GET MATCHED

By Jenny Westerkamp, RD
INTRODUCTION

In April 2008, fellow dietetics student Katie Hamm and I decided to create All Access Internships. At the time, I was a senior at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Katie was a junior at Kansas State University. We connected on the American Dietetic Association Student Community of Interest in November 2007, started chatting via email, and did not even meet in person until June 2008! In October 2008, the website officially launched.

All Access Internships started as a static resource of internship profiles and articles and has since evolved into an interactive community and social network for future registered dietitians (RDs). Now offering individual and group coaching as well as a monthly newsletter, a list serv community, a blog by dietetics students, intern testimonials, videocasts, tips, and discussions on Facebook and Twitter, this website has done its best to meet the needs of dietetics students and will continue to do so for years to come!

All Access Internships has been the go-to resource for over 10,000 dietetic students since October 2008. Since launching the website, countless advice-seeking students have discussed with me the joys and challenges of being a dietetics student and getting matched to a dietetic internship (DI). Many just wanted to pick my brain on how to be competitive for a DI. These interactions have inspired me to fuse together all of my collected advice into one must-have resource for any dietitian-in-the-making.

Getting Matched: A Guide for Dietetics Students provides you with the TOOLS needed for increasing your chances of securing a DI spot...

- Did you know that 80% of All Access Internships Coaching clients were matched to a dietetic internship in 2013? I'll share my most effective and proven strategies, used by my coaching clients, for separating yourself from other applicants. Remember, only 50% of ALL applicants were matched in the April 2013. How can you make sure you have a happy match day?

- Read success stories from students and interns across the country - what they did differently to be admitted and how YOU can gain that same competitive edge.

- What do DI directors look for in an applicant? Well, I asked them! You'll read the inside scoop from internship directors across the country on what they look for in students, including a TOP TEN list on how to make a great first impression, show off your best assets, and prove YOU are their ideal intern!

- Instead of generic advice, such as 'get good grades and have a lot of experience', you'll be provided with "Make it Happen" action steps throughout the book. These will get you going TODAY on working towards your goal of completing a DI and becoming a registered dietitian (RD)! It's never too early to start!

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If everyone has a good GPA, extra-curricular activities, and good experience, then how do you stand above the crowd? Not only should you completely understand the application process, you should know how to SELL YOURSELF! Someone gets that internship spot, right? Getting Matched: A Guide for Dietetics Students makes that spot more within YOUR reach.

NEW! Information on the Dietetic Internship Centralized Application Services (DICAS) and how it will make the application process more streamlined, less stressful, and convenient for you!

The Scary Truth about Dietetic Internships (DIs)
Let’s be realistic about the challenges involved in getting a DI. Some of us may believe that the process is easy and the internship is guaranteed. With the 50% match rate, and the expectation that it will go down this year, it is pretty scary. Looking on the bright side, this dismal match rate should be an eye-opener for students and should motivate them to become competitive and take their future as seriously as they can.

It is clear that there are simply not enough DI spots available to the thousands of applicants that wish to obtain one. While this book does not solve the problem of the shortage of internships, it does provide the information you need to reach your potential.

Quick Facts:
- It is super competitive and you might not get matched
- The application process starts months before the deadline
- All internships are very unique, so one might be a better fit than another
- Some are unpaid, some have tuition, some have stipends, so make sure you can afford it
- Use all the resources available to you to make sure you fully understand the process and what it takes to get matched

The DI is the transition between student and professional. Looking at the bright side of an additional year (or more) of training, you are lucky to have this time to evolve without diving head first into the real world. With that being said, the responsibilities of both a student and a professional are given to you. You will have projects and homework assignments on top of clocking in from 9-5 (for most full-time programs, anyways). Balance will be a running theme throughout the internship—balancing work, assignments, projects, and fun too! Overall, it is an experience that will help you grow both personally and professionally and prepare you for your first career move.

Scared? Nervous? My best advice for surviving life as a dietetics student is summed up in this quote by John Wooden: “Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.” No matter what happens on the road to the RD—searching tirelessly for experience, struggling through tough science courses, or stressing out over the application process—having a positive mental attitude every step of the way will be one of the most important keys to your success as a student, intern, AND registered dietitian! Are you ready?
GETTING YOUR FEET WET

Researching the field

True or False: “Clinical nutrition, food service, and community nutrition are the only areas where dietitians can be employed.” False. In my opinion, the dietetics profession has changed in the last fifty years, alongside our nation’s eating habits and food supply. Different demands, such as increased need for weight loss solutions due to the rise in obesity mean different kinds of supplies such as dietitians that specialize in weight loss, write weight loss books, or are spokespeople for weight loss companies. This is just one example. Dietetics is a profession that is capable of transforming into a passion if you know what you want and you go for it. The paths that we can take to achieve a lifetime of fulfillment are boundless, so long as we listen to ourselves and hone in on what it is that we want to achieve.

Chef RD
Communications Specialist
Consultant Dietitian
Director of Nutrition and Food Services
Early Childhood Intervention Consultant
Educator
Edutainer & Personal Growth Partner
Food Bank Nutritionist
Food Writer or Author
Health Communications Consultant
Health Education Consultant
Health/Lifestyle Coach
Marketing Director
Non-profit Director
Nutrition Informaticist
Nutritional Sales Representative
President of Education Company
Production Manager
Senior Director of Product Development
Spokesperson
Sports Nutritionist
Territory Sales Manager
Weight Loss Group Facilitator
Wellness Coach
Nutrition and Health Consultant
Specialty Food Company Consultant
Professional Speaker
Food Behavioralist
Ethno-centric Food Culture Specialist
Licensed Wellcoach
Motivational Speaker
Health and Life Balance Enthusiast
School Wellness Lead
Corporate Wellness Dietitian
Clinical Nutrition Manager
Nutrition Therapist
Public Relations Consultant
Nutrition Communications Specialist
Nutrition Blogger
Roadie Nutritionist
Freelance Writer
Public Health Nutritionist
Health Communication Specialist
Chief Food and Nutrition Strategist
Vegetarian Cook & Recipe Developer Journalism
Senior Editorial Director
Freelance Food and Nutrition Writer
Diet Guru
Beverage Manufacturer Representative
WIC Nutritionist/Program Director
Director, Wellness Program
Editor
Corporate Dietitian
Patient Services Manager
Pharmaceutical Company RD
Media Consultant
Telehealth/Virtual Dietitian
Personal Chef
Clinical Dietitian
Private Practice Dietitian
Staff Exercise Scientist
Supermarket/Retail Dietitian
Nutrition Journalist
Internship Director
Restaurant Consultant
Rockstar Nutritionist
Purchasing Manager
Website Medical Advisor
Food Marketing Consultant
Industry Consultant
Community Nutritionist
Wellness Coordinator
Independent Health Coach
Advisory Board Member
Health Education Specialist
Private Practice Dietitian
Radio Host
Nutrition Consultant
Wellness Dietitian
School Nutrition Specialist
Food Allergy Specialist
Preventive Medicine Nutritionist
Nutrition Counselor
Sports and Lifestyle Nutritionist
National Spokesperson for the ADA
Editor of Health & Wellness Magazine
Nutrition Consulting Company Owner
Consultant
Nutrition and Lifestyle Counselor
Consumer Manager
Diet Expert
Founder and Director of Nutrition
Weight Management Nutritionist
Cardiovascular Nutritionist
Medical Nutrition Therapist

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Another way to engage yourself in the dietetics field is to know what the hot topics are and to stay abreast current research and media trends. Mention these topics briefly in your application letter if you are interested in them because it shows you have researched the field and are engaged in what is going on now. For example, I showed an interest in nutritional genomics, which many dietetics students may not have even been aware of. This helped me stand out in a positive way.

There are a few ways to stay current. My favorite is the American Dietetic Association’s Daily News. After you sign into eatright.org, go to ADA Member Updates and sign up for the Daily News. You will get daily emails about what is going on with food and nutrition in the media and with new research. I learned so much as a student just by reading these everyday!

Make it Happen:
- Review all dietetic practice groups to learn about the different areas of dietetics.
- Browse the Internet for entrepreneurial RDs with unique careers.
- Sign up for the ADA Daily News, read up on dietetics-related publications and blogs, or even start your own blog to motivate yourself to research hot topics.

Making Connections

True or False: “I don’t know any RDs, so getting unique experiences is impossible.”
False. The Internet and social media have made it ridiculously easy to reach out to registered dietitians for guidance. It sounds intimidating, but it is not as hard as it seems. Networking is simply communicating with a purpose. Listen carefully for opportunities where you and your connection can help each other.

Where can YOU make connections?
- In the classroom
- At professional meetings (FNCE, state dietetic association meetings, etc.)
- With your co-workers
- With your professors
- Through your parents’ friends or friends’ parents
- With the movers and shakers in your home town

What about networking with registered dietitians? Why is it so difficult to reach out to them? Well, maybe you just don’t know WHAT to ask! So here’s my way of picking RDs’ brains in the quest to make connections in the field:
- What steps did you take during and after the internship that got you started in your career?
- What tasks do you spend the most time working on in your job?
- What types of clients or patients do you work with?
- What foundation of knowledge and skills does it take to do what you are doing?
- How did you get into the field?
- What has been the biggest challenge you have encountered in your career?
- What is the best way for one to position oneself to get a job in this field?
What would you have done differently in your career, if anything?
How do you see the dietetics industry developing over the next 1, 5, or 10 years?
What has changed about dietetics since you began your career?
What resources have you found most helpful? (Books, practice groups, websites, etc.)
Do you know of anyone in my area that I can connect with?
Do you take on interns or know anyone that does?

Now you have the ammunition to do some great asking. Of course, don’t use ALL of these questions at once! What questions you use should really depend on your main purpose for contacting the RD. This RD could give you their perspective on one area of dietetics, they could be your next mentor, or they can introduce you to your next mentor! Either way, they will be a valuable source of information.

Tips for Connection with Dietitians

All Access Internships interviewed Mitzi Dulan, RD, CSSD on what it takes for students to make great connections before they are even dietitians. Dulan is an entrepreneur and registered dietitian for the Kansas City Royals and was the team nutritionist for the Kansas City Chiefs for 8 years who regularly takes on virtual nutrition interns. She shares her advice on how to go about fostering a relationship with a registered dietitian.

Why do you feel it is valuable for dietitians to work with students as interns?
“I believe it is important to give back to the profession and it is very rewarding to know that you can impact the life of a student. Some of the most important qualities that I look for in an intern are someone who takes initiative and has a strong work ethic. As a nutrition entrepreneur it takes years and years of dedication, determination, and self motivation to build your business.”

I know that you strongly believe in creating your own opportunities. How can a student go about doing that?
“Pick up the phone and call. Ask for what you want. Follow through and do what you say you are going to do. The worst thing someone can say is “no” and since you didn’t have it before you aren’t losing anything.”

What advice would you give a student interested in contacting a dietitian they might be interested in working with?
“I prefer getting emails which gives me an idea of their interest/passion to work with me. I also definitely want to see their résumé. I recently received an email from a student for an internship this summer, which doesn’t show much advance planning to me since most of my internship inquiries were last fall/winter. In a résumé, I like to see leadership qualities, work ethic, extracurricular activities, and someone who is doing well in school.”
Make it Happen
- Research RDs, companies, and organizations with nutrition practices in your area and beyond. It is far too common for people to think of doing this when they WANT something, but it is to your benefit to set up phone conversations or in person meetings whenever possible. You just never know where it may take you in the long run.
- Send out 10 emails to RDs expressing your interest in their work.
- Make in-person connections at conferences or meetings.

Got a Mentor?
A mentor is that one person who can help you, guide you, take you under his or her wing, and nurture your professional quest. A Sean Maguire to a Will Hunting. A Doc Brown to a Marty McFly. A Glenda the Good Witch to a Dorothy. A mentor can be a priceless tool for success in the transition from student to professional. You may find yourself pondering, “What area of dietetics am I interested in?” or “What are my career goals?” Well, I have another question for you: “Got a mentor?”

Having a mentor was the most beneficial aspect of my dietetics journey so far. My first mentor was Julie Burns, MS, RD, CCN a Chicago-based dietitian and owner of Sportfuel, Inc. (an integrative sports nutrition and wellness practice). When I Googled ‘Chicago dietitian’ and found Julie’s website, I saw that she ran a successful practice and that her past and current clients included the Chicago Blackhawks, Chicago Bears, Chicago White Sox, and Chicago Bulls and professional athletes across the country. With five active brothers of my own, I was very attracted to sports nutrition, so Julie was the perfect fit. She had also recently started Eat Like the Pros, which was a unique service with a lot of potential for growth. Coincidentally, she graduated from the same undergraduate university as me (University of Illinois) and completed her DI at my number one choice (Massachusetts General Hospital). It was fate! I immediately sent her an e-mail and told her how interested I was in her career. When she offered me an internship with her two companies, I was beyond ecstatic!

Our mentor-mentee relationship was more valuable to me than any traditional dietetics student job or any course in school. I experienced clinical nutrition and counseling when I shadowed Julie during consultations with professional athletes. I observed food service when I assisted in nutrient analysis and menu guide development for Eat Like the Pros. Entrepreneurship was a constant theme during my whole experience. In addition, Julie provided honest and constructive feedback, helped me develop self-awareness, challenged me to grow beyond my perceived limitations, connected me with the movers and shakers in nutrition, motivated me to join professional organizations, and above all, she was easy to communicate with. I could ask her any question I had about the real world, because she was in it.

Forming a sensible career path seemed overwhelming to me, but having Julie as a mentor helped me to make connections between text books in the classroom and real-world applications in the workplace. In addition, she shared her stories about her own climb to success and inspired me to
start climbing as well. I stayed in contact with Julie and once I passed by RD exam, she decided to continue mentoring me and hired me! So, even though it was an unpaid internship at first, it absolutely paid off in the end!

Since the mentorship is between a mentor and a mentee, it is equally important to be a good mentee in order to have a successful experience. Here are three essential ways to foster a meaningful relationship:

- **Bring something to the table.** Your mentor may have a lot of experience and valuable advice, but give your skills and time to them too. Offer to take on small projects or teach them your tech-savvy ways. Pass along an interesting article or recommend a book. The mentorship is mutually beneficial when the mentor believes he or she can learn from you and wants to invest more in your relationship.

- **Be respectful.** The key to any great mentorship is respect. Make sure to show up for scheduled meetings, listen carefully, take notes and make sure you always express your appreciation. Above all, be willing to take the mentor’s advice. Mentors will be encouraging, but they will also challenge your ideas because they know this will benefit you, so be open to feedback.

- **Ask a lot of questions, but have answers too.** Your mentor will be a wealth of information, but don’t expect him or her to tell you exactly what to do to be successful in your career. Give this some thought on your own and bounce your ideas off of your mentor.

- **Remember, this mentorship is a two-way street.** Know what your goals for the mentorship are and communicate your needs, desires and objectives with your mentor.

**Make it Happen:**

- Find an RD who is willing to mentor you. This person can help you network with other facilities and RDs in the area to prepare you for the internship.

- If you are an American Dietetic Association member, take advantage of any mentorship program that will match you with a dietitian in your area that fits with your interests and goals. Contact your state dietetic association to find out about how to get a mentor or consider joining a dietetic practice group such as Nutrition Entrepreneurs or Vegetarian Nutrition, which offer excellent programs.

- If there isn’t a mentorship program available to you, Google dietitians in your area. Reach out to them either by phone or email. The rest is up to you… now go get a mentor!
LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Joining a Local Dietetic Association or Dietetic Practice Group

True or False: “Dietetic Associations and Dietetic Practice Groups are for registered dietitians only.” False. Joining your local dietetic association or a dietetic practice group is another very effective avenue for networking with RDs and even other students. It also shows involvement in profession—what selection committee doesn’t like that?

Volunteer, network, attend meetings, or take on small projects. If your state doesn’t have much opportunity for students, ask how you can change that! Dietetic association board members are leaders that you should get to know. Reach out to them immediately. Involvement with this group early on will allow you to create a foundation of experience that you can use to prove you are devoted to the profession. You will inspire other students to follow your lead and before you know it, you have cultivated passionate and enthused group of students to promote and advance the profession in the right direction! Do you see why this is so important? Hey, it looks AWESOME in your application too. :)

Make it Happen:

- Ask your local dietetic association if they need any student volunteers.
- Spearhead a state student dietetic association or increase the association’s student participation.
- Help start a mentorship program or get a mentor through their established program to develop connections.

Creating Leadership Opportunities

When I was a junior in college, I made the degree switch from biology to dietetics. I had some catching up to do with gaining leadership experience. My university’s student dietetic association already had an executive board selected for senior year, so no luck there. I had an executive board committee position during my junior year on the Human Interest Professionals group on campus, but I still wanted something more nutrition-related.

At the end of my junior year, I was assigned a group business plan project in a business
communications class. My group decided on creating a partnership between the University of Illinois and the Eastern Illinois Food Bank. After hours of research and a successful presentation, I decided to take a risk and turn this project into a reality. During my senior year, I started a chapter of Students Team Up to Fight Hunger (STUFH), a national organization that links college campuses to their local food banks. I filled out all the paperwork necessary to make it an official organization. Then, I recruited my executive committee and developed goals to work toward during the year. For the next year, I coordinated food drives, ran fundraisers, and increased awareness of food insecurity on campus. Without a doubt, leadership was essential to getting this STUFH chapter off the ground. Starting this group allowed me to improve that skill and feel more confident in leadership positions.

Why is leadership essential to the application? Well, time and time again, directors are stating that this is what they look for in an applicant. It is plastered all over their websites, requested in the application letter, and often comes up in an interview. A career counselor once advised me that if you are going to put down that you are in an organization, you should only list it if you had a position with responsibility, as opposed to just a membership. This advice really stuck with me. Most selection committees would agree that being a leader in the field of dietetics is important, since it is the leaders that can impact the field in a positive way.

Also, note that there are about 226 didactic programs in dietetics (DPDs). Let’s assume half of them have student nutrition clubs. Let’s again assume that there are 5 executive board members. This is about 565 applicants that will have nutrition club leadership on their application. While this is impressive for any applicant, consider how you can be even more competitive by showing both leadership AND entrepreneurship. You can do it!

Make it Happen:
- Determine your community’s or university’s needs (i.e. hunger insecurity, nutrition education, and food policy awareness).
- Develop a business plan to define your focus for starting an organization and recruit other like-minded people to supplement your efforts.
- Cultivate your leadership skills, take risks, and learn from your experience.

Preparing Financially

True or False: “DIs are paid positions because we are like employees, right?” Most of the time, this is false. A very popular thought to ponder is how you are going to pay for a DI. Possible expenses include: application fees, computer matching fees, printing costs, mailing costs, travel expenses, and then eventually the tuition, insurance, books, lab coats, room and board and other program-related costs. This is astronomical for interns and college students who do not get paid! It’s unfortunate that there are financial limitations in many programs. And even with a stipend, some students still find it hard to cover even the most basic of costs.
I vividly remember hearing about a DPD director telling a class of dietetic seniors about the time she was on food stamps during her DI. My mouth dropped immediately. What? Is it that bad? Well for me, I survived on all student loans, and knew many interns that did the same. I lived in a comfortable apartment and COULD afford groceries, thank goodness. I'll be in some debt, but I look at my loans as an "educational investment." I am confident that my return on investment will be exponential! Even so, financial costs for DIs seem to be high on the list of deciding factors for many applicants.

Here's a rundown of financial sources:

Scholarships – First, complete the American Dietetic Association Foundation scholarship application. Next, check out your local and state dietetic associations. This includes the state you are leaving and the state you are entering if they are different. Scholarships are a GREAT way to get your school paid for without having to pay it back. Be creative with Google too - try “nutrition scholarship” or "dietitian scholarship" and see what might come up. Throw in names of your respective states or cities too. You just never know.

Some programs have scholarships specifically for their interns. Others have state scholarships that are not as competitive as national scholarships. They are definitely worth applying to. Let’s say you work on an application for 5 hours. Then, you get awarded a $500 scholarship. You basically just got paid $100 per hour! NICE!

Loans – They could be federal student loans, private student loans, or personal loans. Ask the program directors which loans are available to you during the internship. Do you know if the internship program has applied to the government for educational loan status? Also, is deferment possible for your undergraduate student loans?

**Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program:**
- Low interest rates
- Loans deferred while student is enrolled in an eligible program of study at least half time
- Can be subsidized or unsubsidized

**Subsidized Loans:**
- Awarded on basis of financial need
- Federal government pays interest on the loan until you begin to pay it off (when you become less than a half time student)

**Unsubsidized Loans:**
- Not awarded on basis of need
- Interest begins to accrue at the time you receive the loan (the "disbursement date")
Interest accrues from the disbursement date until you pay off the loan in full
- You can pay the interest or allow it to accumulate and capitalize

**Part-time jobs** – It is wise to ask graduated interns if they thought it was possible to have a part-time job during the internship. You can find internship reviews on All Access Internships that mention specific examples like waitressing, babysitting, weekend jobs as a diet technician, or jobs offered by the internship institution itself (Perhaps, help in the catering department?).

You might suspect there is no easy solution for the financial burden that comes with DIs, but definitely explore your options. You might find that it IS possible to get a little financial help and also feel settled about the fact that your bank account contains only borrowed money. Maybe then you will want to soak up everything the internship has to offer and get your money's worth!

*I have one last piece of advice on money:* I hear a lot of interns say that one of the challenges of an unpaid internship program is that you feel like you are working for FREE. If they are having a bad day, it is easy to complain about that fact that they are free labor. It basically becomes the scapegoat for their frustration. But I have a thought for you that will nip this bad attitude in the bud: Remember that this internship is the one last step you need to take until you reach your goal of becoming a registered dietitian. You are still paying for an education. Did you complain that you weren’t getting paid to study in college? As you move along through the program, focus on the end goal of the internship: to be a competent entry-level registered dietitian.

Also, think about all of those people who didn’t get matched. How lucky you are to even be in an internship? Many institutions lose money on providing a DI through liability or lost time teaching, among other reasons. In fact, that is part of the reason that there aren’t enough spots available to everyone that applies. Therefore, you know the people guiding and teaching you at the hospital are dedicated to the advancement of the field. Be thankful for this. Stay motivated, positive, and complaint-free. This should make for a more beneficial experience.

**Having a Wide Variety of Experiences**

**True or False:** “*I need to have clinical experience in order to be competitive for an internship.*” This may be true if the emphasis of the program is clinical. However, broad and unique experiences may sometimes outweigh clinical experience, depending on the selection criteria that the program director sets for its applicants. And since “a wide variety” implies having more than one dietetics experience, you must seek out experiences before your application year. Let’s get moving!

If you ask any dietetics student about what it takes to be more competitive with their internship applications you may hear, “Start volunteering soon and often!” Then, he or she will emphasize that you should get as many experiences as you can before you are in the process of applying. Your experience says a lot about your interests as well as your personality traits. Be proactive about
gaining experiences by taking the initiative. Show that you have the ability to juggle multiple things at once. A great example is holding a part-time job during the semester. You also want to convey your willingness to learn new skills and show your enthusiasm for learning. Take on a position that may be extra challenging. As directors review your experiences, they will notice qualities like professionalism, multitasking, leadership, and solid communication (just to name a few).

Create Experiences worth Writing About
Your experiences are what you will use to show that you have the skills to excel in the internship. If you can’t find good experiences offered through your school or within your community, start a new club or work with an RD that can be your mentor and provide invaluable one-on-one experience. It shows that you are a go-getter and are not afraid to take initiative!

Variety is Key
During the internship, each rotation may be very different from the others. Racking up exposure in a lot of different areas will make your internship year less intimidating. Getting experience in basic clinical, food service, and community areas is crucial, since these are required rotations for every DI. Once you've done that, expand to more specialized areas like research, business, entrepreneurship, sports nutrition, pediatrics, or communications. Not only will you have your bases covered with "typical" student positions, you can bolster your application with impressive add-ons that allow you to rise above the crowd.

Making the Ask
How exactly are you supposed to go about finding these impressive add-ons? Let me be the first to tell you that Google can only take you so far! As dietetics students, we all crave opportunities to prove ourselves in the professional world. However, you must be willing to take some risks. I want to let you in on my own personal secret called “making the ask”. Here’s how it works. If you haven’t already spent some time on the Internet researching companies, hospitals, professional organizations, dietitians in private practice, etc., then it’s time you got started. First, do the obvious. Check and see if they offer established internships or volunteer experiences. If they don’t, make the ask! If you don’t ask, your answer is always NO.

Not quite “experience-hungry” yet? Keep in mind that a wide variety of experiences will allow you to:

- Decide what you are interested in
- Gain contacts in the field
- Show your willingness to learn and commitment to the profession
- Expand your skill set
- Prove to directors that you take initiative to gain as much experience as possible

Take Advantage of Breaks:
If you are lucky enough to have them, utilize those month-long winter breaks to squeeze in more experience or even get started on applications! Here are some ideas to stay busy in between semesters:

- Volunteer at a food bank or soup kitchen. It will be especially busy during the holidays.
Help an RD set up his/her blog and contribute posts regularly (nutrition communications!).
Volunteer at a hospital for any holiday events, especially in the food service department.
Start a blog of your own nutrition-related experiences.
Reconnect with your summer job supervisor to see if they could use an extra hand.
Use this time to set up shadowing appointments with a variety of RDs to get to know more about the field.
Research and apply for summer job options. Many summer internships are filled by January.
Collect awards, past work, and projects and create an online résumé using Blogger.com, Wordpress.com, or VisualCV.com. Put this link on your application résumé. It’s all the rage!

SUCCESS STORY: Making the Ask

Read the following success story by Katie Hamm, original co-founder of All Access Internships, who shares her story on how she found invaluable experience just by “making the ask”:

I became discouraged after tirelessly searching for an undergraduate internship in the nutrition field near my hometown with no real results. That’s when I came across the biography of an established dietitian for two major sports teams in Kansas City, Mitzi Dulan, RD, CSSD. After reading about her accomplishments and experiences, I knew this was someone with whom I wanted to work. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I contacted her about creating my own internship under her guidance. Impressed by my initiative, she asked to see my résumé and requested a face-to-face interview. Once we met, she determined that I would be a good fit, and we started planning right away. I knew that I still needed a part-time job if I was selected for an unpaid internship, and Mitzi graciously remained flexible throughout our summer together. We met in person for a few hours twice a week where we discussed upcoming projects. Mitzi’s “hands-on” philosophy allowed me to dive right into the dietetics profession despite having only completed my sophomore year at Kansas State University.

While she allowed me to sit in on her counseling sessions with professional athletes, she was determined to make this experience my own. I developed weekly posters on topics of my choice to display in the training room, a dining out guide for the players, wrote articles for her website, and attended one of her live TV segments for a local station. This summer, Mitzi was in the process of writing a book. She gave me the opportunity to complete research, write excerpts, and preview chapters as needed. One of the most unique opportunities that arose out of working with Mitzi was being able to witness firsthand all that owning a business entails. This definitely was not a traditional internship! Mitzi and I developed a unique relationship as the summer progressed, and she constantly boosted my confidence in my abilities and encouraged my personal growth. At her suggestion, I read the book The Success Principles by Jack Canfield, which has opened up many new doors for me.

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This is why I am writing this article! I want others to realize the value of taking responsibility for their lives and that they too can make it happen for themselves. During our time together, Mitzi encouraged me to join the Nutrition Entrepreneurs Dietetic Practice Group and listserv. It has instantly connected me with practicing RDs, and has kept me reaping the benefits of her entrepreneurial mindset even after we completed our time together.

Thinking back, I know that I never would have spent my summer under the guidance of such an inspirational individual if I gave in to the fear of rejection. Mitzi has even offered me ongoing, paid opportunities throughout the school year, simply because of the lasting partnership we created. I have gained all of this and more because I made the ask. I encourage you to do the same! If you ask and do not receive, you are still at the same place as you were at before you asked. Nothing to lose, right? But if you ask and DO receive, think of all the possibilities! Don’t be afraid to think outside the box. Your experience will surely outshine those of your peers if you start today by making the ask!

Find Experiences on All Access Internships
Check out the GET EXPERIENCE page, which can be found under RESOURCES, for a hidden treasure of opportunities. It is bursting at the seams with internships offered by exciting RDs that are willing to help students. You can gain a mentor and bulk up your application at the same time! Short-term internships, virtual internships, small projects and more are available for your choosing.

Make it Happen:
- List at least four areas of dietetics that you are interested in.
- Create a cover letter or introductory email template describing yourself, your past experience, and your interests.
- Approach at least 4 RDs or institutions that could provide you with a learning opportunity that meets your interests.
- Gain at least 1 experience in each of your chosen interest areas.
- Write down all the responsibilities you held and the skills you gained from each experience and save for when you are writing your application letters.
- Keep in contact with your supervisors and mentors, as they would make excellent recommendations when applying.

Defining What YOU Want
What do YOU want out of your internship? We all know by now that there is a great possibility we might not get matched with our first choice, but do you want to sit back and wonder what if? I have heard of people who decided not to apply somewhere because they thought it was too tough to get in even though it may have been their dream internship.

Please keep in mind that this is a time in your life where you can afford to be a little selfish. I realize that many people are not in a situation where they can move around the country, but if you are, embrace it! Be sure that you are choosing internships that are right for you based on your needs and wants, not based on convenience or the desires of others. If your top choice happens to be across
the street or happens to be the same one that your best friend is ranking first, then that's great! If not, listen to your gut—it's usually right.

Many factors differentiate each internship program from the other. Consider what you can realistically afford to do and choose from programs that will match your interests and experiences. I was realistically willing to look across the country for internships.

I knew I wanted a general emphasis, was attracted to teaching hospitals, did not want a graduate degree yet, and wanted the option to do an elective rotation in Chicago (my hometown). Massachusetts General Hospital offered all of that to me, and that is where I got matched. When you apply to programs that match what you are interested in, your genuine enthusiasm for the program will shine through to the selection committee and will reflect well on your application. The match works two ways—both you and the program should fit well with each other. Proving you are the perfect fit is what the application is for! Let’s dive deeper into defining what you want in an internship.

**Geographic Location**

**Possible Options**
- Near Home
- Far from Home
- Distance Learning

**Questions to Ask**
- Where do I want to get a job after the internship?
- Do I have the finances to move?
- Am I able to leave any obligations in my current location?
- Am I a self-directed learner?

This might be the most important deciding factor if you want to stay near your family, are already employed in the area, or have obligations that will not allow you to move to a new city. For you, deciding on the location of your program is easy! For those of you without a geographical barrier, you’re able to choose from many outstanding programs all over the country! You may find an internship on the other side of the country that fits your interests perfectly.

Yes, moving to a new city can be expensive, scary, and risky, but it could be so worth it! Do not be afraid to sacrifice one or two years in an unfamiliar location if it means completing an internship that will bring you one step closer to reaching your unique goals.

Also, think about where you want to seek employment after the internship. If you stay in this area, you may develop relationships with other dietitians and facility personnel, which could lead to a job after you graduate. I encourage everyone to look at all the unique programs across the country and don’t let location hold you back if it doesn’t have to. I moved from Chicago to Boston knowing only
my intern classmates and the receptionist of the gym I joined, but it was absolutely worth the sacrifice.

If you do move, there is more preparation needed and it could be harder to adjust to new surroundings. If you stay near home, there are less living expenses and transportation costs. Look at all costs, since they might even out in the end. For example, if traveling means getting a stipend instead of paying tuition then it could be worth it. Also, if you need a car for an internship near by, but can use public transportation for the internship across the country, these are the financial decisions you must consider.

Distance programs will still require transportation. You must do well with online learning and be self-motivated. There is less networking with other interns, but you can still make good connections with potential employers at local sites.

**Money**

**Possible Options**
- Tuition/Program Fee
- No Tuition
- Stipend

**Questions to Ask**
- Can I afford tuition?
- Can I defer existing student loans during the internship?
- What other costs do I have?
- Can I still get financial aid for living expenses?
- Does the program meet my needs, no matter the price?

Even if it seems like the internship is a financial burden, remember that you are likely to get a very good return on your educational investment. Of course, you may desire to avoid debt and if this is the case, stipend programs could be your best bet.

Don’t judge a book by its cover on this deciding factor though. Some programs may have stipends, but they may also have tuition that is more than the stipend. Note that Veterans’ Affairs internships are notorious for offering stipends. Living costs associated with the location on the program may end up canceling out the stipend in the end. With any financial decision, analyze all the numbers and research available financial aid by contacting the program director or financial aid office.

Undergraduate loans may be deferred, but you still might need financial aid. If there is no tuition, you might have a harder time finding financial aid (since you might not be considered a student). Also, ask the program director for information on scholarship opportunities, especially for combined Masters and Internship programs.
**Emphasis/Concentration**

**Possible Options**
- General
- Clinical
- Food Service Management
- Community
- Research
- Sports Nutrition
- Pediatrics

**Questions to Ask**
- What are my short-term career goals?
- Am I unsure of my career goals?
- Do I desire a strong foundation in every area of dietetics?

In preparation for the next step in your dietetics journey, it is essential that you research all the different areas that a dietitian can practice in. Beware of saying, "I don’t know what I am interested in!" if you have not even researched what is available to you. Talk to your advisor, other dietitians, your professors, and dietetics-related work supervisors (or check out “Research the Field”). My mentor, Julie Burns, was able to give me real-world advice on the progressive areas of dietetics that I did not know existed!

Choosing a general emphasis is great if you do not know what you are interested in yet or are interested in multiple areas. On the other hand, remember that all internships are required to have a minimum amount of hours in each area of dietetics, so you won’t be missing out if you choose a specific emphasis. Finally, think about where you want to work right out of the internship, and consider if a niche emphasis would benefit you when applying.

**Pace**

**Possible Options**
- Part-time
- Full-time

**Questions to Ask**
- Do I want to get done with school as quickly as possible?
- Will I need to work part-time while I complete the internship? (Or need flexibility?)

If you need to work during the internship, a part-time DI makes employment more realistic and manageable. If you have any other obligation or time commitment, part-time DIs usually offer schedule flexibility. It may take longer than the full-time internships, so it all depends on the length of time you are able to commit. You will still gain the same amount of experience in both options.

**Graduate Options**

**Possible Options**
- Combined Masters and Internship
- Some Graduate Credits
- Internship Only

**Questions to Ask**
- Is a graduate degree one of my professional goals?
- Do I know what area of dietetics I am most interested in?
- Can I handle the time and financial commitment that comes along with the combined program?
- Am I hoping that the internship will help me find my niche?
- Can I afford it?

There has been much debate over choosing a combined internship with graduate school or just the internship. A combined program will allow you to obtain your Masters degree while simultaneously meeting the requirements to fulfill a DI program. These programs are usually longer than a DI program by itself, but you leave with a Masters degree. A combined program is a nice option to consider for advancing your education while completing your internship.

In my opinion, it all comes down to what your career goals are. You don't want to enter a combined Master's in Clinical Nutrition program, only to discover that you have no interest in practicing clinical nutrition. There are also many types of Masters programs applicable to the RD, such as public health, business administration, entrepreneurship, or nutrition communications.

Of course, it is not the end of the world and a Master's credential will still provide you with a competitive advantage for career opportunities in any area of dietetics, but it's to your advantage to think carefully about your decision and get the most out of your advanced study.

**Elective Rotation**

**Possible Options**
- None
- Short
- Long
- Flexible guidelines
- Strict guidelines

**Questions to Ask**
- Do I want options?
- Am I interested in a “non-traditional” field in nutrition?
- Is my area of interest not covered in the assigned rotations?
- Do I know what I like?

Decide if you want an internship that provides you with some options. You may be so set on one area of dietetics, so the option to spend additional time in it is appealing. You may have no clue what area you enjoy, so the more options the better! You can use an elective experience to your advantage and gain valuable exposure to any area of your choice.
However, you may find limited opportunities or you may be restricted on what type of elective rotation you can complete. Some programs require you stay in the vicinity of the program's location and others only allow you to choose from a list of pre-selected rotations.

Figure out how personalized the internship is and how well you think it can tailor to your interests. If this factor is really important to you, make sure you talk to the director and ask how they choose rotation schedules and experiences. Talk to the past interns to find out if they were actually able to do what they wanted to do.

**Program Location**

**Possible Options**
- Teaching hospital
- Community hospital
- University
- Women, Infants, and Children
- Food and Facilities Management Company

**Questions to Ask**
- Where do the actual experiences take place?
- What is the size of the hospital?
- What are the characteristics of the patient population?
- Is the area rural or urban?

Programs have affiliations in an array of settings from hospitals and universities to Women, Infant, and Children's programs and wellness centers. The locations of rotations are an important deciding factor and a detail you should not overlook.

Are the majority of rotations at one location? If so, you could potentially have less transportation costs, quick adjustment with personnel and organizational culture, and the possibility of great opportunities offered all in one place! On the downside, you may not prefer the way this location does things and you could also see a less diverse patient population. You just do not want to be misled by the fact that if a program is in a city with plenty of great facilities, it doesn’t mean you will be able to take advantage of them.

On the other hand, a program located in a small town may set up a majority of their rotations in a nearby large and opportunistic city! My point is, it is important to know where your actual experiences take place, and do not assume that they will all be where you send your application packet!

Make sure the patient population meets your goals too. Are you interested in pediatrics? Apply to a children's hospital. Are you interested in geriatrics? VA hospitals typically service an older demographic. An urban setting will typically have a more diverse population that could enhance your learning experience. A rural setting is typically more homogeneous, but could provide more
hands-on experience. Ask the director or past interns to be sure.

**Rotation Location**

**Possible Options**
- Primarily One Location
- Variety of Locations

**Questions to Ask**
- Are all the rotations “in house”? 
- Do I have to travel to different sites? 
- Is each intern assigned to a different institution? 
- Do I adjust to different personnel well? 
- Am I interested in seeing the “big picture” of clinical dietetics? 
- Are rotation sites accustomed to having interns? 
- Will you be mostly observing or actually participating in tasks?

Many programs are completed at one facility, and typically these are clinical internships. There are also programs that rotate you through many different sites. For those who are unsure about pursuing clinical nutrition, an internship with a variety of rotation locations may better suit your needs—offering a broader array of experiences. Be sure to research all the rotations extensively. Ask the director for a sample schedule with locations.

If you have the majority of rotations in one location, it cuts back on transportation issues, you get to know the personnel in the department very well, and can connect everything together and see the “big picture” (i.e. how clinical RDs work with food service and outpatient nutrition departments). It can be a quick adjustment with organizational culture, and great opportunities offered all in one place!

On the other hand, you may find that you do not work well in this one environment. Or, you see a less diverse patient population. A variety of rotation locations will require more transportation, but you may enjoy the change in pace from one rotation site to another.

Finally, learn about the rotations and the level of responsibility you will have at these rotation sites. Generally speaking, teaching hospitals are more accustomed to having interns. Larger hospitals may give more unique experiences. Smaller hospitals may give you more responsibility.

**Final Thoughts**

Have an open mind and don’t be limited by the location of the internship, unless you have a desire to live in a particular area. Also, keep that open mind as you go through your internship, you could start with a passion for pediatrics and end with a passion for geriatrics!

Also, visit the internship program if it is logistically and financially possible. Meet the internship director; let the director put a face with your name! Also, observe the surrounding location of the internship and what that city has to offer. If you don’t like the location, it will make the internship that
much harder. Contact previous interns and get their feedback about their experience beyond the work day. Past dietetic interns are more likely to tell you about how they de-stressed from the internship than directors. And again, have an open mind when applying and as you go through your internship program.

Make it Happen:
- Develop your list of deciding factors and define what you want out of an internship.
- Keep these deciding factors in mind as you narrow down your list of worthy programs.
- Start going through options early on! The earlier you start, the better off you will be.
- Create a top-10 list, and narrow it down to your final choices at least 2 months before the deadline.

Making an Informed Decision
If you want answers, you need to ask questions. The more informed of a decision you make on your final list of internships, the more comfortable you will feel about the whole process.

Ask questions relating to whether the focus of the program will provide you with the knowledge and experiences that will be specific to your own career goals. Beyond what is presented on the internships’ website, find out the preceptor/intern relationship. The preceptor will be the one who will teach you the skills it takes to be a registered dietitian. The quality of the preceptors can sometimes outweigh the quality and reputation of the internship’s institution.

First, spend a lot of time on the website! If this internship is your first choice, you should definitely read every single word written on the program. Almost all programs spell out EXACTLY what they’re looking for and how they’re scoring the applications. Use that as a guide.

Then, get opinions from those actually at the program or that already went through the program. Also, don’t forget about connecting with preceptors as well. The people associated with the program will be able to tell you more than any websites or materials. I think it’s important to visit so that you can decide if you would like to live there.

All Access Internships has an always-expanding collection of testimonials from past interns on their experiences—this is our users’ favorite feature. Ask the DI directors or your didactic program director for intern contact information too. In addition, the American Dietetic Association Student Community of Interest and your state’s student dietetic association are great resources of information.

Let’s not forget about the dietitians at your college or university! Utilizing faculty advisors and DPD directors can be a huge help. A lot of people are intimidated of faculty advisors and do not seek out their resources; especially when it comes to proofreading letters of application and selecting internships that match their qualifications and career goals. That is what they are there for—to advise
and counsel you on this very important career move. Be prepared for their meetings to that they can guide you more effectively.

**Make it Happen**
- Visit at least twenty program websites and come up with your top ten favorites.
- Print off All Access Internships profiles for each program
- Read the Internship Reviews for each program on All Access Internships
- Contact past interns, preceptors, and director and ask them questions
- Schedule visits with your favorite programs, if possible
- Make an appointment with your advisor to discuss your deciding factors and ask for feedback on narrowing down your top-10

**Reaching Out to the Directors**

My own personal experience with directors was through conversations over email. I expressed my interest in their program and asked specific questions (ones that I knew were not ANYWHERE on their website). This is one recommended way to develop a relationship, especially if there is interaction on two or three occasions, just so they see your name more than once.

Of course, make the emails very professional and address directors by name. Directors may become frustrated by students who contact them with the greeting “To whom it may concern”. You should know the program director's name, since it is almost always listed on the website. Make sure it is up to date too and check multiple sources to confirm.

If you have many issues to discuss with the director and are comfortable on the phone, then calling is a wise choice. Contact them first by email to see what their availability is and request an appointment time. Do not just call right away because they may not be available to talk and it could be considered rude. Also, they might prefer email, and if this is the case, you should honor their preferences.

So the big question now is: Should I visit? I believe that visiting is the best way to truly get a feel for the personality of the program, but the cost can be overwhelming when you are traveling halfway across the country. In my opinion, it is definitely worth it to spend the extra money and time, as long as you make the best of the experience.

**How do you make a good impression with the director?**
- Dress professionally and act professionally too
- Don’t text or use your phone during a visit
- Take notes and ask questions
- Act enthusiastic and energetic about dietetics and the program
- Don’t chew gum or blow bubbles
- Don’t ask what time work ends unless you hope to hold a part-time job or take a class during
Make it Happen

- Check out the open house date on the program website.
- If you can’t make it or don’t want to miss school, check with the internship director to see if he/she will offer an individual visit. Most directors are more than accommodating.
- Make sure you are not visiting on an "off" day. Don’t visit on a weekend day, over their holiday breaks, or during times when they are having classroom training. You want to get a good feel for the program and that is going to be when all the interns are there doing their rotations.
- Check for flights and hotel accommodations. Ask the director if she recommends any hotels. If you are traveling alone, it is a good idea to stay within walking distance of the internship site. The Southwest Airlines DING application is useful to monitor specific airports for deals. Priceline.com is another good one for grabbing last minute deals on both hotel and flight.
- Don’t forget to use your resources. Do you know someone in the area or is a graduate from your school attending that program? They may allow you to crash at their place for the night. It doesn’t hurt to ask the director if you could get in touch with one of the interns and see if this is possible, even if you don’t know them. Most people would love to help out and know how hard it can be to make a visit if you have to pay for transportation and housing.

Uncovering the Clues to Finding your Perfect Fit

What’s a DI applicant’s worst nightmare? Not getting matched to their favorite internship, of course. Unfortunately, this nightmare becomes a reality all too often. What’s even worse is that this acceptance rate has been trending downward because the number of available internship spots is staying about the same and the number of applicants is rising. “Competition is fierce” is definitely an understatement. So, let’s uncover the clues you need to find your "perfect fit,” so that you actually GET MATCHED!

- **Create experiences that improve your strengths and weaknesses and will support your interests.** The key is to gain the right experience for you. To do this, define what your strengths and weaknesses are. In what types of situations do you excel? In what types do you need improvement? Find opportunities to fine-tune strengths and to upgrade your weaknesses. When it comes time to apply, put a magnifying glass over all your paid employment, volunteer work, and extra-curricular activities. Examine and re-examine where you did well and where you felt most passionate about what you were doing. Choose these experiences to write about in your application letter and show the selection committee how
you are prepared to excel in their internship.

• **Develop specific interests by researching opportunities in the dietetics field.** I honestly believe the possibilities in dietetics are endless if you have imagination and passion! I have talked to way too many successful RDs not to be convinced of this. Look at the list of Dietetic Practice Groups to get started. It is important to have interests that are focused on something specific. For example, you shouldn’t only say that your interests are in clinical dietetics! You can’t possibly be interested in every single area of clinical nutrition (surgery, medicine, critical care, pediatrics, etc.). It shows that you have not researched enough and you aren’t engaged in the dietetics field. THIS IS A BAD SIGN! Instead, focus on one or two specializations and then get the wheels turning on how you can apply your interests to a job. Talk to RDs that have careers in your area of interest and get their perspective. Shadow them and really get a feel for their work. When you apply, your specific interests should be consistent with your specific professional goals, and the internship should be capable of helping you. THIS IS A GOOD SIGN!

• **Make an informed decision about which internships can help you reach your professional goals and fit your needs.** I attended the CADE Forum at last year’s FNCE. During the discussion about low internship acceptance rates, one director said that she wished applicants would remember one thing: *don’t tell the program that you want to be a pediatric dietitian when the program cannot offer you experience in pediatric dietetics.* Seems obvious, huh?

Unfortunately, students are not making an excessively-informed decision. ‘Excessively’ is the key word here. The more you know about the program, the more you know if it is right for you. And how will you know? ASK QUESTIONS! Ask directors, past interns, current interns, other students, and anyone with the answers you need!! Get the real deal from those that have “been there, and done that”. Past and current interns have applied and been accepted to an internship program. What was their secret to success? If you can’t find intern contact information, visit All Access Internships (www.allaccessinternships.com) for a collection of testimonials on your favorite internships.

• **Your internship is the gateway to your “dream career”, so choose wisely.** All DIs are required to meet the same core competencies so that the interns are prepared for the registration examination and are competent in an entry-level dietetics position. Just as internship selection committees are looking for applicants that go “above and beyond” what is required of them, prospective applicants should look for internships that go “above and beyond” preparing their interns for the RD exam and a first job.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of the application process. Your application is your "case". You need to make a stellar case in order to convince the jury (the selection committee) that you are—without a doubt—guilty of being the perfect candidate for their program. Highlight strengths, provide examples of experiences that reflect your interests, express your passion for pursuing your
professional goals and convince them that the internship can help you reach these goals. Take advantage of your chance to show the selection committee how you are perfect for their program and how their program is perfect for you. You may be a great applicant, but if you aren’t a great fit for the program, then it’s not a great match!

**Make it Happen:**
- You have strengths and you have weaknesses. Know what they are!
- Find and create experiences that can help develop specific interests.
- Excessively research the internships that would bring you closer to reaching your professional goals.
- State your “case” to the selection committee. When they are done going through your application packet, it should be *logical* that you and their internship program would create a “perfect fit”...CASE CLOSED!

**My Pep Talk**

For many, the DI application process will be a *stress-bomb* destroying weekend plans, fun with friends, and relaxation time. Preparation really is key, so why wait? Well, you could be swamped with school, busy with extra-curricular activities, or exhausted by your part-time job. These are tough times! What I have realized, though, is that sometimes when you have a lot on your plate, you can prioritize and be more productive than if you just had one or two things to manage. The busier you are the more productive you are!

Start by making to-do lists and checking things off. DONE DONE DONE. You might find you have some extra time on your hands! Use that time for career planning and figuring out what you want to do, who you need to talk to, and what steps you have to take to get to where you want to be. All the blood, sweat, and tears you are going to put into the process will absolutely be worth it.

The most inspirational book I ever read was *The Success Principles* by Jack Canfield (recommended to me by Katie Hamm when we started All Access Internships). It is an accumulation of every self-improvement book out there and I took a lot away from it. I suggest reading it to get a positive, confident *BRING IT ON, WORLD!* attitude.

The time is now to set goals. You just have to prove it to yourself and give yourself the confidence to succeed and reach those goals. Each time you meet a goal, the next one is more challenging, but also more rewarding and gets you closer to bigger things-- like your DREAM CAREER.

The reality is that life is only going to get busier, so you will never have time 'later on' to do something. Never push things off, just *DO IT!* :) Take small, action steps EVERYDAY, and no matter what just take ACTION! For example, if nutrition communication is a passion and you want to be on Oprah someday, your first action step would be to start writing. Start a blog, guest post on other nutrition blogs, or contact online magazines and websites that would mesh well with your writing.
style. Writing for newsletters, the All Access Internships newsletter, and the ADA Student Scoop can get your name out there too and would look pretty stellar on your résumé too. See what I mean?

Right now, creating a competitive DI application should be your next goal. Take a big, deep breath. Now take action!
CREATING A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION

Getting Started

True or False: "It only takes a few weeks to put together a DI application." False. Why not look for what steps you could be taking right now to get ahead? I can bet that when the application deadline rolls around you would much rather be perfecting your personal statement than scrambling to arrange transcript requests and reference letters instead.

- **Solidify your career goals:** The internship is the transition into your career. The internship’s main goal is to prepare you for that career. Saying you want to be a clinical dietitian is not an acceptable answer. It needs to be much more thought out than that. I suggest researching the field (see “Reseaching the Field” in this e-book) and talking to other RDs and then find out how they progressed in their field. From my own experience and observations, many RDs do start in clinical right out of the internship, but then move into other settings or advance to higher positions. You want to convey that you have set high goals and see potential in this career. There are many more opportunities to use clinical skills after a few years of experience in the hospital setting and directors want to be sure that you know this. Keep in mind that these career goals are not set in stone either. No one is going to hold you to them, but you do have to believe that they are right for you now!

- **Organize internship information:** Collect all your information on each prospective internship. Many students print out the profiles of each program on All Access Internships and then take notes on those as they go along. Or you can print out only the application checklists of each of your “favorites”.

- **Collect your experiences:** List anything and everything (even if not related to dietetics) as long as it makes you look well-rounded. Think in terms of ‘transferable skills’, meaning that even non-dietetics experiences can still prove to be beneficial experiences in the internship. For example, if working in a retail store allowed you to gain skills in teamwork, communication, and customer service, you should definitely include in on your application. Highlight dietetics experiences over non-dietetics experiences in your personal statement, but the standard ADA application is a good place to list all experiences. Consult with your advisor if you are not sure on experiences to list.

- **Define what sets each program a part:** Think about the key differences in each program and how that applies to you. This will be beneficial when putting together your applications. Sorry to say, but one personal statement does not fit all. You will almost certainly have to write a different
version of your letter for each program you apply to. Write at least three things about the program that make it different from the others—such as different emphases, different options for elective rotations, or certain types of experiences offered. You will want to connect these characteristics to yourself and your goals so that it is clear you are a match for that particular program.

The application is your only chance (unless there is an interview too) to show the director what you’re made of and why you should rise to the top of their list. Be professional at all times. Stay organized. Ooze with enthusiasm for each program you apply to. Strengthen the qualities that directors look for in a future dietetic intern. Get matched!

This Dish on DICAS

Starting with the September 2010 application round, online Dietetic Internship Centralized Application Services (DICAS) will be implemented for the majority of DI programs. This is very exciting for applicants because now most application materials can conveniently be uploaded online and submitted, taking away the stress of running to the post office right before it closes! Keep in mind the following:

- It is still your responsibility to figure out if the program is or is not participating in DICAS and what supplemental information the program requests.
- There will be a $40 fee for the first application and $20 for each additional application.
- This application will be similar to the standard ADA application, and will also calculate your DPD GPA and Science GPA when you enter in grades.
- Transcripts will be sent to the DICAS company, Liaison, to be scanned into your online application. You will still have to mail the hard copy to the internship you are matched to.
- You can request your Declaration of Intent or Verification Statement via DICAS to your DPD director and then add your electronic signature so that it can be included in your application. A hard copy still needs to be sent after matched to a program.
- Not all programs have to participate in DICAS.
- DICAS and Computer Matching are two separate processes. You still need to register with D&D Digital if the program you are applying to participates in computer matching.

SUCCESS STORY: Turning Negatives into Positives

Read this success story by Hannah Carroll, a graduate from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and a member of the 2010 Dallas Presbyterian Hospital internship class, about overcoming a low GPA to get accepted to an internship:

As a freshman, I had the stellar 4.0 GPA for semester one. After transferring to a major university, I learned that A’s weren’t always easy to obtain…especially in sciences. After managing to pull more
C’s than I ever expected, I entered my junior year with much worry and frustration. My professors and advisor were concerned but I did not give up hope for getting an internship. What did I do?? I ran for every experience, job, nutrition opportunity, research assistantship, and conference possible. A few unique experiences were key to obtaining my dream internship.

• Volunteer, Volunteer, Volunteer: For one semester I volunteered as a child life assistant at our local pediatric hospital. I learned key communication skills among the staff and patients of the hospital, networked with the volunteer staff coordinators, and realized how much I loved pediatric healthcare. One year later, when a competitive and unique nutrition technician position opened at the same hospital, it truly helped that I invested time and formed relationships at the hospital. Additionally I worked with a local allergy network, our university nutrition coordinator, the dietetic association at school and in the county, and alongside my fellow students for university-wide events.

• Campus Connections: Due to my class attendance and general desire to learn, I obtained a job and two research assistant positions by simply getting to know my professors. One of my research positions lead to multiple conferences, national networking opportunities, and a great exposure to the nutrition community. Both of these professors wrote various recommendation letters for me that reflected the time and effort that I put into projects with them. For the internship it is vital that the professors know you well. Don’t be another student they had in class-get to know them! Discuss their research interests, other jobs/positions they have had, and the subject at hand. Additionally, campus leadership positions indicate an interest in your community & your fellow man. Check out possibilities of working with Relay for Life, Diabetes Advocacy group, Health Ambassadors, or any student advisory committee. Let your interest in nutrition affect your campus and community!

• Diversify Your Résumé: Throughout my college career I had a series of jobs & opportunities that were all different. As a junior, I was hired by four Catholic priests as their personal cook. Not only did this job indicate that I was dependable, trustworthy, etc., it implied that I have the ability to plan, budget, and prepare food. Additionally I had worked for an upscale caterer, my professor, a pediatric hospital, and a retail store. Think outside the box-it can truly make you stand out! Internships love foodservice and clinical experience but adding additional jobs can indicate a lot about you and your work ethic.

Each of these elements together will make a difference. Do not allow yourself to feel overwhelmed or frustrated. Many times along the internship journey I found myself needing to refocus. Remember why you chose this great career path and jump back in! Most importantly, enjoy the ride and keep on working! If you still feel like you aren’t up to snuff and want to improve your chances of receiving a DI appointment, consider the following:

• Apply to programs that are in less popular geographic regions.
• Apply to programs that do not provide stipends. Because money is such an issue, these programs tend to attract more applicants.
• Even choose programs that charge fees. Everyone would like to receive a large stipend while
Even though there are no statistics to back up these suggestions, the point is that you will have a better chance if less people are applying to a program or if that program has a lot of spots available. It’s all a numbers game.

The Recipe for a Stellar Application Letter

Over and over again, I hear from directors and past interns that the application letter is THE key component of your application packet, since it serves as your introduction to the selection committee. It makes sense to spend a lot of time working on this. If you are concerned about your GRE scores, GPA, or even lack of community involvement, here is the place to show them that you ARE an excellent candidate for their program. Most internships do not just want to hear that you are "excited" to experience what they have available. They are most interested in how you are a good FIT for the program. Use the checklist below to ensure your letter is extraordinary.

✓ Implies that you are well-rounded. Show that you can balance school and other activities without a problem! In the internship, especially a combined program, you will have to handle school, work, and outside homework all the time. The selection committee is going to use your performance in your undergraduate career as a predictor of how you will do in their internship. You might have had a 4.0 GPA, but with no other outside activities. This might not be as challenging to accomplish with extra time on your hands. If you had a 3.6 GPA with a ton of exceptional experiences, leadership positions, and involvement in clubs or an outside job, well that is pretty impressive!

✓ Tells a unique story. Show your personality and share how you learned from certain experiences. How has it made you who you are today? Convey personal and professional growth to the selection committee. They know you will continue to grow during your DI.

✓ Highlights your strengths. As a future intern, describe what you can potentially offer to the program. Incorporate how the program’s selection criteria apply to you.

✓ Conveys how your goals can be met through their program. Notes the areas in which you want to grow in relation to what the program offers. If the internship you are applying to focuses on Clinical Nutrition, don’t write a letter about your Sports Nutrition goals.

✓ Proves that you have done your research. Be able to state why you are right for that program and why they should choose you. Make mention of small facts that you learned about by talking to past interns or preceptors.

✓ Convinces the reader that you have the potential to be a leader. Highlight past leadership experiences and include leadership in your career goals. Write about how much you really want to succeed in the dietetics field. Your enthusiasm will be contagious!

✓ Brings forth unique attributes and experiences. This will allow you to stand out from the
rest. Do not just restate everything that you included in your application. Describe what skills you learned, not what your responsibilities were.

✓ **Mentions skeletons in the closet.** Briefly not a low GPA or a low GRE along with any explanation, if applicable.

✓ **Describes any personal reflections on the program.** Perhaps you had thoughts about your visit or interaction with anyone affiliated with the program that you find appropriate to share.

✓ **Highlights your written communication skills.** The letter should not have any grammar or spelling errors. Active voice is preferred over passive voice. Sentences should be clear and concise. Avoid wordiness or fluff. Make sure this is reviewed by several other people before submitting!

Just like so many Americans want to know what the ONE magic food is that will help them lose weight, dietetic students want to know the ONE guaranteed way that they can get into an internship program. Well, we all know a diet full of a variety of nourishing, nutrient dense foods is what really works, so an applicant with a variety of experiences, skills, and personality traits is what will probably do the trick!

**For DICAS Programs Only**

On the DICAS application, the personal statement should address the following four questions:

1. Why do you want to enter the dietetics profession?
2. Discuss experiences that have helped prepare you for your career.
3. What are your short-term and long-term goals?
4. What are your strengths or weaknesses or areas needing improvement?

There will be a 1000 word limit to this letter as well. This is approximately 1.5-2 pages, single-spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman font. Consider Application Letter Coaching from All Access Internships for answering these tough questions and creating a strong letter!

**Picking the Right Recommendations**

The strategy here is to cultivate relationships with potential references early on. The longer and better the reference know you, the better you can make an impression and prove you have potential to thrive in a DI. Recommendation letters play an important role in your application packet because they are a third-party honest review of your skills, work ethic and character. They represent YOU, so choose wisely.

The reference would ideally:

- Be able to answer all the questions on the forms
- Know your personality
- Be familiar with your academic performance
- Be related to dietetics in some way
- Spend one-on-one time with you discussing your experiences and career goals
Meet the requirements set by the internship (i.e. include a reference from a professor)

Allow your references plenty of time. If you have a lot of classmates vying for the reference of your super-friendly clinical nutrition professor, you’ll want to be first in line. Have you ever considered just HOW MANY reference letters this one person might be writing? Sometimes, professors will only commit to a certain number of students. This is exactly why it is so important to plan ahead! Typically, six weeks notice is enough lead time, keeping in mind that some references may take vacations if classes are not in session.

One strategy is to ask them early enough that your reference letter may be the only letter they are focusing on! This brings me to another point; make sure to ask them in PERSON. This is more professional and shows appreciation of their time. Drop by their office rather than sending an email request if you can.

A director once told me she has been repeatedly surprised that students would pick a professor or employer that would write such negative things about them. The point here is to choose references that will provide positive recommendations, not negative—even if you have to ask them! They should give you an honest answer. If they do agree to be a reference, have the following ready:

- Written Instructions specific to each program and DICAS information (if applicable)
- Résumé
- Application letter
- A list of strengths and weaknesses
  - Creating this document helps references write about what you would like them to write about. This may be insulting for some, so make sure to let them know that it is totally optional to look at, but there if needed to jog a memory.

Depending on the internships application instructions, it is expected that the recommendation letters are including with the application packet or when you submit on DICAS. Also, you will be asked to decide whether or not you waive your rights to view the letters. It is best to waive your rights to view the letters. This shows that you trust your reference, so they can be completely honest because they know you will not be able to read what they wrote.

After the application deadline, remember to thank your references with a nice handwritten card.

For DICAS Programs Only:

Three references will be submitted online by the reference. Two references will be from faculty members and one from an employer. Of course, the DI program may request something different, so always check with the program’s website and director if you are confused.

Once you confirm your references, an email is sent to them and you will be notified when the recommendation is complete. Once you receive recommendations, your application is complete and you can submit your applications through DICAS to your desired internship programs! Of note, if your reference is late, you can still submit your completed application before the deadline, and
submit the late recommendation after. Phew!

Crafting your Resume

Did you know that the résumé is now a mandatory part of the DICAS application? This means that the résumé will be a required field on this application, should the program be participating in DICAS. So how do you wow a selection committee with just one sheet of paper? Let’s break it down by typical components:

**Heading**
- Use a professional e-mail. For example, use jennifer.westerkamp@gmail.com, not jennyloveslife817@hotmail.com.
- The same goes for voicemail on your phone. Make sure you don’t have a funny voicemail, because it’s likely the internship director would NOT find it funny when contacting you.
- Include your blog or personal website if it is professional and shows you in a positive light. (If you tend to rant or complain on your blog, this might not be the best decision)

**Education**
- Remember that stating GPA is optional, but it will be on your full application anyway. You could highlight your DPD GPA here though if it is higher.
- Include anticipated graduation date

**Work Experience**
- Use the Challenge-Approach-Result (CAR) method to craft statements describing your work
- Do not use same action verb twice
- Show how well you did something by using numbers or results when applicable
- Be specific to the internship
- Highlight dietetics experience
- List in chorological order
- Don’t use class projects or labs on the résumé
- Include dietetics-related volunteer positions and unpaid internships

**Extras**
- Publications in newsletters, guest blogs, etc.
- Awards and honors
- Professional Development
- Certifications
- Professional Organizations
- Languages
- Volunteer or Community Service
The Finishing Touches

Don’t forget about the finishing touches to your application package. This is the last thing that should be done before you send them off and never think about them again!

First, you will need to recruit a few pairs of extra eyeballs to look over your materials and provide feedback:

- **Career workshops** – usually this is a free service, but you might have to schedule an appointment.
- **Friends** – offer an incentive for their time, such as a gift card to Starbucks.
- **Your advisor or a mentor** – provide them with the materials well in advance, so they don’t feel pressured by deadlines.
- **All Access Internships** – we provide full application reviews as well as one-on-one and group coaching for writing your application letter, creating your résumé, and preparing for your interview.

One great tip is to print everything out and read it over on paper. You can sometimes find mistakes that you would not normally see when you eyes are looking at a computer screen. Also, read it all out loud, so that you read through things more slowly.

For non-DICAS programs:

If you are not applying online to a DICAS program, then your application’s “first impression” is going to be the envelope. It’s the first thing that the director sees. Make sure the address on the cover of the envelope is exactly correct. Think about using labels for the shipping address and return address.

Inside the envelope, a folder can be used to hold all the application materials. It does not need to be a fancy, expensive folder, since they will probably just toss it anyway. Make sure everything is in an organized fashion. For example, use paperclips instead of staples. Paperclip your recommendation letters together and paperclip your letter of application if it’s more than one page long. Use labels on your recommendation envelopes. Also, if your reference decides to send the recommendation letter directly to the program, write up a
professional memo to let the director know that the letter is coming separately. The same thing goes for late transcripts. It shows your attention to detail!

Read everything over one last time. Check over the instructions a few times over to make sure you have everything. Note that blue ink is recommended for signatures on original documents in the application, so remember this for the ADA application as well as your application letter.

Mailing off these applications will be the best feeling EVER! Send it by certified mail so you have proof that you sent the applications before the deadline. Prepare a copy of each completed packet too, just in case it gets lost in the mail and you have to put it together quickly. You can also certify the receipt of your materials or do delivery confirmation. OK, it’s over! You’re done!

**Computer Matching Mania**

You stare at your final list of internship programs. You like them all...that’s why you are applying to them! But, there’s a twist to this plot: the ultra-important, life-or-death decision of how to rank them (*just kidding*). When it comes down to ranking, think about where you would be most happy and in which environment you could see yourself thriving. No matter what job you want after the internship, you will gain and improve transferable skills in every rotation in everyday of any internship. Being thrown into unpredictable situations with unpredictable personalities will certainly help you in the real world. In the end, it's all about making the most of it.

If you apply to programs with pre-selection, without ranking and computer matching, then apply to as many of those as you would like. Your chances of applying are only dependent on the number of applicants and the number of spots (just like college admissions).

When applying to programs with computer matching though, your chances of acceptance will vary based on how many apply to this program, how many are accepted, your rankings AND the rankings of those that applied. It is impossible to predict the effect that ranking a program 1 or 6 because of all of these factors.

**Confused?** For more information, call D&D Digital (contact information is on their website at dnddigital.com). Also, ask your advisor what he or she thinks. There might be trends from students that graduated from your same program and he or she will be able to shed some light on your qualities and the qualities of your internship program selections.

**Make it Happen**

- If you are stuck on how to rank, start by organizing your thoughts with the following table.
- Compare the programs based on the factors that will be the most important to you when deciding on your ranking order - location, cost, stipend, master’s degree/graduate credit. You will be able to see all of this information at a glance on All Access Internships.
• Add to the list any factors that are important to you.
• Then, choose the 5 criteria that are most important to your decision. Compare your internship choices again based on this new information and rank accordingly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuition</th>
<th>Proximity to home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Interns accepted</td>
<td>Describe living area, city scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-rotation Readiness</td>
<td>Describe clinical rotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe foodservice rotations</td>
<td>Describe community rotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff relief</td>
<td>Electives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree granted?</td>
<td>Homework Load</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Program</td>
<td>Vacation time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD Exam Prep included</td>
<td>Benefits (gym, meal allowance, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for financial aid?</td>
<td>Stipend offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, personality of program</td>
<td>Impression of internship director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 3 Advantages</td>
<td>Top 3 Drawbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps you achieve your career goals?</td>
<td>Other criteria?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the end, it’s all about attitude, what you make out of a situation, how well you can network, and how effectively you can market yourself! Don’t get too hung up on it, because it will really all fall into place. I think that directors are very good at knowing whether or not you will thrive in their type of internship. They see interns go through it year after year and know which types of people were able to succeed!

**For DICAS Programs:**
If you are not matched in the first round, you can re-submit to available internship programs through DICAS. This should hopefully be less stressful than the previous second round matching that was done in years past.

**Rocking for the Interview**

Do you think preparing for an interview is pointless? Do you feel that there is nothing you can do and that the questions cannot be predicted? Have I got news for you…

During my application process, two of my four internships required an interview. I had one in-person interview and one phone interview. As soon as I found out I had interviews, I immediately began to jot down ideas to prepare for them. Because of my preparation, I was confident in my answers and ready for any question the interviewer threw at me…before the interview even started. Below is a breakdown of typical interview questions.

**Behavioral/Performance-based questions** are questions that ask you to describe a past situation and how you acted during it. The reasoning behind these questions is that the
interviewer believes the way you acted in the past will predict how you will act in the future, during the internship. An example of a performance-based question is: Describe a time when you were required to work on a team to complete a task. What role did you play and what was the outcome of the situation?

“Typical” interview questions are those that may be asked in all interviews and that attempt to determine a person’s character and interests. Topics include: strengths and weaknesses, why you chose the internship, and professional goals.

Dietetics-related questions are those that ask you to apply your knowledge to an actual situation you may encounter in an internship. They can be related to all aspects of the DI: clinical, food service, and community nutrition. An example of a dietetics-related question is: A man is diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Describe what your steps would be in treating this patient. Include addition medical information you would need, your counseling techniques, and your treatment goals for the patient.

Develop answers for your list of possible questions. I wrote out twenty possible questions and answered them all as if I were in the interview. This is the key to your success! Practicing makes a world of difference and allows you to go through the motions and get in a rhythm of answering questions on the spot. You can have an unlimited amount of time to form the best possible answer.

The advantage is that even if these questions do not come up in your actual interview, you have still practiced how to give complete answers and also stay on topic instead of digressing and getting off topic if you have no good answer ready off the top of your head. Getting off topic and “blabbing” on and on is never a good thing in an interview. It is better to give a short and relevant answer than a long and unrelated one.

If questions are similar, you are better off if you practiced. Especially in a phone interview, this pays off. You may be so lucky as to read off your practiced answer during the interview! And please don’t think that you are “cheating” when you do this. During my phone interview, I had my answers to 20 questions in front of me, along with some notes from classes, my clinical nutrition text book, a calculator, a list of past situations I could use as examples, the personal statement I had written for this internship, and a list of questions to ask the interviewer. Obviously, this is not possible for an in-person interview.

During the phone interview, I was able to read off my answers almost verbatim to more than half of the questions I was asked. When the interviewer asked me how I prepared for the interview, I answered honestly. The interviewer was impressed and complimented me on my extensive preparation stating that I was the only interviewee that prepared that much. Personally, I have a feeling I was not the only one who had that many references at hand, but I may have been the only one who was honest about it. Which reminds me, always be honest!

I believe that this kind of preparation shows the interviewer that you have taken the interview
seriously, just like you would the internship. It shows that you strive to do your best in all situations and do everything you can to achieve an objective. Being able to tell the interviewer about my “cheat sheets” showed that I am honest and confident. I suspect that other applicants were too afraid to be honest because they thought the interviewer would look down upon it. I consider the opposite to be true. I was commended heavily for what others might consider embarrassing. You may not even be asked how you prepared, and if that’s the case, you do not get the chance to show off your preparation skills, but you were able to give great answers!

Make it Happen

- To begin, compile a list of questions that you think the interviewer may ask (See “Practice Interview Questions”).
- Ask the interviewer or past interns what types of questions were asked. Sometimes the interviewer may even tell you ahead of time, and if he/she doesn’t, then you can at least ask. Depending on the program, they may or may not disclose this information to you. Find out if they are performance-based question, “typical” interview questions, dietetics-related questions, or a combination of these.
- Develop answers for your list of possible questions.
- Perform at least one mock interview and practice where needed.

8 Interview Strategies that Work

1. Dress your best for a phone interview and don’t forget to smile. You will feel more confident and sound a lot more personable. Make sure to have your résumé and other necessary documents readily accessible so that you can refer to them as needed.

2. Do you know what STAR stands for? Behavioral interviewing is HOT, and if you don’t know the meaning of this acronym you need to brush up on your interviewing techniques. Interviewers are looking for you to describe a situation and task, explain what action you took to accomplish it, and the result of your action.

3. Generic answers won’t serve you well in an interview. If someone asks you what type of leader you are, make sure that you have a specific example to back it up. Sure - it’s great to say that you believe in participatory leadership but HOW did you exemplify this in your student organization, work setting, etc? Instead of saying “I am a hard worker” say “I am a hard worker. I worked twenty hours per week, and in addition to being a full-time student, I maintained a GPA of 3.7.”

4. Finish a thought completely and then stop talking. Sometimes we have a tendency to end our answers by filling the impending silence with awkward mannerisms. Interview as if you are writing a sentence. Don’t ease out of the response with "so, yeah". Be decisive. Don’t ramble!
5. Be prepared for the ever-popular "tell me about yourself" question. Have a strong answer ready - memorize it even. A few sentences will do, but this is your first impression, so make it count.

6. Strengths and weaknesses. We all have them, and the interviewers want to know what they are. This is another response to prepare in advance. It is generally a lot easier to identify strengths than weaknesses. Make your answers UNIQUE. I have been on the other end of the interviewing process and can’t count how many times I have heard "I am a procrastinator" and "I tend to get too involved" as answers to the this question. Stand out by identifying a weakness that can be put in a more positive light. Just search the web and you will find tons of ideas to get you going. But DON’T use someone else’s answer; this is just to get you thinking. Being true to yourself is what matters most. Also consider asking close friends or family members.

7. A professional portfolio is an impressive tool to use during an in-person interview. Use a binder and separated items into sections that could include: academic achievement, leadership, communication skills, and work experience. Include past tests from difficult classes, photos from volunteer events, materials you created during work experiences, and awards or certifications. Organize everything into page protectors and make sure it looks neat and professional. Include your résumé on the first page. Anything to stand out, right?!

8. Send your interviewers a thank you note and leave your final impression on the selection committee before they decide your fate for the next year. Include something that stood out from the interview too or something you learned about the program from the interview.

20 Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose this internship?
- What is your greatest strength?
- In what areas do you need improvement?
- Why are you interested in dietetics?
- What are your professional goals?
- What role do you take in group settings?
- Give an example of your critical thinking skills.
- When have you shown sound judgment?
- When have you shown emotional stability and maturity?
- When have you shown empathy for others?
- When have you shown physical and mental stamina and the ability to perform under pressure?
- Talk about your ability to learn and function in a variety of settings.
- Describe a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker or customer.
- What has prepared you for this DI?
- Give an example of your interpersonal skills.
- Give examples of your leadership ability.
- What are your expectations for the DI and how will you manage your time?
- Describe a time when you did a project that you weren’t interested in. Explain how you dealt with it. What was the outcome?
- Why should you be selected for this internship?

7 Sample Questions for the Interviewer

- Do you have a weekly schedule for the intern that I could review?
- What job opportunities have past interns had after the internship?
- Is there any job assistance available when it comes time to graduate?
- What is the (insert rotation name) like? How much responsibility is given to intern during this time?
- What are some sample projects that interns complete?
- What opportunities are there for professional development?
- Could I speak with an intern or a preceptor to ask about his/her experiences?

THE BACK-UP PLAN

As you anxiously anticipate match day, I am sure you are hoping any internship name pops up on your screen, even if it’s not your first choice. Expect the best, but prepare for the worst. It is smart to consider alternatives just in case. My first point to emphasize is that do not under ANY circumstance let a "no match" make you question your worth. I once heard about an extremely successful dietitian, who has been featured on national television and appeared in health/nutrition magazines worldwide, who did not receive a match her first time around. By not letting this small obstacle, although seemingly large at the time, keep her down, she has turned into the person she is today. Perseverance is worth its weight in gold.

If you do not receive a match, the obvious "next steps" are to see what programs do not fill spots or to participate in the fall matching. Speak with your advisor or check the DICAS system. Then, consider the following back-up plans.

1. Begin a Master's program. One of the schools I applied to reports that many students enter their Master's program if unmatched. Consequently, they build rapport with the faculty and staff and are accepted into the internship program the following year. Many combined DI/Master's programs
may have this option.

2. **Head out into the job market.** Maybe a year of experience as a WIC consultant is just the ticket to make your application letter pop. Or you can try out a fun summer or year-long internship with a magazine. There are tons of jobs out there that are nutrition-related that don't necessarily require the RD including:
   - Foodservice Supervisor
   - Foodservice Systems Management (contract foodservice companies)
   - Sales within the health or food industry
   - Jobs in public health programs such as WIC or Head Start
Take some time to gain additional experience. An extra bonus: you can stash away extra cash in case you decide to apply again, making it a little more comfortable living than your peers.

3. **Retake classes that may have lowered your GPA.** If you feel that your GPA was the main deterrent for you, feel no shame in retaking these classes. You will gain a better appreciation for the subject and your hard work will be evident to the review committees.

4. **Consider a Dietetic Technician Program to become a Registered Dietetic Technician.** Although DTRs and RDs may differ in some levels of responsibilities, this is still a chance to practice in the field of dietetics at a professional level. It could give you more experience for the next time you apply to an internship. It may ALSO be a way to decide if this is the right career path for you!

**SUCCESS STORY: So you didn’t get in?**

*Read the following success story by Monica Lobo, RD on what she did after not receiving a match on her first attempt:*

So you didn’t get in. You put all of your marbles in one bag, and just like that, that bully down the block snatched them from your very hands and you’re left with nothing. What now? Better yet, here’s a question I find myself asking myself in 3-month intervals: ‘WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE?!’

First of all, try to relax. Take a deep breath. Go for a run. Because one of the best things about hitting rock bottom, is knowing that you can (and WILL) get back up. Don’t think I’m attacking you because it is not the case at all. After all, what do I know? I’m in a DI, I’m almost done. Who am I to say anything?

My name is Monica, by the way, and just like you, once upon a time...I didn't get in. It was Winter of 2007; I had applied to six, I repeat, SIX DI programs and wasn't matched to any of them. At one point or another, I had convinced myself I wasn't good enough, that there was no point. I could've
given up. I could've just laid around "rock bottom" after hitting it and waited for something amazing to happen. As much as I wanted to do just that, I had absolutely no excuse. I knew exactly why I didn't get in. So, what did I do? I did the last thing anyone would've least expected me to do and... LEFT THE COUNTRY. I didn't do it right away, it wasn't planned, it's simply one of those things that just happen to you and lead you exactly where you need to be. For me, it was the Philippines.

I ended up hooking up with the local Nutrition Scholar where I observed nutrition services offered in various health centers and even the local elementary school. A trip that was only supposed to last two weeks was suddenly extended into a little over two months. I found myself in the Philippines, by falling harder in love with nutrition. The aforementioned question of "WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WITH MY LIFE?!"...was suddenly answered. I had to re-apply. I wanted to become a Registered Dietitian.

Upon my return to Chicago, I got a job as a WIC Nutritionist where I took every, single learning opportunity and ran with it. No questions asked. I went to every seminar, attended every conference, attained every certificate I could possibly attain in hopes of one day getting into a DI program. I got promoted as a WIC Training Coordinator in less than a year, learned Spanish (which was a must considering the fact that I was working in a predominantly Spanish-speaking community), took the GRE and an online graduate course to prove to the DI Directors that I was fully capable of graduate-level work.

I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO, keeping in mind just why I was doing it. All I'm saying is...you shouldn't give up just because an outside force is claiming you're not good enough (newsflash, the outside force is all in your head!). You should want it bad enough to make sure that giving up is not an option.
10 WAYS TO IMPRESS DIRECTORS

We randomly surveyed DI directors at prestigious medical centers, contract management organizations, and community hospitals to find out what an applicant should or should not do to be impressive. Below are ten testimonials straight from directors that could be reviewing YOUR application!

10. While visitors aren't on an official interview when they come to visit, first impressions DO make a difference. If they come, it earns brownie points to dress professionally. A suit is not required by any means, but just don’t come wearing flip flops and shorts. It makes me feel like they are taking the visit seriously if they dress in a mature manner.

9. Use professional language and full sentences - check spelling, etc. You would be surprised at how many students say things like - Hey - and are super casual - real turn off!

8. If visiting, I prefer the parent or person accompanying them NOT sit in on the interview. Of course they can come to campus and walk around, but I don’t think is shows maturity if ”mom” or “boyfriend” asks to sit in on the visit.

7. I like it when they ask ME questions about what I’m looking for in an intern, what can they do between now and the application deadline to stand out, what are the most challenging aspects of the program, etc. It shows maturity that they have questions for me.

6. BE INVOLVED in campus life! Do something besides go to classes – this shows us that the student is well-rounded – and better yet, hold an office!

5. READ DIRECTIONS!!!!! We want a professional business letter – not a personal statement – never fails that each year we receive several applications that did not read what we want!

4. Have specific goals – for example, if someone wants to come to [our internship] because they are interested in pediatrics, bariatric nutrition, or eating disorders, we can offer that experience. If we get an applicant that wants school food service experience, we don’t offer this experience so they should select a different internship.

3. Have unique work or volunteer experience – such as worked at a diabetes camp, worked at a pediatrics weight loss camp. This could even be a student who presented a poster session or some type of research.

2. Providing me with a brief “bio” is nice, but not mandatory. I don’t really care if it is in the format of a résumé or just a short paragraph that paraphrases their experiences to date.

1. There is no stupid question. However, I do find it interesting that I get lots of questions that can be answered from the website. Research the website!
"My secret to internship matching success was an early start. I began compiling my application a year prior to the due date. I volunteered often and acquired a hostess position within a local hospital. I put time and effort into my personal cover letter. It made a difference researching the individual internships to tailor my cover letter to the program’s emphasis. Networking was a major factor in finding influential individuals to write my letters of recommendation. I interviewed previous interns for tips and guidance. I dressed to impress for the interview and created a portfolio to show the internship committee."

Tara Olson, University of Nevada, Reno
DI: University of Nevada, Reno

"My secret can be summed up in one word: "initiative." I researched DIs and the application process three years before I actually applied, and chose UC San Francisco as my top choice to strive for. My university nutrition faculty members were impressed when I approached them for internship advice a year and a half before I would begin applying. I ‘interrogated’ previous UCSF interns who taught at my university, and asked them for their help writing my personal statement. I prepared myself for a rigorous internship by devoting my time to studying, volunteering, and part-time jobs. Reach for the stars! I did!"

Ashlie L., Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
DI: University of California, San Francisco Medical Center
“My secret to success was organization. In September, I printed out the application checklist and "About" page from each internships of interest’s website. These materials were placed in separate colored folders, labeled by internship. I penciled in my planner which days I would work on personal statements, request transcripts, etc., spaced out around semester exams and projects. As each item on the application checklists was completed, it was added to the appropriate folder. I had everything finished by December. Finally, I completed the sample interview questions on All Access Internships with my own answers attached in preparation for upcoming interviews.”

Meredith Harper, Florida International University
DI: Bay Pines VA

“I made sure to introduce myself and take a course with the program director of my university’s DI program. I feel that she got to know me as a student (and a person), as well as, see my hard work and perseverance in the didactic program. Taking her course, the director was able to witness first-hand my work ethic, experience and review my projects, presentations, and test taking abilities.”

Michelle Rauch, Montclair State University
DI: Montclair State University

GOOD LUCK!
GET MATCHED!
About the Author: Jenny Westerkamp, RD

Jenny began her career during her senior year of college when she started All Access Internships (AAI) in April 2008. She has been dedicated to meeting the needs of the dietetic student community through free resources, newsletters, intern reviews, webinars, e-books, one-on-one coaching and workshops across the country.

Jenny is currently the Nutritionist for CJK Foods, an organic, gluten-free, dairy-free prepared meals company in Chicago. Previously, she was the Senior Sports Nutritionist for SportFuel, Inc. where she worked with the Rockford IceHogs, Chicago Blackhawks, and NBA Development League. She is now working on a book with previous Men’s Fitness editor, Michael De Medeiros, entitled Green Foods for Men (coming Fall 2014). She has been interviewed for a variety of media outlets including Good Morning America, Fooducate, and Redeye Chicago. Jenny is the President of the Chicago Food and Nutrition Network and was on the Executive Board for the Academy’s Nutrition Entrepreneurs from 2010-2012. In November 2012, she released You Are What You Retweet: 140 Social Media Rules to Eat By.

Jenny graduated with high honors from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and earned a Bachelor’s degree in Food Science and Human Nutrition. She was honored as the most outstanding dietetics student in the program and also was the recipient of the Senior Honorary 100 for the top 100 seniors at the university. In 2009, she was awarded the Nutrition Entrepreneurs’ Student of the Year. Jenny completed her dietetics training at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.

Connect with Jenny

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Twitter: @jennywesterkamp
Testimonials

"You helped me more than I can say in my internship application process; I believe your critique of my application letter truly made the difference in making me stand out. I am at an internship I love. Thank you!" - M.G., St. Louis, MO

"It was really nice to have someone check it that doesn’t know me AND who has been through the process." - J.S., Distance Dietetic Intern, University of Delaware

"Jenny provided insightful and critical evaluations of my DI letters of application. Her analysis of my essays provided professional feedback, logical flow and sentence structure, and striking vocabulary to weave into my letters of application. Additionally, her feedback was efficiently returned to me—within 24 hours!" - Dietetic Intern, College of St. Elizabeth

"Jenny provided a lot of support as I navigated the DI application process. She was patient in answering many questions I had about several of the Internship Programs. She also proofed an initial draft of my application letter. Jenny’s insight and guidance helped me tremendously since she had gone through this process already and was in the middle of her own DI. I’m now in an Internship that fits me perfectly." - C.C., Dietetic Intern, Southcoast Hospitals Group
There’s a 50% chance that you won’t get matched to a DI. WE CAN HELP.

Free Videos, E-book, & Articles
Dietetic Internship Profiles
NEW! Questions Forum

Get Matched Bootcamp

The GET MATCHED BOOTCAMP is an in-person dietetic internship application workshop designed to teach you exactly how to create a competitive application. As a bootcamp attendee, you will receive a manual that will guide you step-by-step in the whole process. This manual includes easy-to-use templates, checklists, and brainstorming examples to make your application shine!

You will also receive exclusive email access to Jenny (Founder of AAI) to ask her unlimited personal application questions. Visit the WORKSHOPS page to register!

PS There is also a VIRTUAL Get Matched Bootcamp!

AAI Application Coaching

80% of our coaching clients were matched to a dietetic internship. We offer Quick Coaching and Personal Coaching via email and phone to help you turn in the best possible resume and letter!

Your materials will be reviewed for...
- Grammar and spelling errors
- Suggestions for flow of letter, structure, and ease of reading
- Brainstorming letter content for best possible answers to DICAS questions
- Checking for inclusion of selling points needed to stand out in letter
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