

**Commission on Dietetic Registration
NDEP Area Meeting FAQ – Updated September 2021**

Graduate Degree Requirement - Registration Eligibility

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

A. 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. This change addresses Recommendation # 1 in the Visioning Report, which provides the following rationales 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.
 - Almost all other health care professions have increased entry-level educational.
 - 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.
 - “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).
 - Updated information from the original report: The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicates that many dietitians have advanced education degrees, and that employment of dietitians is expected to increase 11% from 2020 to 2030, faster than the average for all occupations (20).
- 2. Q. How did CDR determine the 2024 implementation deadline date?**

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

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

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- A. No. This deadline only applies to initial applicants for registration eligibility.
5. **Q. 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?**
- A. No. Individuals who were credentialed as RDs and lost their credentials are still exam eligible and therefore can apply for exam reauthorization without meeting any additional academic, didactic, or supervised practice requirements.
- *Former RDs are those individuals who were registered prior to January 1, 2024 and lost their registered status by voluntarily terminating their status, by not paying annual maintenance fees, or not completing Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) recertification requirements.
6. **Q. Will individuals who establish eligibility with a bachelor's degree prior to January 1, 2024, but do not pass the registration examination, have to meet this new requirement?**
- A. No. Provided registration eligibility is established prior to January 1, 2024, a graduate degree will not be required.
7. **Q. Will DTR eligibility requirements will move to a bachelor's degree?**
- A. 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.
8. **Q. Will the graduate degree requirement effect any other didactic or supervised practice eligibility requirements?**
- A. No, the current DPD and supervised practice requirements (CP, DI or ISPP), remain in effect. The only change is the degree level moving from minimum of a bachelor's degree to a minimum of a graduate degree. The foreign degree equivalency requirement also remains in effect.
9. **Q. Does the graduate degree need to be in any specific major to qualify an individual for registration eligibility?**
- A. No. Just as the current bachelor's degree requirement may be met in any area, the graduate degree may also be, provided it is granted by a USDE accredited institution, or foreign equivalent.
10. **Q. Does the graduate degree component have to be completed after the supervised practice program?**

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- A. No. A graduate degree may be completed at any time prior to applying for registration eligibility.
11. Q. **Is increasing the degree requirement for registration eligible legal?**
- A. Yes. Legal Counsel confirmed there are sufficient legal grounds to support CDR's change to elevate the entry level registration eligibility education requirement for RDs beginning in 2024. In fact, it is common for credentialing organizations like CDR to update its eligibility requirements or credential maintenance requirements due to industry trends and updated knowledge in respective fields of study. The decision regarding the elevated eligibility education requirement is consistent with the purpose of CDR and safeguards its stakeholders' interests, and substantive due process requirements are satisfied.

Exam Eligibility

12. Q. **How many times can a candidate take the exam?**
- A. There is no limit on how many times a registration eligible candidate can take the examination. There is a 45-day waiting period in between each examination experience.
13. Q. **What is the turnaround time between processing the registration eligibility application and a candidate being able to take the registration examination?**
- A. The process can usually be completed within a week depending on candidate's response and CDR's application volume. The "Flow Chart, Registration Eligibility Application Process" on CDR's website outlines the times for various application aspects:
<https://www.cdrnet.org/vault/2459/web/files/Flow%20Chart%20-%20Revised%202-16.pdf>.

Candidate Information

14. Q. **Why can't CDR release the names of students with their scores?**
- A. Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA, Chair, National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) and Executive Director and Legal Counsel of the American Association of Medical Assistants provided the following information.

Compliance with all the Standards and Standards of Interpretations is **mandatory** for certification programs to become or remain accredited by the NCCA. CDR is accredited by NCCA.

It is the opinion of the NCCA that NCCA-accredited certification programs are permitted to include on the examination application form a statement that the name of each candidate and her/his test score(s) will be released to the academic program from which she/he has graduated (or will graduate) unless the application indicates on the form that she/he does not want this information released. This statement must be in a conspicuous place on the examination application form and in reasonably noticeable type so that it would not be

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overlooked by the average candidate.

- a. Scores are disclosed to education program, ***unless the candidate opts out.***
- b. Scores are **not** disclosed to education programs, ***unless the candidate opts in.***

Generally, licensure is a mandatory credentialing system established by state law. Generally, certification is a voluntary credentialing system provided by a private sector body. There is a major difference between: (a) the authority of a state licensing board to mandate release of licensing examination scores to academic programs (or even more widely); and the right of a private sector certifying body to release test scores to academic programs. The primary purpose of licensure is public protection. Because of the strong interests of the state and its people, the state legislature can require the names of candidates for licensure and their scores to be released to their respective academic programs. However, certification is not a creature of state law, and candidates' rights of confidentiality/privacy pertaining to their test scores are greater than they are in a licensure situation. In other words, in certification there is no countervailing state interest militating in favor of releasing examination results to programs.

The Federal Privacy Law, enacted in 1974, prohibits the release of examination scores without the permission of the examinee. Unlike many other credentialing programs, CDR releases scores without the examinee name regardless of the number of examinees included on the institutional score report. Many other credentialing programs do not provide institutional score reports if the number of examinees falls below a minimal number, e.g., less than 10, due to the increased likelihood that individual student scores could be identified. CDR encourages Program Directors to continue to emphasize to their graduates the importance of releasing score information.

The following is the question asked of candidates while scheduling their exam. They must select "Yes" or "No" to proceed with scheduling.

*Pearson VUE will send my test results to my Program Director. I authorize Pearson VUE to send my name as well to my Program Director. Test results are only used by the Program Director as part of ongoing program evaluation to improve effectiveness.

Select one... 

15. Q. **Does CDR (Pearson VUE) require that both the candidate's name and address match on their government issued photo ID, and authorization to test and appointment letters to be admitted to the testing center?**

A. No. Only the name must match.
16. Q. **Does CDR collect ethnic, race, age or gender demographic information regarding examination candidates or its registrants?**

A. No. This decision was made by the Commission at its beginning, based on the recommendation of its legal counsel, and the Commission has maintained this policy. The

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Academy, however, does collect this information regarding its members and it has been extrapolated to the registered dietitians and dietetic technicians, registered.

Exam Preparation

17. Q. Does CDR have a study guide? How do study guides get sample questions?
- A. CDR publishes two study guides: *Study Guide for the Registration Examination for Dietitians* and *Study Guide for the Registration Examination for Dietetic Technicians*. They can be purchased from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics online store. Both study guides include a comprehensive study outline, references, and a practice examination. Study Guide sample questions have been selected by the Examination Panel and retired from the actual examination question/item bank.
18. Q. Should candidates preparing to write the registration examination use the most recent edition of a reference to study, when an older edition is listed in the study guide reference section?
- A. Candidates should use the most recent edition of the reference book, if possible, when preparing to take the examination. Annually, all questions are reviewed by CDR's Examination Panel for currency and accuracy prior to administration, and new references are consulted.
19. Q. Which study resource includes questions which most closely match the actual examination question style?
- A. The practice examination questions included in either the CDR *Study Guide for the Registration Examination for Dietitians* or *Dietetic Technicians* are questions that were once part of the actual examination item pool. These questions will most closely resemble the style of questions on the actual examination.
20. Q. Can the *Study Guide for the Registration Examination for Dietitians* practice examination be copied by educators to distribute to students?
- A. No. The *Study Guide* is copyrighted. CDR established a nominal charge of \$60.00 per copy for the *Guide* with the intent that every candidate would have access to all the information included in the *Guide*, not just the practice examination.
21. Q. Are there any accommodations for exam candidates with special test taking needs?
- A. Yes. Candidates can apply for accommodations through Pearson VUE. Accommodations information can be found on their website: <https://home.pearsonvue.com/Test-takers/Accommodations.aspx>.

Examination Questions

22. Q. Why are candidates not able to go back and review or skip questions and answer later?

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- A. Candidates must answer each question as presented before going to the next question on the computer-based examination. This policy is in effect to protect the security of the exam by not allowing candidates to review or memorize questions for unauthorized sharing purposes. This policy also ensures that the candidates are knowledgeable about the information and can respond accurately the first time it is presented. Documented testing statistics show that an examination candidate's first choice of an answer is usually the correct choice. If a candidate has the opportunity to review and change their answer, there is a 75% chance of the candidate selecting the wrong answer. This information is reliable across licensure and certification examinations.
23. Q. **How does CDR address the fact that standardized testing is a culturally biased process considering diversity goals/needs for the profession?**
- A. From the inception of its testing program in 1970, CDR has been committed to the inclusion of bias prevention steps in its examination development process. The basis of this process is the use of practice audit data that is practice/job related and representative of cultural diversity in dietetics practice to develop the examination content specifications. In the subsequent examination development step, the process of item writing and review, CDR has consistently included writers and reviewers who represent diverse population subgroups engaged in dietetics practice. This assists in ensuring that under-represented group perspectives are represented in the items. All volunteer item writers/reviews must view a Bias Sensitivity Training video before each workshop or meeting. This review activity is repeated throughout the examination development process. Annually, all newly written items are reviewed by a Bias Review volunteer group comprised of underrepresented population groups. These volunteers conduct a careful review of all new questions to identify and remove any questions that may be biased.
24. Q. **How does the test development process ensure that examination questions are current? Are question writers required to provide references for each question?**
- A. New questions are written every year by trained RD or DTR item writers representing diverse geographic, ethnic and dietetics practice perspectives. The CDR Examination Panel and subject matter experts representing diverse ethnic, geographic and practice perspectives review all new questions for currency, accuracy, and absence of bias before they are pretested. Entire item pools are reviewed on an annual basis when outdated items are archived and new items are introduced. Every item must be referenced by the item writer prior to submission.
25. Q. **Does every candidate get a comparable test as far as the percentage of questions coming from each domain being equal to the study guide test specifications?**
- A. Yes. Every examinee receives an examination that adheres to the content specifications described in the *Candidate Handbooks*. However, it is important to note that each

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examinee also receives un-scored pretest questions (twenty for dietitian examinees and thirty for dietetic technician examinees), and each exam candidate receives different pretest questions. These questions are newly written and when presented on the candidate's exam may or may not adhere to the content outline. Depending on the needs of CDR examination question pool, the pretest questions may focus on one or two content areas. This may lead examinees to perceive that their examination is heavily weighted in a particular content area.

- 26. Q. Does the exam begin immediately, or are there practice questions to get the exam candidate used to the format?**
- A. An examination tutorial is available at the beginning of each examination. The testing appointment is scheduled for a three-hour period to allow examinees twenty minutes to complete the tutorial before going on to the two- and one-half-hour examination.
- 27. Q. Do questions start out at a certain level of ability and then increase in difficulty?**
- A. No, the examination questions do not increase in difficulty as the examination progresses. Each question has its own level of difficulty. However, when all the questions on an examination are pooled together, the level of difficulty from one examination to another varies slightly and is adjusted through the scaled scoring process.
- 28. Q. Are there always just four answers per question?**
- A. Yes.
- 29. Q. Are questions weighted?**
- A. Yes.
- 30. Q. Are all the questions numbered?**
- A. Yes.
- 31. Q. Are examinees expected to have any equations/math formulas memorized for the test?**
- A. No. Other than knowing basic formulas, the examination candidate should not have to remember mathematical formulas.
- 32. Q. Is the content outline only based on survey respondents?**
- A. The content outline is based on the results of the entry-level Dietetics Practice Audit survey conducted every five years. The last audit was done in 2020. All entry-level RDs and DTRs (0-5 years registered) were surveyed.

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- 33. Q. How often are dietetics practice audits conducted?**
- A. Dietetics practice audits are conducted every 5 years. The last practice audit was conducted in 2020. Updated test specifications will be effective January 1, 2022.
- 34. Q. Why isn't the registration examination based on the ACEND competency standards?**
- A. The registration examinations are designed to assess entry-level competence to practice, rather than as educational assessment examination. Both the registration examinations and the ACEND competency standards are based on the results of the dietetics practice audit conducted every five years. This assures congruence between the examination and the educational competencies. While the CDR examination must be careful to test for competence to practice, the educational competencies may include skills and "cutting edge" new information that cannot be assessed on the registration examination, for example counseling skills are difficult to assess on the multiple-choice registration examination.
- 35. Q. Why can't CDR release all examination domain sub-scores? It would help to inform progress or potential weakness of program.**
- A. While CDR understands the need for program faculty to assess the effectiveness of their educational programs, it is important to note important differences between educational and certification testing. Certification testing methodology focuses its measurement precision on discriminating at the cut score or passing level, with a corresponding lack of measurement precision at the higher and lower levels of performance. In addition, modern computer-based testing models allow pass/fail decisions to be made with many fewer questions than previously needed. While this is helpful in controlling development costs and reducing item exposure, it reduces the number of questions taken by certification candidates, and therefore, reduces the number of questions available to produce valid and reliable sub-scores on an examination. Thus, while certification tests are extremely reliable near the pass/fail level of performance, they are necessarily less reliable near the extremes of performance, and therefore particularly unsuited and unreliable for diagnostic or educational testing, or for student ranking purposes. The number of questions required to make a reliable pass/fail decision in a broad area of practice (such as on a certification examination) is far fewer than the number required to produce a number of stable, reliable sub-scores. A small number of test questions in a sub-area (say 5 or 10), is very likely to produce spurious, non-reliable results, which is often worse than no information at all, causing students and educators alike to draw incorrect conclusions.

Exam Scoring

- 36. Q. What is a scaled score?**
- A. CDR uses a scaled score to report examination scores; the scale is 1-50 with 25 always

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being the passing scaled score. The number of questions the examinee must answer to obtain the scaled passing score of 25 varies. This variation is because each examination includes a different set of questions. Because every examination is different, one may be more difficult or easier than another. To compensate for the differences, the "raw" scores are adjusted on the scale so that the examinee is not penalized because their examination was more difficult or rewarded because their examination was easier. Testing vendor psychometricians know the difficulty of each examination question based on past administrations. The scaled score process is used to report most national standardized examination results such as the college entrance examinations.

- 37. Q. Are examination scores for students who completed a dietetics education program several years ago included on the institutional summary reports provided to program directors?**
- A.** CDR includes aggregate examination score information for program graduates who completed the dietetics education program within the last five years.
- 38. Q. Explain what it means that the exam is variable in length.**
- A.** Up to 20 additional questions can be presented to an examination candidate to clarify their pass or fail status. The computer can terminate the examination at any time between question 125 and 145 (dietitian) or question 110 and 130 (technician) if the examination pass or fail decision can be clearly determined.
- 39. Q. Is CDR concerned about the falling pass rate on the exam?**
- A.** The primary purpose of a registration examination is to discriminate between those examinees who are minimally competent to practice at entry-level and those who are not. Passing rates on both entry-level registration examinations are expected to fluctuate over time based on examinee competence. Historically, the pass rates on both examinations fall slightly when the test specifications are revised every five years to reflect the practice audit results.
- 40. Q. If an examinee fails the test, is there any way they can find out what their weakness was?**
- A.** There are two sub-scores that are available for the examination candidate to review: Food and Nutrition Sciences (dietitian - Domains I and II, dietetic technician – Domain I) and Foodservice Systems/Management (dietitian - Domains III and IV, dietetic technician – Domains II and III). The candidate can also review the Examination Study Outline to reflect on their examination experience and identify the topic areas in which they may be weak.
- 41. Q. What suggestion do you have for candidates who have taken the exam several times and failed?**

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- A. Circumstances vary for everyone. Some candidates need to study the material more and become familiar with application versus comprehension question formats, and others may need to learn more about the strategies for taking a multiple-choice examination. It is best to interview each examination candidate to determine his/her issues and discuss possible aids and solutions.

Examination Reports

42. Q. Who should program directors contact when they have problems accessing institutional program reports, or have concerns regard the accuracy of report data?

- A. Program exam reports are compiled by CDR's testing agency, Pearson VUE and are available to be viewed online or the PDF can be downloaded from CDR's Registration Eligibility Processing System (REPS). Program directors can access their program's reports by using their assigned REPS access codes. Reports generated since 2014 can be accessed from this site.

Questions on interpreting report content should be directed to ACEND (acend@eatright.org). For concerns regarding the accuracy of the reports, please email CDR (cdrexams@eatright.org).

43. Q. When are exam reports released?

- A. ACEND program directors are emailed about the availability of reports in REPS 45 days after the reporting period ends. On August 15, the January-June, six-month reports are available. On February 15th, the July - December 2020, 6-month ACEND program examination summary reports and 3-year pass rate reports are made available.

Foreign Language & Test Sites

44. Q. Does CDR offer the exam in Spanish? Is additional time allowed for examinees for which English is a second language?

- A. CDR has considered requests to offer its examinations in a second language. CDR has made the decision not to administer the registration examinations in a second language for several reasons including:
- It is reasonable for employers and the public to assume that CDR credentialed practitioners are fluent in the English language.
 - It is cost prohibitive to develop a separate Spanish registration examination. There are multiple Spanish dialects spoken by various populations. One version of a Spanish exam would limit its use to only one population.
 - English language, textbooks, software, and comprehensive examinations are used in ACEND accredited programs.

English as a second language is not defined as a reason for special testing accommodations, such as extended time, under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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45. Q. Can exam candidates take the exam in a foreign country?

A. Yes, the registration examinations can be administered by Pearson VUE at designated international testing centers.

Item Writers

46. Q. How would an individual volunteer as an examination item writer for the registration exams?

A. Individuals wanting to volunteer to be an item writer for the entry-level registration examinations need to complete the Item Writer Volunteer Form; <http://www.cdrnet.org/vault/2459/web/files/itemwritingvolunteerform.pdf>. This form needs to be returned to CDR, where they are all reviewed and considered. Volunteers are invited to the annual workshop based on specific criteria: current professional position, experience, and dietetics practice area. Only 15-18 volunteers are invited annually to write for the dietitian examination and 9-12 for the dietetic technician exam.

Dietetic Technicians, Registered

47. Q. How many dietetic technicians are currently registered with CDR?

A. As of September 2021, there are 4,531 DTRs.

48. Q. Is CDR discontinuing the DTR credential?

A. No, although the Council of Future Practice 2012 Visioning Report included a recommendation to discontinue the DTR Credential, CDR has made the decision to continue to support the credential as long as it's financially feasible to do so. In 2014, CDR expanded the dietetic technician credential title options to include the Nutrition and Dietetic Technician, Registered (NDTR).