the past three years, exceeding the 80% benchmark. Graduates continue to demonstrate strong outcomes in registration examination participation (100%), one-year examination pass rates (90–97%), employment (91–100%), employer satisfaction (100%), and self-reported preparedness for entry-level practice (97–100%). Leadership development remains a program strength, with 97–100% of students demonstrating improvement in leadership attributes during the program. Although graduates' self-reported confidence in serving in leadership positions declined from 100% to 73%, the results continue to exceed the established 50% benchmark. This decline will be monitored to identify opportunities to strengthen the application of leadership skills in professional practice. Overall, assessment findings indicate that the program effectively prepares graduates for entry-level dietetics practice while supporting leadership development. Program faculty will continue to use student outcomes, graduate surveys, employer feedback, and preceptor evaluations to guide curricular improvements, strengthen clinical preparation, and support registration examination success.

Program Assessment and Continuous Improvement

Program faculty systematically review student outcomes, course evaluations, supervised experiential learning assessments, preceptor feedback, and graduate survey findings to evaluate curriculum effectiveness.

Assessment findings are discussed by MDA faculty and used to identify opportunities for improvement. Changes are prioritized based on student learning needs, accreditation requirements, evolving professional practice expectations, and feedback from community and clinical partners.

Program modifications are documented and incorporated into curriculum planning and implementation for subsequent academic years.

Data-Driven Program Improvements: 2026

1. Clinical Skills Preparation and Orientation
The MDA program continues to strengthen clinical skills preparation during orientation to support student readiness for supervised experiential learning. Clinical skills instruction includes participation by RDN-credentialed guest speakers who contribute professional expertise and practical demonstrations. This hands-on training remains a highly valued component of orientation. Based on prior clinical evaluations and student feedback, the program expanded orientation instruction to include additional content addressing differences between inpatient and outpatient nutrition education.

Impact and ongoing assessment: These changes are intended to improve student confidence, clinical readiness, and adaptability as they transition into supervised practice. Future evaluations will examine student perceptions of preparedness and preceptor feedback regarding clinical performance.

2. Registration Examination Preparation
The program continues to evaluate strategies to support graduates' success on the CDR registration examination. Historically, faculty conducted individual pre-graduation meetings with students to review examination preparation, study strategies, and employment planning.

The program revised this approach by adding group preparation sessions and educational resources on evidence-informed study methods. A dedicated study strategies module was also added to the curriculum.

Impact and ongoing assessment: These changes are intended to promote more consistent examination preparation, strengthen independent study skills, and provide equitable access to examination preparation resources. The program will continue to monitor examination participation and pass rates to evaluate effectiveness.

3. Preparation for the 2027 ACEND Accreditation Standards
During 2026, the program began preparing for the transition to the 2027 ACEND accreditation standards. This work includes reviewing anticipated changes in competencies, curriculum expectations, and assessment requirements to identify necessary updates to coursework and supervised experiential learning experiences.

Impact and ongoing assessment: Early preparation will support an organized transition to the new standards while maintaining continuity in student learning, assessment, and accreditation compliance.

4. Supervised Experiential Learning and Preceptor Partnerships
The program continues to maintain and strengthen its network of clinical, community, and foodservice preceptors to support student learning across diverse practice settings. In 2026,

faculty continued reviewing preceptor resources, learning expectations, and assessment processes to promote consistency across supervised experiential learning sites.

Impact and ongoing assessment: These efforts support clear expectations for students and preceptors, consistent competency evaluation, and continued access to supervised practice experiences.

Pre-RD MDA Priorities for 2027

The program will focus on maintaining strong student outcomes while responding to evolving accreditation and professional practice expectations.

Priorities include:

1. Implementing curriculum and assessment revisions required by the 2027 ACEND accreditation standards.
2. Continuing to strengthen clinical preparation and readiness for supervised experiential learning.
3. Evaluating the effectiveness of registration examination preparation resources and identifying opportunities for targeted student support.
4. Monitoring graduate leadership competence and strengthening opportunities for practical leadership application.
5. Expanding and maintaining preceptor partnerships to support student placement and program sustainability.
6. Continuing systematic review of program outcomes, graduate feedback, and employer satisfaction.

Post-RD Master of Dietetics Administration

Program Overview

The Post-RD Master of Dietetics Administration program offers practicing registered dietitian nutritionists the opportunity to earn a master's degree focused on leadership, management, and administration in nutrition and dietetics. The program is designed for credentialed professionals seeking to advance their knowledge, strengthen leadership competencies, and expand professional opportunities.

Unlike the Pre-RD MDA pathway, the Post-RD program serves students who have already earned the RDN credential and focuses on professional advancement rather than preparation for entry-level practice. The program provides flexibility for working professionals through online graduate coursework and an applied quality improvement or leadership project.

Program Leadership and Administrative Transition

In July 2026, the Post-RD MDA program experienced a significant leadership transition following the passing of Dr. Martha Archuleta, who had directed the program for many years. Dr. Lacie Peterson, director of the Pre-RD MDA program, assumed responsibility for the Post-RD MDA program.

This transition brought both MDA pathways under unified leadership, creating opportunities to strengthen coordination, improve administrative efficiency, align related curricular and assessment processes, and **support** long-term program sustainability. The programs continue to maintain distinct educational objectives and learning outcomes appropriate to their respective student populations.

Program Enrollment and Trends

Enrollment in the Post-RD MDA program has declined in recent years, largely reflecting changes in the dietetics education pathway at Utah State University. Historically, approximately 90% of Post-RD MDA students were graduates of the USU Dietetic Internship, with many enrolling immediately or within two years of internship completion.

The final USU Dietetic Internship cohort graduated in 2023 as the university transitioned to the integrated Pre-RD MDA model. Consequently, the traditional pipeline of Dietetic Internship graduates entering the Post-RD program has decreased.

The program has demonstrated strong historical degree completion outcomes, with approximately half of students completing within one year and most completing within two years. Some cohorts, particularly those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced longer completion timelines.

		Years to Completion									
MDA Cohort start	# students	1	1.33	1.67	2	2.33	2.67	3+	Continuing	% graduating at 1 year	% graduating within 2 years
Fall 2012	9	6	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	67%	89%
Fall 2013	12	8	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	67%	92%
Fal 2014	11	5	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	45%	100%
Fall 2015	31	17	7	4	1	1	1	0	0	55%	94%
Fall 2016	25	13	5	6	0	0	0	1	0	52%	96%
Fall 2017	19	6	3	3	4	1	1	1	0	32%	84%
Fall 2018	33	18	4	2	3	1	1	3	0	55%	82%
Fall 2019	36	16	9	1	4	1	2	3	0	44%	83%
Fall 2020	26	6	3	5	0	4	1	6	1	23%	54%
Fall 2021	29	13	7	3	3	3	0	0	0	45%	90%
Fall 2022	19	8	6	2	1	0	0	1	1	42%	84%
Fall 2023	18	12	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	67%	94%
Fall 2024	23	8	0	9	0	1	5		14	39%	
Fall 2025	15	5									
Fall 2026	5										
Total (2012-2026)	**311**	**141**	**50**	**40**	**21**	**13**	**12**	**15**	**17**	**45%**	**87%**

311	Total # students including current cohort
292	Total # grads (2012 cohort thru 2023 cohort graduates)
13.67	Average cohort size for past 3 years

Assessment: The enrollment decline reflects a structural change in the university's dietetics education pathways rather than an established decline in student satisfaction or educational effectiveness.

The smaller entering cohorts, however, highlight the need to develop new recruitment strategies and increase awareness of the program among practicing RDNs who did not complete their dietetics education at USU.

Revised Program Outcomes: Effective Fall 2026

Beginning in Fall 2026, the Post-RD MDA program implemented revised programmatic outcomes to better reflect its purpose of supporting leadership development, professional growth, and career advancement among credentialed dietitians.

Goal #1: USU Post-RD MDA graduates will demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to advance their careers and effectively serve in leadership, management, and administrative roles within nutrition and dietetics.	
Objective 1. Degree Completion: At least 80% of students who enroll in the Post-RD MDA program will complete their degree within 2 years of beginning MDA coursework.	
Objective 2. Student Satisfaction: At least 80% of graduating students responding to the exit survey will report that the MDA program met their professional development goals.	
Objective 3. Leadership Competency: At least 75% of graduates responding to the one-year follow-up survey will report feeling competent to serve in a nutrition- and/or dietetics-related leadership or management position.	
Objective 4. Career Advancement: At least 25% of graduates responding to the one-year follow-up survey will report professional advancement through a promotion, expanded job responsibilities, new leadership opportunities, or increased professional influence.	

Post-RD MDA Program Assessment and Improvements: 2026

1. Unified Program Leadership

The transition of leadership in 2026 created an opportunity to review the administrative structure of the Pre-RD and Post-RD MDA pathways. Program leadership began identifying opportunities to coordinate faculty resources, improve student communication, streamline administrative processes, and align assessment practices where appropriate.

Expected impact: Improved administrative efficiency, consistent student support, and stronger coordination across the two programs.

2. Revision of Program Goals and Objectives

The program revised its outcomes to more directly measure degree completion, student satisfaction, leadership competence, and professional advancement. These revised measures provide a more meaningful assessment of program effectiveness for students who already hold the RDN credential.

Expected impact: Improved ability to demonstrate the program's contribution to professional development and identify opportunities for curriculum improvement.

3. Recruitment and Program Sustainability
The decline in enrollment following the conclusion of the traditional Dietetic Internship pathway highlights the importance of developing new recruitment strategies. The program will evaluate opportunities to reach practicing RDNs through professional networks, employer partnerships, and outreach emphasizing the program's online format, leadership focus, and relevance to career advancement.

Expected impact: Greater awareness of the Post-RD MDA program among credentialed dietitians beyond the traditional USU Dietetic Internship pipeline.

Post-RD MDA Priorities for 2027
The program's primary priorities are to strengthen enrollment, maintain strong degree completion outcomes, and demonstrate measurable professional benefits for graduates. Priorities include:

1. Implementing the revised program assessment framework and collecting baseline data.
2. Establishing consistent cohort tracking and degree completion reporting.
3. Evaluating student satisfaction and the program's contribution to professional development.
4. Strengthening recruitment among practicing RDNs outside the traditional USU Dietetic Internship pipeline.
5. Continuing to improve student advising, academic planning, and completion support.
6. Evaluating opportunities for administrative efficiency and curriculum coordination across both MDA pathways.

Overall 2026 Assessment and Conclusions

The 2026 assessment demonstrates continued strength in the Utah State University Master of Dietetics Administration programs. The Pre-RD MDA program continues to exceed established benchmarks for program completion, registration examination participation and performance, employment, employer satisfaction, and leadership development in the reporting periods with available data.

These findings support the effectiveness of the program's competency-based curriculum and supervised experiential learning model. The Post-RD MDA program experienced a significant administrative transition in 2026 while maintaining its focus on leadership development and professional advancement for credentialed dietitians.