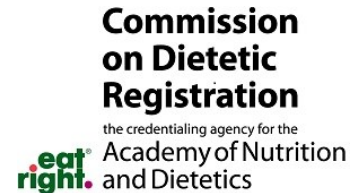


Graduate Degree Registration Eligibility Requirement

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

February 2020



This FAQ is intended to provide you with answers to questions you may have regarding the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) action to change the degree requirement for dietitian registration eligibility from a baccalaureate degree effective January 1, 2024. This action is based on the recommendations of the Council on Future Practice Visioning Report released in Fall 2012. The full report is available at the following link:

http://cdrnet.org/pub/file.cfm?item_type=xm_file&id=10369.

Several of the recommendations directly relate to CDR's role as the credentialing agency for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Recommendations 1 and 2 specifically address the requirements for eligibility to take the entry-level registration examination for dietitians.

Recommendation #1

Elevate the educational preparation for the future entry-level RD to a minimum of a graduate degree from an ACEND-accredited program.

Recommendation #2

Recommend that ACEND require an ACEND-accredited graduate degree program and/or consortium that integrates both the academic coursework and supervised practice components into a seamless (1-step) program as a requirement to obtain the future entry-level RD credential.

As the credentialing agency for the Academy, CDR is charged in the Academy *Bylaws* with the establishment of registration eligibility requirements for its certifications. *Excerpt from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Bylaws, January 7, 2012 Article VII Section 2.*

Section 2. Commission on Dietetic Registration ("CDR").

Purpose Statement: CDR has sole and independent authority in all matters pertaining to certification...establish and evaluate requirements, standards, policies and procedures for certification programs, including eligibility, reinstatement, examination and recertification for all levels of dietetics practice (e.g., entry, specialty and advanced level practice).

At its April 2013 meeting, CDR took the following action:

Move to change the entry-level registration eligibility education requirements for dietitians, beginning in 2024, from a baccalaureate degree to a minimum of a graduate degree. A graduate degree includes a master's degree, practice

doctorate, doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., D.Sc.) All other entry-level dietitian registration eligibility requirements remain the same.

1. Why did CDR change the degree requirement for entry-level registration eligibility to a graduate degree?

CDR's vote to change the entry-level registration eligibility education requirements for dietitians, beginning in 2024, from a baccalaureate degree to a minimum of a graduate degree addresses Recommendation # 1 in the Visioning Report. The Visioning Report provides the following rationale for this recommendation.

- The need to elevate entry-level RD education to a graduate level is consistent with the knowledge, skills, and research base required in the field of nutrition and dietetics and is necessary to protect the public, remain competitive, and increase recognition and respect. Furthermore, Collier found that graduate degree requirements do not deter student interest in a health professions career (24).
- Almost all other health care professions have increased entry-level educational standards based on expansion of knowledge and need for deeper and wider expertise; further, level of education is a factor that influences respect as a valued member of the healthcare team (5). Too often, RDs at any level are seen as assisting in, rather than leading, the nutrition care process, a perception that may affect career advancement (19).
- In 2011, participants in a joint meeting of CFP, ACEND, and CDR agreed that increasing degree requirements for entry into the profession to a graduate degree—either a master's degree or practice doctorate—along with developing a new credential for DPD program baccalaureate graduates, would elevate practice at all levels of the profession (10).
- One theme that emerged from the CFP educator survey indicated that dietetics educators support a graduate degree for entry into the profession, as well (14). It has been observed that health care professionals with advanced degrees tend to have higher self-esteem and attain a higher profile within the profession as writers, researchers, and leaders (1).
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicates that many dietitians have advanced degrees and that employment of dietitians is expected to increase 20% from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations (20).
- In 2010, RD salaries were 40-45% less than salaries of other non-physician health professionals (21). Education beyond the bachelor's degree continues to be associated with hourly wage gains. In 2011, the difference between the median wage of RDs with a master's degree and those with a bachelor's degree was \$2.41/hour (approximately \$5,000/year difference) (22).
- "Healthcare will continue to grow fastest and provide some of the best paying jobs in the nation—but the people in these jobs will increasingly require higher levels of

education to enter the field and continuous certification once they are in” (23, page 15).

2. **How did CDR determine the 2024 implementation deadline date?**

CDR calculated a five to six year window for those entering a DPD program in 2014 to complete the DPD program followed by two years to find and complete a supervised practice program and then two years as a cushion for any unforeseen circumstances that would interfere with submission of the registration eligibility application by January 1, 2024.

3. **Will the registration examination content change with this new graduate degree requirement?**

Since the content of the entry-level registration examination is based on the results of a practice audit, not on the degree content or level, the graduate degree requirement will not impact examination content until there is a change in practice as a result of the degree requirement. Practice changes are captured in CDRs recurring practice audits.

4. **Will current RDs who do not have a graduate degree have to obtain a graduate degree by this deadline date?**

No. This deadline only applies to initial applicants for registration eligibility and those who have lost their registered status and apply on or after January 1, 2024 to retake the registration examination for dietitians to reinstate registered status.

5. **Will former registered dietitians, who do not have a graduate degree, have to obtain a graduate degree if they are applying to reinstate registered status before January 1, 2024?**

No. Former RDs who do not have a graduate degree must apply for reauthorization* to take the registration examination for dietitians on or before December 31, 2023 to be exempt from the graduate degree requirement. RDs who apply for reauthorization* to take the registration examination for dietitians on or after January 1, 2024 must have completed a graduate degree granted by a U. S regionally accredited college or university or foreign equivalent.

*The reauthorization eligibility time limit is one year, e.g., if examination eligibility is reestablished on December 1, 2023, it expires on December 1, 2024. The individual must take and pass the registration examination before the December 2024 authorization expiration date. If the individual does not pass the examination within this one-year eligibility period, they will be required to obtain a graduate degree prior to requesting registration examination reauthorization on or after January 1, 2024.

6. **Will individuals who establish eligibility with a baccalaureate degree prior to January 1, 2024, but do not pass the registration examination, have to meet this new requirement?**

No. Provided registration eligibility is established prior to January 1, 2024 a graduate degree will not be required.

7. What is the last day for program directors to submit applicants for eligibility to take registration examination for dietitians who have only completed a bachelor's degree?

Individuals who complete their academic and supervised practice programs before January 1, 2024, need to be submitted by their program directors to CDR by 12:00 midnight central time December 31, 2023, in order to be processed for registration eligibility. Processing of submissions received between December 23 and December 31, 2023 will occur January 2-5, 2024. If a final academic transcript is required for a recent December 2023 graduate, and its availability may be delayed until 2024, program directors may need to make arrangements with their university's registrar's office to obtain an original letter confirming the candidate's degree and December 2023 conferral date. The letter from the registrar will fulfill the transcript document requirement for the application process.

8. Does this mean that the DTR eligibility requirements will move to a baccalaureate degree?

No. CDR does not plan to change the requirements for eligibility to take the registration examination for dietetic technicians to the minimum of a baccalaureate degree.

9. What does the statement, "all other entry level dietitian registration eligibility requirements remain the same," mean?

The current DPD and supervised practice requirements (CP, DI or ISPP), remain in effect. The only change is the degree level moving from minimum baccalaureate degree to minimum graduate degree. The foreign degree equivalency requirement also remains in effect.

10. Does the statement, "graduate level degree can be in any major," mean that the graduate degree could be in anything (even totally unrelated to nutrition and dietetics) as long as the person has a graduate degree and meets the other requirements for registration eligibility; i.e., coursework and supervised practice?

Just as the baccalaureate degree may currently be in any area, the graduate degree may also be in any area, provided it is granted by a U.S regionally accredited college/university, or foreign equivalent. The vast majority of applicants for registration eligibility have a degree in dietetics, food and nutrition. Those that do not are most often second career applicants. Since they are not identified as such during the application process we do not have data on the second career population, but we estimate that it is 5% or less of the total applicant pool. It is also important to note that some institutions have established policies which require all students completing DPD requirements to also complete degree requirements at their institution. This is at the discretion of the institution.

11. Why did the CDR motion not address the seamless aspects of the recommendation in the Visioning Report? Is it because that is a function of ACEND and not CDR?

The responsibility for the establishment of all requirements for eligibility to take CDR's registration examination examinations rests with CDR, not ACEND. This includes academic degree, and supervised practice. CDR has historically accepted completion of ACEND academic and supervised practice programs to meet registration eligibility requirements.

During CDR's discussions with ACEND, it was clear that ACEND needs additional time to prepare competencies and standards for the seamless graduate degree programs. Because of these time constraints ACEND requested that CDR delay establishment of a timeline. CDR believed that establishing a deadline relative only to the degree level would meet the needs of stakeholders requesting a timeline, while still allowing ACEND time to establish competencies and standards. The intent is to address the seamless aspect of the registration eligibility requirements in the future with a separate deadline date. CDR is hopeful that more programs will move forward with the graduate degree seamless option now that the timeline for the graduate degree implementation has been established.

10. Does a graduate degree positively impact the earnings of Registered Dietitians? (Excerpt from the 2017 Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Compensation and Benefits Study)

CDR's decision to change the entry-level degree requirement to a graduate degree was based on the needs of the marketplace to better, and more safely, serve the public. Employer stakeholder qualitative studies conducted over the past twenty years underscored the need for enhanced entry-level practitioner skills. Practitioner salaries, in general, are influenced by numerous factors, such as, the value they bring to the healthcare or business system, their importance to society, payment rates for services they provide and their expertise and experience.

Since 2013, the effect of entering the profession with a master's rather than a bachelor's degree has been analyzed during *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Compensation and Benefits Study*, conducted every other year, most recently in 2017.

The masters-level preparation requirement should result in positions becoming higher skilled, which in turn should lead to higher compensation (and prestige etc.). Exhibit 2.23 of the 2017 Compensation and Benefits Survey shows a \$2.02 difference in median wage between those whose highest degree is a bachelors, and those with a masters - but that exhibit is not a comparison of bachelors to all graduate degrees, and adding in doctoral degrees would have the wage differential even higher.

11. Is there data that illustrates the impact of the practice doctorate requirement on the diversity of students in either physical therapy or pharmacy?

Ethnic diversity in student enrollment in ACEND accredited programs has increased over the past 10 years. Most notably, the number of Hispanic students has nearly

doubled. ACEND talked with other health profession accreditors (Physical Therapy, Pharmacy, Occupational Therapy) who have moved their education requirements to a graduate level and learned that this change did not decrease student diversity in those professions. In pharmacy, for example, under-represented minority students (Black, Hispanic, Native American) were 10.6% of the student population in 1988, prior to implementing their practice doctorate degree requirement, and 11.4% in 2012 after implementation. Diversity of students currently enrolled in dietetic internships combined with a required graduate degree (males = 10%; under-represented minorities = 9%) and in coordinated programs at the graduate level (males = 10%; under-represented minorities = 11%) is no less than the diversity of students in dietetic internship programs that do not offer a graduate degree (males = 8%; under-represented minorities = 9%). ACEND Standards encourage programs to foster diversity in their student selection process. ACEND currently monitors and will continue to monitor student diversity in all accredited programs.

12. Did CDR discuss one of the other recommendations in the Visioning Report related to requiring an emphasis area as part of the graduate degree?

No, CDR's recent discussions focused on degree level. This does not preclude the establishment of a specific area of focus for graduate degrees in the future.

13. Does the graduate degree have to be in food, nutrition or dietetics, or can it be an MBA or MPH or something else?

CDR's motion is consistent with our past practice relative to the baccalaureate degree. It can be in any area. Under some past registration eligibility pathways the degrees had to be in a "related area". However, "related" was very broadly interpreted to include a variety of business-type degrees such as marketing, human resources, organization development, and labor relations. The diversity of the profession promotes a wide array of degree topics that are seen as related. It is anticipated that a graduate level degree in nutrition and dietetics would be the most efficient means for students to obtain the necessary competency for dietetics practice.

14. Will a degree in any area continue to be acceptable once the seamless process is addressed?

It is anticipated that this will change once the seamless process is established. Although, it is anticipated that there would be ACEND accredited seamless programs designed for areas such as an MPH.

15. Will applicants for registration eligibility with a graduate degree have to have supervised practice? Will they have to have a verification statement to take the RD exam?

Yes. Just as baccalaureate graduates now have to have verification statements to document completion of DPD and supervised practice program completion, graduate degree applicants will have to do the same.

16. Is it ACEND's responsibility to identify what major area of a graduate degree will be acceptable? Is that outside of the purview of CDR?

The content area of the degree accepted for registration eligibility is CDR's purview, not ACEND's.

17. Does the graduate degree have to be completed after the supervised practice program?

No. The graduate degree may be completed at any time prior to applying for registration eligibility.