

Dietetic Internship Program

The St. Louis Department of Veterans Affairs Dietetic Internship is a 42-1/2 week “on-the-job” training program with a concentration in **“Health Promotion to Chronic Disease Management”**. The curriculum combines both classroom and supervised practice experiences which prepare graduates to assume a variety of entry level roles in the field of dietetics. Learning activities include experiences in: Administrative Management of food service, clinical MNT and NFPE, community advocacy and cultural competence. Interns also establish and monitor personal goals for professional development throughout the Program and are matched with a mentor.

A **21-month graduate program** is available online through the University of Alabama (UA). Interns complete 18 credit hours over 2-3 semesters and can work full time, if desired, during the first year of the program. The final 2 semesters (12 credit hours) are completed at the VA St. Louis Health Care System along with the supervised practice and includes a stipend. Financial aid is available through UA. Interns graduate with a Master of Science degree in Human Nutrition and a verification statement, ready to take the RD exam. **Interns with a master’s degree** may complete only the supervised practice work in St. Louis, receive the stipend, and graduate with the verification statement, ready to take the registration examination for dietitians (RD exam).

Interns spend eight hours a week in the classroom and 32 hours per week in **hands-on** rotation settings. Additional time above the scheduled hours is necessary for rotation preparation, projects and class assignments, professional meetings, and other program-related activities.

Interns complete a variety of projects throughout the Program for the VAMC, including writing articles, newsletters, and specialized education materials, a NNM health fair booth, a health promotion proposal, a Quality Improvement project, journal club, and a case study.

Field trips to Jefferson City for Legislative Day and a bio-agriculture research facility, along with workshops on pediatrics, TPN/EN, NFPE, MI, and Whole Health are annual events.

Orientation

Orientation begins in early/mid-August. A variety of classes are presented to prepare interns for the rotations.

Program Rotations

The clinical settings provide opportunities for the application of knowledge and development of skills while working with a complex patient (mostly adult) population.



The clinical patient care rotations include:

- Cardiology
- Renal & Oncology
- Outpatient Clinic
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Medicine
- Health Promotion Disease Prevention
- Surgery & Nutrition Support
- Geriatrics & Hospice
- Psychiatry & Substance Abuse
- Home Based Primary Care
- Clinical Staff Relief

Interns participate in multidisciplinary teams, develop individual counseling and group teaching skills, attend medical and wound rounds, and learn to provide patient centered care using a unified health communication approach. **Community experiences include** St. Louis Area Food Bank or Operation Food Search and WIC, as well as volunteering at local organizations. Infrequent evenings will be part of the rotation schedule.

The NFS Administrative Management rotation emphasizes learning advanced food prep managerial skills, including food production, food service systems, and labor relations, as well as commercial cafeteria management (VCS). Intern teams produce a themed meal, learn QI/QM report writing, complete a QI waste project and serve as a food service supervisor for “NFS staff relief”.

Program Completion

The dietetic internship is accredited by ACEND. For admission to the internship the applicant must be a U.S. citizen, hold a bachelor or master’s degree from an accredited college/university or be accepted to UA’s graduate program, and have a minimum Overall GPA of 3.0. Interns applying to the graduate program must be accepted prior to matching with our program.

Application packets must be submitted online as outlined by DICAS. There is no separate fee to apply to the VA. Applications are evaluated by a Committee for academic achievement, extracurricular activities, references, volunteer and work-related experiences, personal attributes, and professional goals and interests that are in line with the program concentration. Telephone performance-based interviews are conducted with the final candidates. We participate in computerized matching in April of each year with D & D Digital. A maximum of six interns are appointed annually.



The Program is completed in late May/early June when the intern has satisfied all learning objectives and competencies within the established levels of performance and demonstrated entry-level knowledge, skills and abilities during the final four weeks in a self-selected clinical staff relief area. Graduates are then eligible to take the registration examination for dietitians.

The Program exceeds the ACEND pass rate on the registration examination at 100% during the first year and 100% of our graduates are employed in the dietetics profession within 12 months of graduation, including in the VA Health Care System nationwide.

Medical Center and Community

The St. Louis VA Medical Center (VAMC) is a state-of-the-art tertiary care medical facility consisting of two separate hospitals under one management. The VA Health Care System provides comprehensive care for Veterans in both inpatient and outpatient settings. There are approximately 400 hospital beds and 105 community living and domiciliary beds between the two divisions. The medical center provides over 300,000 outpatient visits per year. The medical center has active educational affiliations with several medical, nursing, pharmacy, and other professional associated health training programs.

The John Cochran (JC) Division is the main hospital, located in mid-town St. Louis. Patient care includes acute medical care, surgical and specialty care areas.



The (JB) Jefferson Barracks Division is 18 miles southeast of the JC division. The major focus at JB is spinal cord injury and rehab services, psychiatry, chemical dependency services,



a community living center (LTC), the Domiciliary, and the food production kitchen and offices. It also houses the Geriatric research offices, education classrooms, Veteran Canteen Service (VCS) offices, and an outpatient clinic. The JB Division is also the location of the dietetic internship offices. The majority of learning activities are within the two divisions of the medical center. Some rotations are located at community agencies and VA outpatient facilities (CBOC) in the metropolitan area.

The St. Louis VAMC is a vital part of a diverse community which includes many Fortune 500 companies, sports teams, museums, performing arts centers, and many historic and leisure attractions.

Financial Considerations

Interns are paid a stipend bi-weekly during the supervised practice portion of the internship program. Ten paid vacation days and 9 Federal holidays are included. Financial aid is available through the University of Alabama.



Anticipated expenses during the program:

- Room and board (secured on your own)
- Registration fees and expenses for professional meetings (when they occur in St. Louis)
- Transportation and parking for field experiences
- Student membership dues for the Academy and AND-STL, the local dietetic association
- Personal expenses and health insurance (if desired)
- Professional Liability insurance
- University of Alabama tuition and fees

For additional information contact:

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<http://www.nhm.ches.ua.edu/masters-in-human-nutrition.html>

