

Nutrition Science Graduate Students Engage in Assessment Practices in an Accredited Program

M.A. Nutrition Science Graduate Program
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Introduction

Learning objective measured: "Utilizes the nutrition care process with individuals, groups or populations in a variety of practice settings."

Setting Measured: NSD 650 Dietetics Practicum, taken in the second year of the program during both the fall and spring semester.

Setting Practiced: long-term and acute care clinical nutrition settings.

Participants: first- and second-year students in the M.A. nutrition science graduate program.

Measurement Methods: focus groups and interviews

Program Background

The M.A. graduate program prepares students to become Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) through the completion of both a master's degree and 1,000+ hours supervised experiential learning in just 21 months. This study analyzed SU students' understanding of one of the 37 competencies that ACEND requires to instruct and measure to maintain accreditation.

Program Accreditation

ACEND (Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics) oversees the instruction of nutrition undergraduate and graduate programs and ensures that they are meeting education standards. SU's M.A. nutrition science graduate program is accredited under ACEND's Future Education Model (FEM) standards. Students who complete this program are eligible to take the credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists.

Conclusion

Preceptors want to see repeatability and independence from students. Students want to receive notes on their evaluations. This research project utilized focus groups and interviews to analyze how Falk's nutrition graduate program eases students transition from textbook to patient care and how to best breakdown clinical assessment objectives to ensure that students are aware and ready to complete the given learning objectives.

Engagement Assessment

Students understanding of proposed learning objective

Students' perceptions of grading scale (1-9)

Students' perspective on remediation plan

Classroom → Clinical: SU's role in easing the transition

M.A. Graduate Students	Syracuse University	Preceptors
Students typically enter clinical rotations with little to no clinical experience.	Program assesses student learning outcomes annually, 37 for ACEND and 2 for SU.	Preceptors want to see <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Repeatable skills <input type="checkbox"/> Consistent skills <input type="checkbox"/> Independence in skill completion
Students have completed an undergrad degree in a related field, numerous case studies, mock clinical skills practice, and plenty of classroom experience.	SU is a Future Education Model Program and is responsible for supplying students with 1,000+ clinical hours.	Preceptors evaluate on a 1–9-point scale. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 = passing 9 = mastery: repeatable, independent, consistent
The transition from classroom to hospital can be difficult. It is important that students are aware of clinical expectations in order to meet and exceed evaluation requirements.	How can SU continue to ease the student to clinical experience? Evaluating students understanding and perception of proposed clinical skills is essential to increasing student success.	Preceptors communicate with program director throughout the rotation and provide specific mid- and endpoint evaluations shared with both the student and program director.

Assessment Methods

Advisory Board Meeting: met with preceptors to understand assessment methods

Focus Groups: Quantitative and qualitative questions
 First year students: November 18th
 Second year students: March 23rd
 + individual student interviews

Assessment content

Preceptor Feedback

→ Going into the focus groups, preceptors communicated that they want to see an independent and consistent clinical skillset when grading students.

First-Year Focus Group

→ Aimed to educate students on the ACEND and SU standards required in an FEM program
 → Aimed to boost student accountability towards learning objective achievement and remediation plan development
 → Aimed to assess students' current perceptions towards clinical nutrition in an acute setting and the 9-point evaluation scale

Second-Year Focus Group

→ Clinical experience is needed to develop confidence in clinical judgement
 → Time restraint on patient care was the biggest change from classroom case studies
 → It is important to be your own critique while working rotations
 → Students felt supported throughout clinical rotations by both their preceptor and program director.

Interviews

→ Emphasized trust in SU staff and their ability to help students complete learning objectives
 → Showed appreciation towards a smaller program providing individual support

Outcomes

Clear Expectations = Completed Expectations Students need to have clearly defined and outlined expectations. If desired outcomes are not clear, a remediation plan is put into action.	Students Trust M.A. Leadership "Program director will always have additional resources to review." "Program director has always been willing to work with me." "Program director is working with our preceptors throughout the rotation"	Student Knowledge Increases Clinical Confidence The first-year focus group exemplified that once learning objectives are broken down, discussed, and analyzed, students become more confident in their ability to complete the objective. On a ten-point scale, confidence increased by an average of 1-1.5.	Small, tight-knit program provides individual support It was clear through both the focus groups and interviews that students feel supported by SU staff and preceptors throughout the program. This increases the likelihood that a student will reach out and ask for help and support if struggling with a learning objective.
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