



Pre-Nutrition and Dietetics Track Basics

Mercer University undergraduate students who plan to pursue a career as a Registered Dietician (RD) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) may follow these guidelines to pursue their chosen path.

Credentialing as RD or RDN requires that applicants pass an examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). Eligibility to take this exam requires: a) a master's degree from a US regionally accredited institution; AND b) completion of an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) accredited Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) plus 1100 of supervised experiential learning in an ACEND accredited program; OR c) completion of an ACEND accredited Coordinated (CP) or Graduate Program (GP), which includes 1100 of supervised experiential learning. Licensure is not required in many states but is often preferred. **RDs and RDNs are required to hold an advanced degree (master's or higher), in order to be eligible to take the CDR's licensure exam.** More information about the field of dietetics and nutrition can be found on the <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dietitians-and-nutritionists.htm#tab-4> or on the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (<https://www.eatrightpro.org>).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median income of dietitians and nutritionists in 2024 was over \$73,000 and there is a positive outlook for the field: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dietitians-and-nutritionists.htm>.

Mercer does not have an ACEND-accredited Dietetics & Nutrition program, so Mercer students will earn a bachelor's degree in a field of their choice before matriculating into a graduate program. Given the upcoming credentialing requirement for RDs and RDNs to hold a graduate degree, Mercer students will not find themselves at a disadvantage. **Students interested in becoming an RD or RDN should investigate the different ACEND accredited graduate or coordinated programs available and make themselves aware of the particular requirements for the programs in which they are interested.** Prospective Dietetic & Nutrition students must therefore plan to fulfill the requirements for their chosen academic major as well as the specific pre-requisite courses for their preferred graduate school(s).

The Ideal Dietetics & Nutrition Graduate School Candidate. Students must plan ahead carefully in order to create a competitive application "portfolio" during their undergraduate years. This means taking the appropriate coursework, performing well academically, and participating in appropriate extracurricular activities that will develop the skills and characteristics required of a successful graduate school applicant.

Students should bear in mind that graduate schools in this field are looking for individuals with the following characteristics:

- a strong academic background with a firm foundation in the sciences (high GPA's in rigorous coursework);
- good reasoning ability and strong critical thinking skills;
- strong interpersonal skills, able to connect well with people from various backgrounds;
- compassion and a commitment to service;
- excellent communication skills (both written and oral);
- strong leadership skills but with the ability to work well on a team;
- a good base of knowledge about occupational therapy and the health care field in general;
- integrity and high ethical standards;
- a positive attitude, able to function effectively under stress; and
- competitive Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores.

Developing a Back-Up Plan. Because graduate studies in Dietetics & Nutrition is challenging and graduate schools are so selective, students should develop an alternative plan to implement in the event that adequate progress is not made or acceptance to graduate school is not achieved.

An effective back-up plan is one that addresses any perceived “weak spots” in an applicant’s portfolio. For example, it would be appropriate for a student with GPA’s below 3.4 to take more classes and earn high grades before applying again to graduate schools school, while a student with high grades and very little extracurricular experience should spend more time working or volunteering in a relevant setting before applying again.

Students without a strong desire to follow this career path should consider a complete change of career goals; they may investigate other options and consult with advisors in the Center for Career & Professional Development (Mercer-Macon) and Erin Smith, the Pre-Graduate School Advisor, in the Office of Academic & Advising Services.

Post-baccalaureate steps: How to become an RDN (Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics, 2025)

Become a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

- ❑ **Complete a minimum of a master's degree** granted by a college or university accredited by a U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agency or foreign equivalent, and coursework through an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics accredited Didactic, Coordinated, Graduate or International program.
- ❑ **Complete required supervised practice/experience** through an ACEND-accredited Dietetic Internship, Coordinated Program, Graduate Program, or an Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway offered through an ACEND-accredited program.
- ❑ **Pass a national examination** administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). For more information regarding the examination, refer to [CDR's website](#).
- ❑ **Meet the requirements to practice in your state.** Many states have regulatory laws (i.e. licensure) for food and nutrition practitioners. All states accept the RDN credential for state licensure purposes.
- ❑ **Stay up-to-date in dietetics through continuing education.** After successfully passing the national exam and earning the credential, RDNs maintain ongoing professional development in order to stay up to date on the latest research, recommendations, and best practices.