Applying to Distance Internships

Dietetic students who need to stay in their geographic area due to family or job responsibilities during their internship year can apply to a distance internship (DI) program with participating universities, colleges and food service organizations. These internships give students the ability to complete their ADA internship requirements in their own area without having to relocate.

One thing to keep in mind before you enter this process is that it is more difficult to arrange your own internship and coordinate your program than it is to apply to an existing internship program. Existing programs, with many years of development and experience handling interns, are ready for you as soon as you are accepted. On the other hand, DI programs are largely set up by you with some guidance from the DI program sponsor.

Here are some guidelines to get you started in applying to DI programs and to help you along the way:

- **Find distance internships.** Review the universities, colleges and food service organizations that provide distance internships at All Access Internships www.allaccessinternships.com.

- **Do your research.** Narrow down your search to the programs that emphasize your interests. For example, Sodexho Distance Internships has Clinical, Community and Food Service rotations, but also has a 30 day rotation that can be tailored to your own interests such as working in clinical research. Other programs emphasize Community Nutrition; while others emphasize Medical Nutrition Therapy. In other words, read the details of each program at their website or request mailed information packets so you completely understand the specific internship.

- **Be honest.** Know yourself and your focus. Match your interests with that of the distance internship. Internship program directors are experienced at reviewing applications; they will have a keen sense of your interests just by reviewing your application and personal letter. So, do not try to be someone you are not just so you can get a distance internship. A director/s will see right through dishonesty.

- **Contact professionals in your area.** Distance internships require you to find your own practice sites and preceptors to fulfill the ADA requirements for Community, Clinical, Food Service, and other rotations that may be unique to each program. Generally, a preceptor is a Registered Dietitian, who is willing to provide guidance and expertise in his/her specific concentration area over the course of your rotation. Start with your local dietetics association (go to www.eatright.org to find one near you.) Below is a table of Examples of Supervised Practice Sites below to give you ideas of where you can find RDs that may be willing to help.

- **Understand the rotations.** Each program has a specific number of weeks of completion for each rotation (i.e., Community - 6 weeks, MNT- 10 weeks; etc). Also, most programs list completion dates for each rotation so all the interns in the program can interact online for projects, reports, etc. It is important to make sure your preceptors are available during the times you need them. Also, if you are accepted, there will be an orientation session at the start of the program at the sponsoring university or college. At this time (usually a week long session) you meet the program directors and your fellow distance interns.
• **Know the requirements necessary for the application.** In order for you to be considered a candidate, DI programs require you to have all the documentation from the facilities and preceptors complete when you send in your application. Consult the specific program for the application details. If you are unclear about application dates and requirements, review the website or program materials before you contact the director. Most likely, your answer will be in the materials (you don't want to look as if you aren't detail oriented!)

• **Complete your application.** Include all the necessary preceptor and practice site documentation along with your application, any fees, transcripts (just like applying to a regular internship) etc. and mail it before the due date. Most of the programs participate in computer matching.

**Examples of Supervised Practice Sites**

- Addictions Clinic (Alcohol/drug)
- Ambulatory Care Clinics (Adult/Pediatric)
- Cardiac Rehabilitation Center
- Clinical Research Center
- College/University Foodservice
- College/University Health service
- Computer Systems Corp
- Cooperative Extension
- Correctional Facility
- Corporate Foodservice
- Corporate Test Kitchen
- Dept. of Health
- Developmental Disabilities Center
- Diabetes Center
- Fitness/Athletic Club
- Food Nutrition Consulting
- Food Bank
- Grocery/Supermarket
- Head Start
- Health Care Foodservice
- Health-related Children's Camp
- Health Spa/Report Home Care
- Homeless Shelter/Soup Kitchen
- Hospitals
- Hospice
- Indian Health Service
- Journalism/Publications
- Legislative Office
- Long Term Care Foodservice
- Long Term Care/Subacute Clinical
- Managed Care System
- Meals on Wheels
- Mental Health Facility/Service
- Military Field Operations
- Non-Profit Agency (Heart Assoc etc.)
- Office for Aging
- Pediatric-Based Program/Clinic
- Pharmaceutical Sale
- Rehabilitation Center
- Renal Dialysis Outpatient Center
- School Foodservice/Residential Dining Center
- Senior Citizen Program
- State/Federal Agency or Task Force
- Wellness Program Wholesale/Retail Food Corp
- WIC

*Source: Iowa State University Dietetics Academy, 2008*
If you are prepared to do the leg work necessary to apply to DI programs you may be rewarded with an internship, allowing you to accomplish your goals in your own community on the way to becoming a Registered Dietitian.

Kelly Smith, a dietetics student at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, is anxiously awaiting her turn to complete the distance internship application process in 2010.

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