

ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED FOR THE STUDY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN¹

Preamble

The University of Saskatchewan program in Nutrition and Dietetics has a social responsibility to provide enrolled students with opportunities to develop the qualifications (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes and skills) to enter the profession of Dietetics. The purpose of this document is to describe the skills and attributes required for success in completing the university program in Nutrition and Dietetics. Students interested in pursuing a degree in Nutrition/Dietetics are encouraged to review the following document that outlines the requisite skills and attributes for completion of the program leading to registration as a registered Dietitian.

An offer of admission to the Nutrition/Dietetics program should not be interpreted as evidence that the Nutrition/Dietetics program has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. These skills and attributes are essential, and must be demonstrated, if students are to be successful in achieving the competency standards and occupational expectations of the profession of Dietetics. Students interested in pursuing a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics should engage in some self-reflection considering this document and their own skills and abilities before proceeding with an application.

The competency standards for dietitians are described in the *Professional Standards for Dietitians in Canada*.² Students admitted to the Nutrition and Dietetics program must possess the skills and attributes described in this document in order to be able to develop the competencies required of an entry-to-practice registered dietitian. By the time of graduation and subsequent entry into practice, students must be able to demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment and responsible decision making to become professionals who are cognizant of practice accountability issues, laws and regulations, professional codes of ethics and standards of practice.

In addition to obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition degree, an individual must pass the Canadian Dietetics Registration Examination in order to obtain registration/licensure as a dietitian in most jurisdictions in Canada. Additional information about this exam can be obtained from <http://www.dieteticregulation.ca/en/qualifying.php#nationalexam>. It is during the final year of the program and culminating in this Examination that students are evaluated on the skills and attributes that are necessary for the profession of dietetics.

Students with disabilities who anticipate that reasonable accommodation will enable them to meet the required standards, as outlined in this document, are responsible for articulating their requirements and for being proactive in seeking such accommodation. Requests for accommodation for disability or an extension of time to complete the program are considered on a case-by-case basis according to the applicable policies, regulations and procedures of the College and the internship programs. Applicants are strongly encouraged to seek out and review the policies, regulations and procedures regarding accommodation of students with disabilities at the University of Saskatchewan (<http://students.usask.ca/disability/dss/>) and the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition. If admitted to the program, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the University and the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition.

¹ Adapted with permission from *Essential Skills and Attributes Required for the Study of Physical Therapy at the University Of Saskatchewan*, October 1, 2010

²Professional Standards for Dietitians in Canada (2000). Dietitians of Canada.

Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in the Bachelor of Science in Nutrition Program

Aptitude and attitude

Students seeking to enter the Nutrition and Dietetics program must have an interest in nutrition, food and health and a desire to assist individuals, groups and populations in improving and enhancing health status. They must demonstrate sensitivity, compassion, integrity, and concern for others. Students must have the cognitive abilities to understand and develop the theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively as part of a team with their peers, clients, staff and colleagues. Students must have the capacity to develop leadership, management and supervisory skills. They must be willing to comply with the standards and requirements set by the program and the profession of Dietetics to ensure patient safety (e.g., criminal record checks, immunizations, federal and provincial laws and regulations).

Students must have the capacity and desire to develop the high level of professionalism expected in the Nutrition program and the profession of Dietetics. This means having a strong work ethic, developing and maintaining a professional image and attitude and understanding of professional boundaries, demonstrating commitment and respect for others, and having appropriate interpersonal skills. They must be non-judgmental and respectful of individuality and diversity in patients, clients, health professionals, families, staff, peers and communities. They must also be able to creatively problem solve, to manage multiple, potentially competing demands, to be willing to adapt and change as needed, and to make decisions and develop confidence in their decision-making abilities. They must have the ability to reflect on their own performance, receive and provide constructive criticism and adjust /update their knowledge and skills appropriately, and show a commitment to lifelong and independent learning, and to sharing knowledge with others.

Information gathering/sensory skills

Students must be able to participate in learning situations that require skill in gathering and remembering information about a patient, a client, a group, an organization, a community or the population in the course of an assessment. This information is normally acquired through observing, listening, talking to others and by gathering information from charts, reports, the literature, and other written material. The student must be able to observe a patient and acquire visual, auditory and tactile information.

In all situations, the student must be able to gather information using various assessment tools. He/she must also be able to assess food items using visual, olfactory, taste and tactile senses. The student must be able to function in an environment that may be crowded or noisy, or that has the potential for exposure to disease and which may contain noxious odors.

Students who have sensory limitations (e.g., in vision, hearing, touch and taste) or in perceptual integration of information from those senses, need to be able to seek out and use adaptive methods and/or technology to compensate for their limitations.

Communication skills

Students must be able to speak to, hear and observe (aided or unaided) patients, staff, clients, health professionals and others in order to effectively and efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity, posture and perceive non-verbal communication. Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, families, clients, other health professionals, staff and others in small and large groups, and to maintain confidentiality

In the clinical setting, students must be able to coherently and systematically summarize a patient's condition and care plan, both orally and in text (handwritten or electronic) to comply with regulatory and organizational record-keeping standards.

In all settings, students must be able to write business letters and emails, reports, proposals, and other print sources (handouts, manuals, posters, displays) in a professional manner with coherence and organization.

Students with less than full fluency in English or with learning disabilities are responsible for achieving the high level of communication ability that is required for patient safety, informed consent, and fully independent and ethical interaction with patients, clients, health professionals and others. Students should note that the level of communication fluency required, both oral and written, is often higher than is generally assessed in standard tests of language fluency.

Critical thinking and cognitive skills

Students must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to measure, calculate, and reason in order to analyze, integrate and synthesize information. They must have the capacity to be able to understand and use complex medical, scientific and technical information. Students must be able to accurately recognize numbers and perform relevant calculations. These comprehensive problem solving activities must be done in an acceptable timeframe relative to their peers; proficiency in practice is determined both by accuracy and by completion of tasks within specified time frames. Students also need to be able to demonstrate the ability to accurately assess their performance to further direct their learning by engaging in self-reflection.

Effective problem solving and judgment are necessary to address patient, client, community or public needs, and engage them in a safe and efficient manner. Students must have critical appraisal skills in order to build a foundation for evidence-based practice. Students must demonstrate these critical thinking skills in their course work at the University, at the practicum training site, and in the work environment.

Psychomotor / Physical skills

Students must demonstrate sufficient motor function to safely perform some aspects of physical examination on a patient (e.g. anthropometric measurements). The examination must be done independently and in a timely fashion.

Students are expected to have the energy to be able to participate in all learning experiences of the educational program (e.g., attend classes, complete clinical skills or laboratory work) and therefore should be able to bend, reach, use their hands, and sit and/or stand or walk for most of the day. They also must be able to demonstrate appropriate tools and techniques to a patient (e.g. how to read a nutrition fact label, how to use a scale, how to inject insulin).

Emotional Health

Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional health required for full use of their intellectual abilities, in the context of the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the program. Students must demonstrate adaptability to changing environments and the ability to function and respond effectively in situations of high stress and potential conflict. They must be comfortable working in close proximity with colleagues and clients. The development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients, families, staff and others is also required. Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional resilience

and balance to manage a myriad of emotionally charged or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in all work settings.

Approved by College of Pharmacy and Nutrition Faculty – November 23, 2011