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# MS in Dietetics Student Handbook 2023-2025



**The University of Texas**  
**Rio Grande Valley**<sup>TM</sup>

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College of Health Professions  
Department of Health and Biomedical Sciences

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
<b>SECTION 1: ABOUT MS IN DIETETICS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Mission.....	4
1.2 Goals and Objectives.....	4
1.3 Statement of Accreditation .....	4
1.4 Organization and Administration .....	5
1.5 Affiliated Institutions and Sites.....	5
1.6 Diversity and Inclusion.....	6
<b>SECTION 2: STUDENT RESOURCES.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Student Health and Wellness.....	6
2.2 Academic Resources.....	7
2.3 Safety, Security, and Disaster Preparedness.....	8
2.4 Tuition and Financial Resources.....	9
2.5 Academic Advising.....	10
<b>SECTION 3: ENSURING A CLIMATE OF LEARNING.....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Competency-Based Education.....	10
3.2 Guiding Ethical Principles.....	12
3.3 Student Mistreatment Policy .....	14
3.4 Academic Integrity.....	17
3.5 Attendance and Absence Policies.....	19
3.6 Summative and Formative Feedback.....	22
3.7 Student Membership in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.....	23
3.8 Appropriate Dress and Attire.....	23
3.9 Criminal Background Check Policy .....	24
<b>SECTION 4: CURRICULUM STRUCTURE .....</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1 Introduction to Curriculum.....	26
4.2 Time Commitment.....	26
4.3 Structure of Curriculum.....	27
4.4 Course Faculty and Preceptor Responsibilities.....	27
4.5 On-line Requirements, Testing and Assessment .....	27
<b>SECTION 5: EVALUATION, PROMOTION, GRADING, and GRADUATION.....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 Evaluation .....	28
5.2 Promotion and remediation.....	29
5.3 The Grading System .....	29
5.4 Leave of Absence .....	30
5.5 Requirements for Graduation .....	30

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<b>SECTION 6: OTHER EDUCATIONAL POLICIES.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>6.1 Technology policies .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>6.2 Student Privacy .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>6.3 Educational Records.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>6.4 Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination, and Special Accommodations.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>6.5 Requirements for Supervised Experiential Learning .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>6.6 Community Engagement Requirements .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>6.7 UTRGV Academic Calendar .....</b>	<b>40</b>

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## Section 1: About the MS in Dietetics program

### 1.1 Mission

The MS in Dietetics will prepare graduates for practice as Registered Dietitian Nutritionists who focus on ensuring food and nutrition innovation, research in health care, sustainability, promoting health and wellness equity, and providing nutrition leadership and collaboration in the Rio Grande Valley as well as the national and global communities.

### 1.2 Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1: Graduates will become Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) who meet the employment needs of the local, national, and global communities.**

Objective 1: “At least 80% of program graduates complete program/degree requirements within 3 years (150% of the program length).”

Objective 2: “Of graduates who seek employment, 80 percent are employed in nutrition and dietetics or related fields within 12 months of graduation.”

Objective 3: “At least 80 % of employers are satisfied with graduate preparation for entry-level practice.”

Objective 4: “80 percent of program graduates take the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within 12 months of program completion.”

Objective 5: “The program’s one-year pass rate (graduates who pass the registration exam within one year of first attempt) on the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists is at least 80%.”

**Goal 2: Graduates will promote health and wellness equity through nutrition education in the community.**

Objective 6: 40% of graduates will hold employment in community-based health and wellness organizations.

**Goal 3: Graduates will be leaders in the field of nutrition and be active in the profession.**

Objective 7: At least 70% of graduates who become RDNs will be active members in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Objective 8: At least 80% of employers observe leadership skills in graduates, including interprofessional collaboration, being an effective communicator, and the ability to support and inspire others.

### 1.3 Statement of Accreditation

**The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has been granted candidate status by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). The MS in Dietetics program at UTRGV is implementing a new and innovative program to prepare Registered Dietitian Nutritionists.**

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Contact Rachel Villarreal MS, RDN, LDN, CDCES at [Rachel.villarreal@utrgv.edu](mailto:Rachel.villarreal@utrgv.edu) for more information.

The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) released the Future Education Model Accreditation Standards for programs in nutrition and dietetics (see [www.eatright.org/FutureModel](http://www.eatright.org/FutureModel)). These accreditation standards integrate didactic coursework with supervised experiential learning in a competency-based curriculum designed to prepare nutrition and dietetics practitioners for future practice.

For further information on ACEND accreditation, contact:  
Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics  
120 South Riverside Plaza  
Suite 2190  
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6995  
Phone (800)-877-1600 ext. 5400  
Email: [acend@eatright.org](mailto:acend@eatright.org)  
[www.eatright.org/acend](http://www.eatright.org/acend)

**State Authorization and Professional Licensing Disclosure:**

The UTRGV MS in Dietetics program meets the professional licensing requirements for the state of Texas. Texas is a licensure of title only. This means the state only licenses the title “licensed dietitian” which may facilitate reimbursement or employment in certain facilities.

**1.4 Organization and administration**

Executive Vice-President of Academic Affairs	Dr. Luis H. Zayas
Dean of Health Professions	Dr. Lehker
Chair of Health and Biomedical Sciences	Dr. Saraswathy Nair
MS in Dietetics Program Director	Mrs. Rachel Villarreal MS, RDN, LDN, CDCES

**1.5 Affiliated Institutions and sites**

The MS in Dietetics has clinical affiliation agreements and partnerships with the following sites:

- Doctors Hospital at Renaissance
- Driscoll Children’s Hospital
- Edinburg Regional Medical Center

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- Harlingen Medical Center
  - Knapp Medical Center
  - McAllen Medical Center
  - Rio Grande Regional Hospital
  - Valley Baptist Medical Center — Brownsville
  - Valley Baptist Medical Center — Harlingen
  - Valley Regional Medical Center — Brownsville
  - Brownsville ISD – Child Nutrition
  - Rio Grande City – Child Nutrition
  - Mission CISD – Child Nutrition
  - McAllen CISD – Child Nutrition
  - Weslaco CISD – Child Nutrition
  - San Benito ISD – Child Nutrition
  - Donna ISD – Child Nutrition
  - Pharr San Juan Alamo CISD – Child Nutrition
  - Harlingen CISD – Child Nutrition
  - HEB Grocery Store
  - Zepol Dietary Consultants
  - Complete Nutrition Solutions
  - Certified Nutrition Consultants
  - Hidalgo County Head Start
  - Hidalgo County WIC
  - El Milagro Clinic
  - Nuestra Clinica de Valle

## **1.6 Diversity and Inclusion**

The MS in Dietetics program strives to create and sustain a spirit of diversity, inclusion, and enrichment that fosters an environment of cultural competency, sensitivity, and awareness. These goals stem from the unique geographic location of University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), a place with a rich bicultural community and full of family tradition. Diversity and inclusion are essential to strengthening the communities that we serve and improving the health of the public.

### **Students**

The MS in Dietetics program uses a holistic approach in its admissions selection process to ensure a diverse student body that encompasses race/ethnicity of any groups historically underrepresented in dietetics (i.e. Black; Hispanic or Latino).

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## Section 2: Student Resources

### 2.1 Student Health and Wellness

#### **Mental Health Counseling Services**

The mission of the Counseling Center is to provide free and confidential counseling services to UTRGV students to address mental health concerns. They seek to promote personal growth and well-being among our campus community through education and outreach activities. Dietetics students are encouraged to seek professional mental health services if symptoms are interfering with academic performance and/or personal or professional relationships. For more information, visit: <https://www.utrgv.edu/counseling>. Our students also have free access to tele-counseling via My Student Support Program (My SSP). For more information on tele-counseling, see: <https://www.utrgv.edu/som/student-health-and-wellness/counseling-services/telebehavioral-healthcounseling/index.htm>

#### **Collegiate Recovery Program (CRP)**

The purpose of the CRP is to provide an environment in which students seeking and wanting to sustain recovery from addictions can find support and better manage the challenges of this journey. It seeks to help students make positive decisions about healthy relationships while improving the way they see and think about themselves. The program also enables students to learn affirmative methods to identify and to cope with various life stressors. Participating in the program contributes to a network of mutual support for the development of lifelong commitments to individual recovery and understanding of life in recovery. For more information, visit <https://www.utrgv.edu/recovery>.

#### **Vaqueros Crisis Line**

The Vaqueros Crisis Line (956-665-5555) is a 24/7 confidential helpline for enrolled UTRGV students experiencing an emotional crisis that may include suicidal ideation, thoughts of harming oneself or others, confusion, panic, or otherwise feeling distressed. A trained counselor will be available on the line to provide assistance.

#### **Student Health Services**

The main goal of the Student Health Services is to meet student health care needs. Office visits are free of charge. The health services clinics provide the same types of services as a family doctor and much more. Access to services can be found at:

Health Services Clinic, Brownsville: Cortez Hall, Suite 237, Brownsville, Texas 78520;  
Phone: (956) 882-3896

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Health Services Clinic, Edinburg: 613 North Sugar Road, Edinburg, Texas 78539; Phone: (956) 665-2511  
Email: [healthservices@utrgv.edu](mailto:healthservices@utrgv.edu)  
Website: <https://www.utrgv.edu/health-services/>

## 2.2. Academic resources

### Library Services

The University Library plays a critical role in the commitment to academic excellence in a balanced program of teaching, research, and service. The library facilitates scholarship by securing and providing access to resources and facilities for students, faculty, and the community. Librarians actively assist academic and research programs, providing students with library use instruction both on an individual and group basis. The University Library serves as the chief information center on campus and plays a strong role as a regional information center. Access the University Library's online resources at <https://www.utrgv.edu/library/>

## 2.3 Safety, Security, and Disaster Preparedness

### Overview

All students, faculty and staff of the MS in Dietetics program are expected to adhere to university standards and policies regarding emergency preparedness, safety, and security. The MS in Dietetics Clinical Coordinator will collaborate with clinical affiliates to review and ensure alignment of affiliate policies and procedures, and to ensure the safety and security of students at clinical and community sites.

### Emergency Preparedness

The MS in Dietetics program adheres to university procedures in the event of an emergency and follows the UTRGV Emergency Operations Plan found at: (<http://www.utrgv.edu/emergencypreparedness/files/documents/emergencyoperations-plan.pdf>). This plan is designed to provide a framework and guidance for coordinated response to minor emergencies, major emergencies, and disasters. It is maintained by the Office of Emergency Preparedness (<http://www.utrgv.edu/emergencypreparedness>) and is regularly updated to mitigate potential emergency situations.

### Disaster Preparedness

Refer to the UTRGV Office of Emergency Preparedness for updated policies, procedures, and operational plans as well as questions regarding natural hazards and emergency preparedness. <http://www.utrgv.edu/emergencypreparedness>.

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## **Safety**

The MS in Dietetics program ensures a safe learning and workplace environment through the adherence to all university safety policies and procedures. This includes the university fire safety program (<http://www.utrgv.edu/ehsrm/programs/fire-safety/index.htm>) that aims to protect lives and property, occupational health and safety program to provide safe working conditions, laboratory safety, and environmental protection. The MS in Dietetics also adheres to all UTRGV procedures for safety, chemical, biological, and other hazardous material response, and other emergency measures established at the university level. (<http://www.utrgv.edu/ehsrm/programs/lab-safety/index.htm>). The MS in Dietetics program will communicate with the university's Environmental Health, Safety, and Risk Management office (<http://www.utrgv.edu/ehsrm>) to promote a healthy and safe campus environment. This office oversees hazard communication, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) compliance, indoor air quality, bloodborne pathogens, asbestos awareness, construction safety, accident investigation/reporting, ergonomics, and industrial hygiene.

## **Security**

The MS in Dietetics faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to utilize UTRGV campus security resources. These resources include:

- Calling UTRGV police at 911 or by personal visit to the UTRGV Police Department;
- Using any campus telephone and dialing 5-7151, or 956-665-7151;
- Contacting an officer in uniform on patrol;
- Using emergency (blue light) call boxes located throughout campus;
- Contacting any staff member in a university office;
- Utilizing UTRGV's emergency alert system;
- Contacting Office for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention (<https://www.utrgv.edu/ovavp/>) when a student is a victim of or witness to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual harassment, and interpersonal violence. 956-665-8287 or 956-882-8282.

## **2.4 Tuition and Financial Resources**

The financial aid office is committed to help students in the pursuit of their educational goals by removing financial barriers. The financial aid counselors who assist students with meeting the cost of their education, offer guidance in navigating the financial aid process, and provide resources on how to manage expenses associated with the pursuit of their degree. Visit the Financial Aid Express Lab or call 888-882-4026.

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The Graduate College funding page has helpful links that can be found at: <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/funding/index.htm>. In addition, there are scholarships available through the Graduate College that will require a separate application from your financial aid application (<https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/funding/scholarships/index.htm>).

The Texas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation (Texas Academy Foundation) is an education organization whose purpose is to raise money for scholarships for students in nutrition and dietetics. You can complete a scholarship application at <https://tandfscholarships.org/texas-academy-foundation-applications/>

## **2.5 Academic Advising**

Ms. Rachel Villarreal (rachel.villarreal@utrgv.edu) is the MS in Dietetics Program Director. She will also be your advisor for general program information such as copies of your program of study, policy questions, etc. Most questions can be asked and answered by UTRGV email but if you would like to schedule a face to face, phone, Skype or Zoom meeting you can call or email to make an appointment. Any content-related questions should be directed to the instructor for your course.

In addition, during the first semester students will be assigned an MS in Dietetics faculty member who will be their academic advisor for the duration of the program. Students will meet with their faculty advisor a minimum of two times each semester. Advising is ongoing and individualized based on student's needs. Faculty advisors will monitor and track student academic performance and follow up with the appropriate intervention, remediation, or referral to UTRGV support services.

## **SECTION 3: ENSURING A CLIMATE OF LEARNING**

### **3.1 Competency-Based Education**

The MS in Dietetics program will follow a competency-based education system. This system consists of the student achieving and demonstrating core level competency before they move on. In a competency-based education (CBE) framework, the focus is on defining and measuring progress toward reaching the required competencies. The described knowledge, skill, judgment, and attributes need to be performed in professionally related functions to show competence. Over the past decade competency-based education has been phased-in across numerous health professions to ensure consistency among the graduates' competence and domains of practice. The MS in Dietetics is embracing this change through participating in the Future Education Model for Graduate Program (FEM-GP) to produce competent and highly employable practitioners.

The MS in Dietetics program does not grant credit for Supervised Experiential Learning hours for students prior learning to shorten the length and/or eliminate a rotation.

There are seven units that contain a variety of competencies that are designated for the FEM-GP's which students need to achieve to progress. The Units and competencies are as follows:

Unit 1: Foundational Knowledge Applies foundational sciences to food and nutrition knowledge to meet the needs of individuals, groups, and organizations.	
Competencies	
1.1	Applies an understanding of environmental, molecular factors (e.g. genes, proteins, metabolites) and food in the development and management of disease. (S)
1.2	Applies an understanding of anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry. (S)
1.3	Applies knowledge of microbiology and food safety. (S)
1.4	Integrates knowledge of chemistry and food science as it pertains to food and nutrition product development and when making modifications to food. (S)
1.5	Applies knowledge of pathophysiology and nutritional biochemistry to physiology, health and disease. (S)
1.6	Applies knowledge of social, psychological, and environmental aspects of eating and food. (S)
1.7	Integrates the principles of cultural competence within own practice and when directing services. (D)
1.8	Applies knowledge of pharmacology to recommend, prescribe and administer medical nutrition therapy. (S)
1.9	Applies an understanding of the impact of complementary and integrative nutrition on drugs, disease, health, and wellness. (S)
1.10	Applies knowledge of math and statistics. (S)
1.11	Applies knowledge of medical terminology when communicating with individuals, groups and other health professionals. (D)
1.12	Demonstrates knowledge of and is able to manage food preparation techniques. (D)
1.13	Demonstrates computer skills and uses nutrition informatics in the decision-making process. (D)
1.14	Integrates knowledge of nutrition and physical activity in the provision of nutrition care across the life cycle. (D)
1.15	Applies knowledge of nutritional health promotion and disease prevention for individuals, groups and populations. (S)
1.16	Gains a foundational knowledge on public and global health issues and nutritional needs. (K)
Unit 2: Client/Patient Services	

Applies and integrates client/patient-centered principles and competent nutrition and dietetics practice to ensure positive outcomes.	
2.1	Applies a framework to assess, develop, implement, and evaluate products, programs, and services. (D)
2.2	Selects, develops and/or implements nutritional screening tools for individuals, groups, or populations. (D)
2.3	Utilizes the nutrition care process with individuals, groups, or populations in a variety of practice settings. (D)
2.4	Implements or coordinates nutritional interventions for individuals, groups, or populations. (D)
2.5	Prescribes, recommends, and administers nutrition-related pharmacotherapy. (S)
Unit 3: Food Systems Management Applies food systems principles and management skills to ensure safe and efficient delivery of food and water.	
3.1	Directs the production and distribution of quantity and quality food products. (D)
3.2	Oversees the purchasing, receipt and storage of products used in food production and services. (D)
3.3	Applies principles of food safety and sanitation to the storage, production, and service of food. (D)
3.4	Applies and demonstrates an understanding of agricultural practices and processes. (S)
Unit 4: Community and Population Health Nutrition Applies community and population nutrition health theories when providing support to community or population nutrition programs.	
4.1	Utilizes program planning steps to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate community and population programs. (D)
4.2	Engages in legislative and regulatory activities that address community, population and global nutrition health and nutrition policy. (D)
Unit 5: Leadership, Business, Management and Organization Demonstrates leadership, business and management principles to guide practice and achieve operational goals.	
5.1	Demonstrates leadership skills to guide practice. (D)
5.2	Applies principles of organization management. (D)
5.3	Applies project management principles to achieve project goals and objectives. (D)
5.4	Leads quality and performance improvement activities to measure, evaluate and improve a program's services, products, and initiatives. (D)
5.5	Develops and leads implementation of risk management strategies and programs. (D)
Unit 6: Critical Thinking, Research and Evidence-Informed Practice	

Integrates evidence-informed practice, research principles and critical thinking into practice.	
6.1	Incorporates critical thinking skills in practice. (D)
6.2	Applies scientific methods utilizing ethical research practices when reviewing, evaluating and conducting research. (D)
6.3	Applies current research and evidence-informed practice to services. (D)
Unit 7: Core Professional Behaviors Demonstrates professional behaviors and effective communication in all nutrition and dietetics interactions.	
7.1	Assumes professional responsibilities to provide safe, ethical, and effective nutrition services. (D)
7.2	Uses effective communication, collaboration, and advocacy skills. (D)

### 3.2 Guiding professional and ethical principles

The MS in Dietetics faculty, staff and students will abide by a code of ethics that reflects the values and ethical principles guiding the nutrition and dietetics profession and sets forth commitments and obligations to the profession and community. Professionalism is a central competency in the MS in Dietetics program and is cornerstone to the profession of dietetics. It impacts one's ability to provide safe, ethical, and effective nutrition services. At UTRGV, students are expected to maintain the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct. Dietetics students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner in interactions not only with patients, but also with peers, faculty, and staff of UTRGV and the Rio Grande Valley community. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) and the Commission on Dietetics Registration (CDR) provide guidance on the four Principles that all nutrition and dietetics practitioners (faculty and students) will agree to abide by as stated in the *Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession*:

#### 1. Competence and professional development in practice (non-Maleficence)

- a. Use an evidenced-based approach to practice within areas of competence, continuously develop and enhance expertise, and recognize limitations.
- b. Assess the validity and applicability of scientific evidence without personal bias.
- c. Interpret, apply, participate in and/or generate research to enhance practice, innovation, and discovery.
- d. Make evidence-based practice decisions, considering the unique values and circumstances of the patient/client and community, in combination with the practitioner's expertise and judgment.
- e. Recognize and exercise professional judgment within the limits of individual qualifications and collaborate with others, seek counsel, and make referrals as appropriate.

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- f. Act in a caring and respectful manner, mindful of individual differences, cultural, and ethnic diversity.
  - g. Practice within the limits of their scope and collaborate with the inter-professional team.

## **2. Integrity in personal and organizational behaviors and practices (Autonomy)**

- a. Disclose any conflicts of interest, including any financial interests in products or services that are recommended.
- b. Refrain from accepting gifts or services which potentially influence, or which may give the appearance of influencing professional judgment.
- c. Comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including obtaining/maintaining a state license or certification if engaged in practice governed by nutrition and dietetics statutes.
- d. Respect intellectual property rights, including citation and recognition of the ideas and work of others, regardless of the medium (e.g. written, oral, electronic).
- e. Provide accurate and truthful information in all communications.
- f. Report inappropriate behavior or treatment of a patient/client by another nutrition and dietetics practitioner or other professionals.
- g. Implement appropriate measures to protect personal health information using appropriate techniques (e.g., encryption).

## **3. Professionalism (Beneficence)**

- a. Participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the well-being of patients/clients.
- b. Respect the values, rights, knowledge, and skills of faculty, students, colleagues, and other professionals.
- c. Demonstrate respect, constructive dialogue, civility, and professionalism in all communications, including social media.
- d. Refrain from communicating false, fraudulent, deceptive, misleading, disparaging, or unfair statements or claims.
- e. Uphold professional boundaries and refrain from romantic relationships with any patients/clients, surrogates, supervisees, or students.
- f. Refrain from verbal/physical/emotional/sexual harassment.
- g. Provide objective evaluations of performance for employees, coworkers, and students and candidates for employment, professional association memberships, awards, or scholarships, making all reasonable efforts to avoid bias in the professional evaluation of others.
- h. Communicate at an appropriate level to promote health literacy.

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- i. Contribute to the advancement and competence of others, including colleagues, students, and the public.

#### **4. Social responsibility for local, regional, national, global nutrition and well-being (Justice)**

- a. Collaborate with others to reduce health disparities and protect human rights.
- b. Promote fairness and objectivity with fair and equitable treatment.
- c. Contribute time and expertise to activities that promote respect, integrity, and competence of the profession.
- d. Promote the unique role of nutrition and dietetics practitioners.
- e. Engage in service that benefits the community and to enhance the public's trust in the profession.
- f. Seek leadership opportunities in professional, community, and service organizations to enhance health and nutritional status while protecting the public.

### **3.3 Student Mistreatment Policy**

The MS in Dietetics program will treat students with respect and dignity. Mistreatment of students is not tolerated and is detrimental to the learning environment. Mistreatment, intentional or unintentional, occurs when behavior shows disrespect for the dignity of others and interferes with the learning process. Student mistreatment may take many forms, all which impact student performance. Sexual harassment and assault, which are defined by policy through the University of Texas System Rules and Regulations of the Board of Regents Rule 30105, "Sexual Harassment and Misconduct and Inappropriate Consensual Relationships" at <https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/utsfiles/offices/board-of-regents/rules-regulations/30105.pdf>, are included in this section as forms of student mistreatment.

Examples of behaviors that are unacceptable to the MS in Dietetic program include:

- Physical or sexual harassment/assault.
- Discrimination or harassment based on race, gender, age, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or disability.
- Disparaging or demeaning comments about an individual or group.
- Loss of personal civility including shouting, displays of temper, public or private abuse, belittling, or humiliation.
- Use of grading or other forms of evaluation in a punitive or retaliatory manner, for example, sending students on inappropriate errands.

#### **Informal Complaints**

Students are encouraged to first make a reasonable effort to resolve the problem by discussing his or her concerns with the faculty or staff member against whom the complaint is lodged. Unless extraordinary circumstances exist, the faculty or staff

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member shall respond to the student initiating the complaint no later than 10 business days after receipt of the complaint. If the student does not agree with the informal resolution reached with the faculty or staff member, the student may file a formal complaint no later than 10 business days after receiving the faculty or staff member's response at Student Rights and Responsibility (SSR) (<https://www.utrgv.edu/srr/students/filing-a-grievance/index.htm>) or by completing the Vaquero Care Report It form online ([www.utrgv.edu/reportit](http://www.utrgv.edu/reportit)).

### **Formal Complaints**

Complaints are submitted to SRR utilizing the Vaquero Care Report It form. SRR must notify the student no later than 5 business days after it receives the complaint that the complaint has been forwarded to the appropriate department chair and director for review and to provide a formal response. In addressing the student's formal complaint, the department chair or head must solicit information from both the student and employee. The Chair may confer with anyone having information pertinent to the complaint or may hold a meeting between the student and the employee to resolve the complaint. The chair or department head shall provide a response to the student initiating the complaint within ten business days after receiving the complaint. If the complaint is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, the student may appeal in writing to the next administrative level. The appeal must be filed no later than 10 business days after receipt of the chair or department head's decision. A decision at the administrative level must be emailed, mailed, or delivered in person to the student no later than 10 business days after receipt of the student's written appeal. Additional appeals may be pursued through the appropriate lines of authority up to the vice-presidential level. The 10 business days applies to each appeal and to each notification of decision as described above. Decisions at the vice-presidential level will be final.

### **Grade Appeal**

Students wishing to appeal final grades should first discuss the matter with the instructor of the class. If no resolution occurs, and the student wishes to pursue the matter further, they should appeal in writing to the MS in Dietetics program director within 1 semester after the disputed grade is issued or the misunderstanding occurred. The program director will respond in writing to the student within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) of the receipt of the student's written appeal. Pursuant appeals will be written and directed within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) of the date of the program director's decision to the College or College Academic Appeals Committee. After the College Academic Appeals Committee has heard the appeal, it will deliberate and come to a decision. The committee's decision will be written and mailed, or delivered in person, to the student and faculty member within 5 calendar

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days (excluding holidays) of the close of the hearing. The student may appeal in writing within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) to the Dean. The Dean's decision will be final, and it must be mailed or delivered in person to the student within 14 calendar days (excluding holidays) of the receipt of the student's written appeal.

### **Sexual Misconduct and Mandatory Reporting**

In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a "Responsible Employee" for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report to the Office of Institutional Equity & Diversity (oie@utrgv.edu) any instance, occurring during a student's time in college, of sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, about which they become aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at [www.utrgv.edu/equity](http://www.utrgv.edu/equity), including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct, discrimination, and all forms of violence. If students, faculty, or staff would like confidential assistance, or have questions, they can contact OVAVP (Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention) at 665-8287, 882-8282, or [OVAVP@utrgv.edu](mailto:OVAVP@utrgv.edu).

### **Complaints to ACEND**

The Program Director makes every effort to ensure the MS in Dietetics Program is in compliance with ACEND Standards. However, if a student or preceptor wish to submit a complaint about the program and all other options have been exhausted, the process for doing so is outlined in the ACEND Policy and Procedure Manual. The link to the form to file a complaint can be found at: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/public-notices-and-announcements/filing-a-complaint-with-acend>.

### **3.4 Academic Integrity**

Integrity is a key trait that faculty, staff and students should aspire for. Within academic settings, maintaining academic integrity is imperative. As members of a community dedicated to honesty, integrity, and mutual respect in all interactions and relationships, the students, faculty and administration of our university pledge to abide by the principles in the Vaquero Honor Code:

### **WE ARE HONEST**

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We do our own work and are honest with one another in all matters. We understand how any act of dishonesty conflicts as much with academic achievement as with the values of honesty and integrity.

### **WE HAVE INTEGRITY**

We will make personal and academic integrity fundamental in all of our endeavors.

### **WE ARE RESPECTFUL**

We act civilly and cooperate with one another for the common good. We will strive to create an environment and a culture in which people respect and listen to one another. We recognize a university is, above all, a place for the exchange of ideas, popular and unpopular. It is the one institution in society that encourages challenges to conventional wisdom. Consequently, we pledge to encourage the exchange of ideas and to allow others to participate and express their views openly.

### **UTRGV Academic dishonesty Policy**

As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to Report it at UTRGV and will be investigated by the office of students' rights and responsibilities (SRR).

Academic integrity violations at UTRGV have serious consequences. These violations are categorized into four levels. UTRGV's Academic Integrity Violation Sanctioning Guidelines are available at [https://www.utrgv.edu/files/documents/student-experience/report-it/utrgv\\_sanctioning\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.utrgv.edu/files/documents/student-experience/report-it/utrgv_sanctioning_guidelines.pdf). Note that for graduate students, any type of violation is categorized as level four, which has serious sanctions and ramifications on your academic career.

### **Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:**

Cheating

- Unauthorized use of commercial "research" services such as term papers.

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- Providing information to others without the instructor's permission or allowing the opportunity for others to obtain information that provides that recipient with an advantage on an exam or assignment, including, but not limited to, duplication in any format of exams or quizzes.
  - Unauthorized communicating with a fellow student during a quiz or exam.
  - Copying material from another student's quiz or exam.
  - Permitting another student to copy from a quiz or exam.
  - Permitting another person to take a quiz, exam, or similar evaluation in lieu of the enrolled student.
  - Using unauthorized materials, information, or study aids (textbooks, notes, data, images, formulas, dictionary, calculator, etc.) in any academic exercise or exam.
  - Unauthorized collaboration in providing or requesting assistance, such as sharing information on an academic exercise or exam through cell phones, texting, or similar mobile technology.
  - Using computer and word processing systems to gain access to, alter, and/or use unauthorized information.

#### Fabrication

- Fabricating or altering data to support research.
- Presenting results from research that was not performed — submitting materials for lab assignments, class projects, or other assignments which are wholly or partially falsified, invented or otherwise do not represent work accomplished or undertaken by the student.
- Crediting source material that was not directly used for research.
- Falsification, alteration, or misrepresentation of official or unofficial records or documents, including but not limited to academic transcripts, academic documentation, letters of recommendation, and admissions applications or related documents.

#### Fraud, Misrepresentation, Lying

- Providing an excuse for an absence, tardiness, late assignment with the intent to deceive the instructor, staff, or the school.
- Checking into classes, labs, centers, or other resources with the intent to deceive the instructor, staff or the school.
- Using another student's identification card for use in a class, lab, center, or other resource.
- Re-submission of past work as new, unique, or novel to a class whereas the work had been previously submitted.

#### Plagiarism

- Stealing the written, oral, artistic, or original works or efforts of others and presenting them as one's own.

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- The submission of material, whether in part or whole, authored by another person or source (the internet, book, journal, etc.) whether that material is paraphrased, translated, or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form without properly acknowledging the source. It is the student's responsibility to cite all sources.
  - The submission of material edited, in part or whole, by another person that results in the loss of the student's original voice or ideas (while an editor or tutor may advise the student, the final submitted material must be the work of the student, not that of the editor or tutor).
  - Unauthorized transfer and use of another person's computer file or any other electronic/technical product as the student's own.

### **3.5 Attendance and Absence Policy**

Attendance is mandatory for all:

- Face to face lectures and flipped/hybrid classroom sessions.
- Assigned field trips and community outreach projects.
- Quizzes and formative and summative examinations.
- All required supervised experiential learning (SEL) and other designated activities.
- Interprofessional education sessions that bring either health care professionals or health professions students together (as assigned).

Course instructors, preceptors, or their assigned designees, have the responsibility for keeping and maintaining records of attendance and tardiness for all mandatory educational activities. Students found to be in violation of the attendance or tardiness policy within courses and supervised experiential learning will be referred to the Program Director, who will address the issue with the student and determine actions to be taken.

#### **Absences Permitted to Seek Health Care**

Dietetics students are required to attend all courses and clinical assignments unless formally excused by their faculty, SEL preceptor, or program director.

Excused absences are granted when the health and safety of the student and the student's classmates might be adversely affected. In circumstances involving illness or other medically related issues that prevent a student from attending a class or completing a mandatory assignment or assessment:

- **MUST** inform the faculty or SEL preceptor **and** the program director by telephone/email within **24 hours** of the scheduled activity and/or due date.

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- The program director will then coordinate with the faculty and/or SEL preceptor to make appropriate arrangements for the student to make up missed work.

### **Planned Absences**

Students must send formal request for absence via UTRGV email at least 4 weeks in advance for planned absences that will occur within course. This does not constitute automatic approval. Students should submit the email request to the faculty who has the authority to grant or refuse requests.

### **Absences for Personal Appointments and Activities**

Students should not schedule personal appointments and activities during times when mandatory activities are scheduled.

### **Absences to Attend Professional Conferences and Meetings**

Students are encouraged to participate in professional conferences and meetings. However, students must be free of any academic deficiencies and professionalism violations and must take into consideration their academic responsibilities when making decisions to participate in professional conferences and meetings that would necessitate being absent from mandatory scheduled academic activities. Students who wish to participate in professional conferences and meetings must:

- Obtain prior approval to be absent from mandatory educational activities to attend a professional conference or meeting. This prior approval also must be in place before registering for conferences or meetings and before making travel arrangements.
- Provide a plan for completing all missed course or work

### **Absences Due to Holidays and Religious Observances**

Students are expected to report to their scheduled educational or clinical duties during holidays unless otherwise specified by the faculty. All students, faculty, and staff at the MS in Dietetics have the right to expect reasonable accommodations for their religious observances, practices, and beliefs. The MS in Dietetics will attempt at the beginning of each academic term, to provide written notice of the class schedule and formal examination periods. The faculty will make every attempt to schedule required classes and examinations to avoid interference with customarily observed religious holidays of those religious groups or communities.

### **Absences Due to Extended Illnesses (2 or more days)**

- Students with extended illnesses **must** contact faculty, Program Director, and SEL preceptor, if applicable.

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- Students must provide the Program Director with written documentation of the nature of the illness from their personal physician.
  - Students also have the option of requesting a Leave of Absence in the event of a prolonged illness.

### **Unplanned Absences and/or Emergency Situations**

Students are required to contact the Program Director as soon as possible for all unplanned and/or emergency absences (e.g., illness, accident, family illness or death, or other unplanned event/emergency).

### **Consequences of Unexcused Absences**

If a student's request for an excused absence is denied, the student is expected to report to all mandatory activities. Students who fail to report to mandatory activities and/or scheduled exams do not receive any credit for those activities or exams. Faculty and SEL Preceptors are under no obligation to provide students with make-up activities due to unexcused absences. An unexcused absence is a serious matter and is viewed as unprofessional student behavior. It is expected that the student will be counseled. Other potential consequences of unexcused absences will depend on the seriousness of the matter and might include reduction of a course grade.

### **Tardiness to Required Activities**

Students are expected to attend all scheduled activities on time and be ready to actively participate in learning activities. It is important that students realize that their tardiness can negatively impact other people. Students who expect to be late for a mandatory education or activity for any reason (e.g., car trouble, accident, injury, or similar unforeseen event) should contact the following individuals, as appropriate, as soon as possible:

- **For courses:** the faculty for course.
- **For SEL:** Preceptor and clinical coordinator

Faculty, at their discretion, may deny entrance or participation to a tardy student. This also applies to late admission to exams and quizzes due to tardiness. Extended time for completion will not be provided to students who arrive late for exams and quizzes — except under special circumstances.

## **3.6 Summative and Formative Feedback**

### **Formative Feedback**

All faculty are required to provide students with formative assessment and feedback early enough during each required course to allow enough time for remediation of assignment or

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competency. The types of formative assessment available to students include but are not limited to case study activities with feedback, coaching feedback, narrative feedback, and other activities directed toward enabling students to identify strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement. Formative assessment activities and feedback opportunities will be outlined in the syllabus for each course. Students will meet a minimum of 2 times per semester with their faculty mentor to review their academic progress. The goal of these meetings is to provide students with feedback regarding their performance and to identify as early as possible those students who are struggling academically and refer them for academic support services to assure successful completion of the courses.

During the Supervised Experiential Learning (SEL) courses, students will meet with their preceptor at the midpoint to review: 1) their core dietetic skills, behaviors, attitudes, and overall performance; 2) their progress toward meeting required competencies and 3) strengths and areas for growth and/or improvement with the goal of successful completion of the SEL. Preceptors will receive faculty development to assist them in identifying struggling students and be provided with information on how to refer struggling students.

### **Summative Feedback**

Summative Feedback is a comprehensive measure of a student's ability to demonstrate the concepts, skills and knowledge embedded within a course/rotation competency. It is an assessment of learning, and it is weighted in the grading system of each course. Summative assessments provide a summary of what a student has learned over a given period, such as a rotation or over an entire semester.

### **3.7 Student membership in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND)**

All students accepted into the MS in Dietetics program are required to gain student membership in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Dietetics students represent the future of food, nutrition, and dietetics profession. Some benefits to becoming a student member of the Academy include:

- Apply for scholarships: The Academy Foundation offers nearly \$500,000 in scholarships annually to qualifying dietetics student members at all levels of study.
- Search for jobs: Refine your job search in the Academy's online job board, EatRight Careers, features newly posted positions monthly and allows you to create custom e-mail alerts, respond directly to job listings, post your résumé for employer searches, and target your search by specialty or geographic location
- Access to the latest research: Subscriptions to the Academy's publications, which help you stay on top of breaking news and learn about your future profession:
  - Food & Nutrition Magazine®: Bi-monthly digital magazine emphasizing breaking news and trends in nutrition, diet, health, culinary arts, food service, sports

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- nutrition, fitness, integrative nutrition, food safety and other professional services.
  - Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: The premier source for information on the practice and science of food, nutrition, and dietetics.
  - Student Scoop: The Academy's monthly Student member e-newsletter.
  - Be mentored: The Academy's new eMentoring system is available to all members. You can search for a mentor using a variety of parameters such as years of experience, practice area, and languages spoken. This system was created to help students find the right mentor among participating Academy members.
  - Discounts on products: books, e-learning, conferences

### 3.8 Appropriate attire and appearance

Attire and behavior should promote a positive impression of the individual student, the specific course, and the institution. In addition to the guidelines outlined below, certain departments and some affiliate clinical institutions may require alternate dress guidelines, which must be followed. These requirements typically will be included in written course materials, but if any doubt exists, it is the responsibility of the student to inquire.

#### General Standards

- All clothing must be clean, neat, professionally styled, and in good repair.  
**Men:** Slacks and shirt, preferably with a collar. Tie optional.  
**Women:** Dresses or skirts of medium length, or professional-style slacks.
- UTRGV Student ID must be always worn and clearly visible.
- Good personal hygiene and grooming should be always maintained. This includes regular bathing, use of deodorant/antiperspirant, and regular dental hygiene.
- Excessive use of fragrances should be avoided, as some people are sensitive to scented chemicals.
- Cosmetics should be used in moderation.
- Hair should be neat and clean. Hairstyle and/or color should not interfere with assigned duties or present a physical hazard to the patient, to the student, or to another person.
- Facial hair must be clean, neatly groomed, and trimmed.
- Fingernails should be clean and of short to medium length. Students may not have artificial/acrylic nails while providing nutrition care services.

#### Standards in the classroom setting

- For men, a shirt with a collar is preferred.
- For women, shirts and blouses must extend to the waistband of the skirt or pants.

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- Students are permitted to wear casual slacks, jeans, and T-shirts, provided they are clean, in good repair, and do not contain any offensive language or pictures.

#### **Standards in SEL**

- In food production areas: shoes should be safe and sturdy with closed toe. You will be working in areas where floors may be wet and slippery or where something may be dropped on the foot.
- In clinical areas: professional-appearing shoes must be worn. Shoes must be safe, quiet, clean and in good repair. No canvas, nylon or cloth shoes; no open heels, sides, or toes in patient care area or food service areas. \*Wearing scrubs will be at the discretion of facility preceptor.

### **3.9 Criminal Background Check Policy**

Applicants who have received an offer of admission must submit to and satisfactorily complete a criminal background check as a condition of matriculation to the MS in Dietetics program. An offer of admission will not be final until the completion of the criminal background check(s) with results deemed satisfactory. Admission may be denied or rescinded based on a review of the criminal background check. Additionally, students who are currently enrolled may have to submit to, and satisfactorily complete, a criminal background check as a condition to enrolling or participating in educational experiences at affiliated clinical sites, as required. Students who refuse to submit to the criminal background check or do not pass the criminal background check may be dismissed from the program.

#### **Rationale**

- Registered Dietitians are entrusted with the health, safety, and welfare of patients, clients, and students. They have access to confidential information and operate in settings that require good judgment and ethical behavior. Thus, an assessment of an applicant's or current student's suitability to function in these settings is imperative to promote the highest level of integrity in health care services.
- Clinical facilities are increasingly required by accreditation agencies, such as the Joint Commission of Healthcare Organizations to conduct background checks for security purposes on individuals who provide services within the facility and especially those who supervise care and render treatment.
- Clinical and school child nutrition rotations are essential components of the MS in Dietetics curriculum. Students who cannot participate in clinical or school nutrition rotations due to items revealed in the criminal background check will be unable to fulfill the requirements of the MS in Dietetics program.

#### **Background Check Reports**

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- The MS in Dietetics program will designate approved entities to conduct the criminal background checks and issue reports directly to the College of Health Professions. Results from a company other than those designated will not be accepted. Applicants who have received an offer of admission and current students must contact the designated company and comply with its instructions in authorizing and obtaining a criminal background check. Applicants who have received an offer of admission and current students are responsible for payment of any fees charged by the designated company.
  - Criminal background checks include the following, and cover at least the past seven years:
    - Criminal history search, including convictions, deferred adjudications, or judgments, and pending criminal charges involving felonies, Class A, Class B, and Class C violations
    - Social Security Number verification
    - Violent Sexual Offender and Predator Registry search
    - Office of the Inspector General List of Excluded Individuals/Entities
    - General Services Administration List of Parties Excluded from Federal Programs
    - U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control, List of Specially Designated Nationals

### **Current Students**

Dietetic students may have to complete a criminal background check review prior to beginning an assignment to a clinical facility. Students who return from a leave of absence may require a criminal background check. If a legal violation occurs after matriculation, it is the student's duty to report the violation within 30 days. These students may also require satisfactory completion of a criminal background check. Violations include arrest, charge, or conviction of a misdemeanor or a felony. Serious traffic offenses such as reckless driving, driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, hit and run incidents, evading a peace officer, failure to appear in court, driving with a suspended or revoked license MUST be reported. This list is not all-inclusive, and if in doubt as to whether an offense should be disclosed, it is better to disclose.

## **SECTION 4: CURRICULUM STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP**

### **4.1 Introduction to the Curriculum**

The MS in Dietetics is a 2-year program (maximum completion is 3 years) containing 47 graduate hours. There are three dedicated Supervised Experiential Learning (SEL) courses in which students will be placed in a variety of settings. These courses provide a minimum of 1191 clock hours of SEL. If a student needs more time, there will be allocated time within the

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semester for additional hours. Furthermore, students will have supervised experiential learning within their didactic courses that include simulations, outreach (service-learning), and case studies that facilitate meeting competencies.

The MS in Dietetics will include opportunities for students to engage and interact with different populations and cultures through a variety of learning activities. SEL I includes food systems management in child nutrition programs and hospital food service. Students will engage in management activities to include human resource management, procurement, distribution, food safety, and all aspects of meal service. During the student's SEL II – community rotation students will be placed at a WIC facility in which they will assess infants and children for malnutrition and iron deficiency. In addition, students will rotate through HEB (Texas-based grocery store) and will provide group culturally competent nutrition education to Hispanic/Latinx patients. This will be conducted through grocery store tours, one-on-one counseling, and group classroom-based education sessions. Students will also have a 4-week rotation in diabetes care in the Rio Grande Valley to conduct diabetes self-management education. SEL III will include the student's clinical rotation in a hospital setting. In this course, students will conduct assessments on hospital patients who range from infants to older adults. During clinical rotations, students will review medical charts, assess patients, and provide appropriate Medical Nutrition Therapy for a variety of disease states, populations, and cultures.

#### 4.2 Time Commitment

The MS in Dietetics program is a full-time commitment and students are expected to be in rotations or didactic courses on a full-time basis, at least 40 hours per week. Supervised Experiential Learning (SEL) hours will vary with the requirements of the individual rotation to which the student is assigned. Due to the professional nature of the MS in Dietetics program, students should anticipate spending additional time outside of the normal workday to complete assignments and projects.

Generally, students SEL hours will be like that of the preceptor the student is assigned to at the time. During clinical and community rotations, students can expect to rotate normal business hours. Rotations in management may require the student to attend early morning and/or late evening shifts on various days.

#### 4.3 Structure of Curriculum

Course/Term	Hours
<b>Year 1: Fall</b>	
DIET 6300 Food Systems Management	3

DIET 6310 Scientific Analysis in Nutrition Practice	3
DIET 6320 Advanced Human Metabolism	3
DIET 6331 MNT in Disease I	3
<b>Year 1: Spring</b>	
DIET 6200 Ethics, Leadership, Professionalism	2
DIET 6340 Culturally Sensitive Counseling In Dietetics	3
DIET 6332 MNT in Disease II	3
DIET 6511 SEL I	5
<b>Year 2: Fall</b>	
DIET 6350 MNT in Diabetes	3
DIET 6360 Global and Public Health Nutrition	3
DIET 6521 SEL II	5
<b>Year 2: Spring</b>	
DIET 6370 Critical Care & Nutrition Support	3
DIET 6380 Dietetics Capstone	3
DIET 6531 SEL III	5
<b>Total Graduate hours</b>	<b>47</b>

#### 4.4 Course faculty and preceptors' responsibilities

The course faculty or SEL preceptor presents the overall goals, objectives, requirements, expectations, and grading policies to students at the beginning of each course. The faculty assigned to the course assigns grades. For coursework completed during rotations (SEL), the assigned course faculty will grade and assess all assignments and review preceptor evaluations at the host institution to assign the final grade.

#### 4.5 Online Requirements, Testing, and Assessment

To participate in this online/hybrid courses, you need easy access to a computer less than 5 years old with high-speed internet connection. To ensure you are using a supported browser and have required plug-ins please refer to tutorial from Blackboard Resource Page: [Supported Browsers, Plugins & Operating Systems for Blackboard Learn](#).

#### Student Technical Skills

You are expected to be proficient with installing and using basic computer applications and can send and receive email attachments.

#### Software

- Mozilla Firefox (latest version; Mac or Windows)
- Google Chrome (latest version; Mac or Windows)

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- Adobe Flash Player & Reader plug-in (latest version)
  - Apple QuickTime plug-in (latest version)
  - Virus Protection UTRGV Software link
  - Microsoft Office UTRGV Software link
  - Respondus Lock down browser with Monitor (download from Student Support in Blackboard)—required for all quizzes.

### **Student Monitoring and Verification during Exams**

#### Guidelines for online assessment Proctoring

- Students are required to use Respondus Lockdown Browser. Lockdown Browser is a custom browser that locks down the testing environment within Blackboard and replaces regular browsers such as Chrome, Firefox, and Safari.
- Students are required to use Respondus Monitor for online assessment proctoring. Your activities are recorded while you are logged into or taking your assessments. The recordings serve as a proctor and will be reviewed and used to maintain academic integrity.
- Respondus Monitor requires you to have a webcam and microphone as it will record you while taking your assessment.
- Unless otherwise noted by individual instructor, students are not allowed to use any resources (books, notes, phones, etc) during assessments.
- Students will need to perform an environmental scan and show picture identification (student ID, state ID, passport) prior to taking online assessments. You can find more detailed information on [Lockdown Browser and Monitor](#) at [UTRGV.edu/online](http://UTRGV.edu/online).

## **SECTION 5: EVALUATIONS, PROMOTIONS, GRADING AND GRADUATION**

### **5.1 Evaluation**

The MS in Dietetics program director will review the academic progress and professional development of each student during all components of the 2-year program. The MS in Dietetics program director has the primary responsibility for recommending for graduation only those candidates who have satisfactorily completed all graduation requirements and demonstrated the professional conduct. The program director shall be responsible for:

- The oversight of academic and professional performance during the 2 years of the curriculum.
- The promotion or termination of students in the academic program.
- The consideration of requests for leave of absence and curriculum deceleration.
- Tracking of student SEL hours

- The tracking of competency completion to receive a verification statement to sit for RDN examination.

## 5.2 Promotions and Remediation

To be promoted to the next semester, dietetic students must meet all requirements of the current semester, and satisfactorily adhere to all University standards.

### Grade notification

MS in Dietetic students who receives a grade lower than a “B” in any program course, will be sent an email notification about their at-risk status. Students are encouraged to meet with the Program Director in order to develop a plan of correction which may include tutoring and other forms of remediation. Students that are remediated will be allowed to retake the course the next time it is offered. If it is determined that a student does not have the ability or they receive an additional grade below B, guidance will be provided toward the ability to remain in the program. If the student does not want to remain in the program or does not meet remediation recommendations, they will be counseled into career paths that are better suited to their abilities.

### UTRGV Graduate College Policy on Academic Standing

For a degree-seeking master student to remain in good academic standing, the student must maintain a 3.0 grade point average during the program. A student who receives a grade of “C” or lower in 9 semester hours of credit attempted toward the master’s degree, regardless of the student’s classification, whether or not in repeated courses, is ineligible for any graduate degree and will not be permitted to re-enroll. A master student whose overall GPA falls below 3.0, in a given semester, is automatically placed on academic probation the following semester. Within the following 9 semester credit hours, the overall GPA must return to 3.0 for master students or the student will be suspended for a minimum of one semester. A student who receives an “F” in any course is automatically dismissed from the graduate program.

## 5.3 Grading System

The MS in Dietetics will follow the UTRGV grading system which uses a 4.0 scale. The following grades are used to designate achievement in coursework. Their corresponding grade values and points are indicated.

A	>90%	4 grade points per hour
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B	80-89.9%	3 grade points per hour
C	70-79.9%	2 grade points per hour
D, F	<69.9	0 points (failing)

#### 5.4 Leave of Absence

Students may apply in writing for a leave of absence for no more than two semesters. Request must be approved in advance of the leave by the Advisor, Director/Program Coordinator, Dean of the College, and Dean of the Graduate College. Students on leave must reapply for admission in order to return but readmission during the approved period of leave is automatic and application fee is waived. A leave of absence does not change the time limit for completion of the student's graduate program of study (max of three years from first admission).

#### 5.5 Requirements for Graduation

Students will earn a Master of Science in Dietetics degree upon successful completion of the 47-credit hour program. Degree certification will begin upon submission of grades from your last courses and normally takes 6-8 weeks. You can see the update on Assist when your degree has been conferred and at that time you can print your unofficial transcript or request official transcripts that will reflect your degree has been earned. It will take additional time to receive your diploma.

Commencement exercises are scheduled for every Spring and Fall semester. Commencement is planned and organized by the Registrar's office, and they are the department to contact for questions about commencement.

#### Verification Statement Requirements & Procedures

In addition to earning the MS degree, students who satisfactorily complete all program requirements receive an ACEND Verification Statement from the Program Director signifying the completion of the academic qualifications required by ACEND to be eligible to register for the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) Registration Exam for Dietitians.

To receive a verification statement, students enrolled in the MS in Dietetics program must:

- Achieve and maintain a GPA of 3.0 or above, with no grade lower than a B in all MS in Dietetics courses.

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- Complete a minimum of 1000 hours of supervised experiential learning.
  - Meet all the competencies in the Future Education Model standards
  - Achieve a 70% or greater on the final Exit Exam

The Verification Statement is a VERY IMPORTANT document and should be kept with the graduate's permanent records. Graduates who need additional copies of the form should contact the Program Director. Students not awarded the ACEND verification statement will NOT be eligible to take the CDR examination to become a registered dietitian.

### **Licensure**

In the state of Texas, Registered Dietitians Nutritionist can also be licensed by the state. The site that contains application and requirements is <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/diet/diet.htm> .

## **SECTION 6: OTHER EDUCATIONAL POLICIES**

### **6.1 Technology polices**

#### **Email**

All communication with MS in Dietetics faculty and staff should be conducted through the students official UTRGV email. The use of email is encouraged where such use supports the University's academic goals and facilitates communication between faculty and students.

#### **Etiquette**

Email communication is an important tool to project a professional image with your professors, preceptors, and fellow students. Students will follow the below guide to email etiquette.

- **Use a Professional Email Address.** Always use your official university email address for all MS in Dietetics-related communication.
- **Use a Formal Salutation.** Professional correspondence should have a certain level of formality including a standard greeting. Unless you are invited to use a first name, it is best to address your recipient by his or her title, such as Dear Mr., Ms., Dr., or Professor.
- **Lead with a Clear Subject Line.** A concise and specific subject line will help your reader know exactly what to expect. For example, if you are writing to inquire about an assignment, a good subject line may look like this: DIET-6300 Assignment 2 Question.
- **Be Clear, Polite, and Succinct.** Make sure that your email contains all the relevant information necessary to help evaluate and respond to your request. Before sending, always review your message and make sure that it has a clear and

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courteous tone of voice, that it is written in complete, coherent sentences, that there are no spelling errors, and that no part of it is written in all capital letters or caps (using caps is equivalent to SHOUTING YOUR MESSAGE).

- **Sign Off with a Thank You.** It is common courtesy to thank someone for his or her time and help. End your email with a “thank you” or “best” and your full name. Include your student ID number in all messages to faculty or advisors.
- **Boost Your Image with a Strong Email Signature.** There is no exact template you must follow, but your goal should be to clearly state who you are and how to easily contact you.
- **Practice Common Courtesy.** If you expect timely, helpful replies, you should do the same for others. Check your email regularly and respond as soon as you are able.

### **Portable Computers and Mobile Devices**

Portable computer users must take personal responsibility for the security of the equipment, software, and data in their care.

Standards Pertaining to the Use of the Personal Computers

- Students must ensure that their laptops are not used by unauthorized persons.
- All students are encouraged to regularly save all data to the network drives and a central location, i.e., Blackboard.
- Laptops should never be left unattended in public places (e.g., car, library, restaurant, restroom, etc.).
- Students must abide by all the UTRGV IT policies. This includes all HIPAA and FERPA regulations pertaining to security and privacy.

Communications:

- Student will not use cell phone to make personal phone calls or other personal communications while in assigned supervised learning sites.

### **Social Media**

The MS in Dietetics faculty and staff recognize that social networking websites and applications are an important type of communication. All faculty, staff, and students in the MS in Dietetics program are subject to university policies and/or regulations on social media and social networking, as well as all other applicable University policies and regulations.

The following actions are strictly forbidden:

- Any violation of University IT policies.
- Students may not disclose the personal health information of other individuals in their professional role as caregivers. Removal of an individual’s name does not necessarily constitute proper de-identification of protected health information. Inclusion of data such as age, gender, race, diagnosis, date of evaluation, or type of treatment or the

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use of a highly specific medical photograph may still allow the reader to recognize the identity of a specific individual, and therefore is prohibited.

- Display of vulgar language.
- Display of language or photographs that imply disrespect for any individual or group because of age, race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.
- Presentation of personal photographs or photographs of others that may reasonably be interpreted as condoning irresponsible use of alcohol, substance abuse, or sexual promiscuity.
- Posting of potentially inflammatory or unflattering material on another individual's page.
- Fraternization between faculty/staff and students in an inappropriate manner of a personal nature.

Students should make every effort to present themselves in a mature, responsible, and professional manner.

Please read the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Pledge of Professional Civility:

[Professional Civility - Food & Nutrition Magazine \(foodandnutrition.org\)](http://foodandnutrition.org)

## 6.2 Student Privacy

The University will not permit access to, or the release of personally identifiable information contained in student education records without the written consent of the student to any party, except as follows:

- To appropriate university officials who require access to educational records in order to perform their legitimate educational duties.
- To officials of other schools in which a student seeks or intends to enroll, is enrolled in, or receives services from, upon request of these officials.
- To federal, state, or local officials or agencies authorized by law.
- In connection with a student's application for, or receipt of, financial aid.
- To accrediting organizations or organizations conducting educational studies, provided that these organizations do not release personally identifiable data and destroy such data when it is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was obtained.
- To the parents of a dependent student as defined in section 152 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.
- In compliance with a judicial order or subpoena provided a reasonable effort is made to notify the student in advance unless such subpoena specifically directs the institution not to disclose the existence of a subpoena.

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- In an emergency if the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of students or other persons.
  - To an alleged victim of any crime of violence, the results of the alleged perpetrators disciplinary proceeding may be released.

### **6.3 Educational Records**

Upon written request, the University shall provide a student with access to their educational records. The Vice President for Business Affairs at UTRGV has been designated to coordinate the inspection and review procedures for student education records, which include admissions files, academic files, and financial files. Students wishing to review their education records must make written requests to the Vice President for Student Access to Educational Records Business Affairs, listing the item or items of interest. Education records covered by the Act will be made available within 45 days of the request. A list of education records and those officials responsible for the records shall be maintained at the Office of the Executive Vice President for Business Affairs.

### **6.4 Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination, and Special Accommodations**

#### **Equal Opportunity**

The MS in Dietetics adheres to the UTRGV non-discrimination policy and does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, disability, sex, gender, or sexual orientation in its educational programs or activities it conducts. Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and other federal and state laws prohibit such discrimination. Such discrimination includes failure to provide equal opportunity in admissions, activities, employment and/or athletics. As a recipient of federal funds, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) complies with Title IX and has designated a Title IX Coordinator to oversee all complaints of sex discrimination. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for identifying and addressing any patterns or systemic problems that arise during the review of such complaints. Additionally, other responsibilities include the coordination of training, education, and communications regarding Title IX procedures for the University community.

#### **Accommodations**

Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery

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during the semester are eligible for temporary services. Make sure to contact SAS as soon as possible.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination, which includes discrimination based on pregnancy, marital status, or parental status. Students seeking accommodations related to pregnancy, pregnancy-related condition, or parenting (reasonably immediate postpartum period) are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services for additional information and to request accommodations.

For more information on forms, and procedural guidelines, contact Student Accessibility Services at:

Brownsville: Cortez Hall, Room 129, Phone: (956) 882-7374

Edinburg: University Center, Room 108, Phone: (956) 665-7005

Email: [ability@utrgv.edu](mailto:ability@utrgv.edu)

Website: [www.utrgv.edu/accessibility/](http://www.utrgv.edu/accessibility/)

## **6.5 Requirements for Supervised Experiential Learning**

Supervised experiential learning sites are evaluated for adequacy and appropriateness of learning for students. The criteria for adequate sites will be outlined in this section. In addition, student is expected to maintain a knowledge of and comply with MS in Dietetics policies related to immunizations, Servsafe Certification, tuberculosis testing, needle sticks injury and prevention, workers' compensation, drug screening, HIPAA provisions, and universal precautions such as the OSHA requirements. Students not in compliance may be immediately removed from clinical, community, and/or food systems supervised experiential learning until they have met all requirements. Lack of timely compliance may delay meeting course requirements, and even graduation

### **SEL Sites policy**

Facilities must meet the following minimum qualifications to be considered:

Clinical Sites:

1. Located in the Rio Grande Valley (Texas).
2. Be in good standing with The Joint Commission and/or State of Texas.
3. Able to provide a variety of experiences to meet rotation competencies (e.g., serve diverse populations with various conditions, perform aspects of the nutrition care process).
4. Does not use students to replace RDN position.
5. Must have at least one full-time RDN Preceptor who has 2 years' experience to supervise student.
6. Must be licensed for at least 70 beds.

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#### Food Systems Sites:

1. Located in the Rio Grande Valley (Texas).
2. Be in good standing with Health Department and the USDA.
3. Able to provide a variety of managerial experiences to meet rotation competencies (e.g. procurement, production, menu modification, budget, human resources management, and food safety).
4. Does not use students to replace food service employees.
5. Must have at least one full-time RDN with 2 years' experience or a food service manager with more than 5 years' experience.

#### Community sites

1. Located in the Rio Grande Valley (Texas).
2. Be in good standing with Health Department.
3. Able to provide a variety of community experiences to meet rotation competencies (serve diverse populations with various conditions, perform aspects of the nutrition care process).
4. Does not use students to replace employees.
5. Must have at least one full-time RDN with 2 years' experience or nutrition manager that has more than 5 years' experience.

#### **Placement in Sites**

Placement of students is an intricate puzzle that takes many variables into account. All sites must have an affiliation agreement in order for students to be placed. Affiliation agreements can take 3 to 18 months to secure before a student can be placed. In addition, the program takes into account the personality of both preceptor and student and effectiveness of preceptor to provide inclusive and appropriate supervision and education. Lastly, if possible, the program will take into account students' location, however not all students are guaranteed to have rotations near their homes.

#### **Transportation**

Reliable transportation to all SEL sites, seminars, and field trips is the responsibility of the student as well as any expenses incurred for gas and meals. Neither The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley nor the MS in Dietetics is liable for accident or injury in transportation to and from supervised practice locations. If a student is driving their own vehicle to and from sites, they must have a valid driver's license and appropriate insurance (see car insurance section of this Handbook).

#### **Drug testing**

Dietetic students are entrusted with the health, safety, and welfare of patients; have access to confidential information; and operate in settings that require the exercise of sound,

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professional judgment, and ethical behavior. The MS in Dietetics program has a responsibility to assure that patients are not under the care of impaired persons. The University is obligated to meet the contractual requirements contained in affiliation agreements with its clinical health care partners. To facilitate these requirements, the MS in Dietetic program requires urine drug screens for all accepted applicants and enrolled students.

All persons accepted for admission to the MS in Dietetics program must have a negative result prior to matriculation. Enrolled students must maintain a negative urine drug screen to fulfill the requirements of the program. Applicants or students with a positive test may not be guaranteed admission, continued enrollment in the educational program, allowed on clinical rotations, or remain eligible for graduation with the MS in Dietetics degree. Students may be required to complete additional re- screening at any point, and, if there is reason to believe a student may be using or misusing drugs or other substances — or if there is an extended absence from the education program.

All test results are reviewed by a third-party vendor to confirm a negative result or determine whether a positive result is due to a legally prescribed medication. A positive test will result in a report to the Dean of Health Professions for intervention and/or possible disciplinary action as authorized by policies, rules, and regulations imposed by the University or The University of Texas System. A positive test may result in the withdrawal of an offer of acceptance, or, if after matriculation, dismissal from the program. The expenses related to drug testing are the responsibility of the applicant or enrolled student. Drug test results remain separate from the academic record.

### **Immunizations**

Students are required to be immunized against vaccine-preventable illnesses. Students are asked to present validated records of vaccines received. “Validated” means the record includes dates of administration, where the vaccines were administered, and a signature or stamp of the health care provider administering the vaccine. Specific requirements will be detailed in notices you will receive from Student Health Services. Please comply with these notices – failure to do so will exclude you from Supervised Experiential Learning assignments. In compliance with the State of Texas Higher Education Mandatory Immunization Requirements and recommendations of the Texas Department of State Health Services Immunizations Division and Department of Health and Human Services CDC, all students must complete the required immunizations outlined below as condition of enrollment.

Prior to registration, each applicant accepted for admission must submit appropriate medical documentation to include, but not be limited to, documentation of appropriate immunizations required by the University. Exceptions may be granted as authorized by law

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and with appropriate documentation. For example, an exception may be granted in cases where the required vaccination would be injurious to the health and well-being of the student. Important Note: Immunization Records must be provided to Student Health Services at least 30 days prior to registration. Vaccinations may be subject to change based on fluctuation of outbreak, changes in state law, and/or CDC recommendations. The following immunizations are required for all students enrolled in health-related courses that involve direct patient contact:

- Hepatitis B
- Tuberculosis Skin Test (TST) or Blood Assay for Mycobacterium Tuberculosis Test (BAMT)
- Tetanus/Diphtheria/Acellular Pertussis (Tdap): All students must provide proof of one dose of (Tdap) within the prior 10 years
- Mumps, Measles and Rubella
- Meningitis
- Varicella
- Influenza
- Polio Vaccine
- COVID Vaccine

### **Bacterial Meningitis**

The 77th Texas Legislature (2001) required all public institutions of higher education to notify all new students about bacterial meningitis (Chapter 51, Education Code, Section 51.9191; Chapter 38, Education Code, Section 38.0025). This information is provided to all new college students in Texas. Bacterial meningitis is a serious, potentially deadly disease that can progress extremely quickly, so students must take utmost caution. It is an inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. The bacteria that cause meningitis can also infect the blood. This disease strikes about 3,000 Americans each year, including 100-125 on college campuses, leading to 5-15 deaths among college students every year. There is a treatment, but those who survive may develop severe health problems or disabilities. Please see attached document for facts on Bacterial Meningitis.

### **Blood Borne Pathogens**

All dietetic students will receive an orientation to the blood-borne pathogen policy of the affiliate hospital prior to commencing patient care activities. The program director or clinical coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all visiting students receive the appropriate training and orientation prior to starting supervised experiential learning at one of its clinical affiliates. The department of Environmental Health, Safety and Risk Management provides Bloodborne Pathogens Training online through Blackboard. All students will take this training prior to starting any SEL rotation.

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## **ServSafe**

The ServSafe program helps prepare students for the food systems course and Supervised Experiential Learning I. Training covers the importance of food safety, good personal hygiene, time and temperature control, preventing cross-contamination, cleaning and sanitizing, safe food preparation, receiving and storing food, HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points), and food safety regulations. The CDC estimates that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans (48 million people) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne illness. It is vital that dietetics students are the leaders and authorities in preventing this public health problem. If you are already a certified Servsafe manager, you will need to provide your certificate via blackboard orientation. If you are not certified contact Professor Villarreal at [rachel.villarreal@utrgv.edu](mailto:rachel.villarreal@utrgv.edu) to get the necessary training and set up a testing date. ServSafe testing will be provided prior to the start of program, and students must obtain a passing grade in no more than 3 attempts.

## **Student health insurance**

Prior to orientation, and annually thereafter, students will be automatically enrolled in the University of Texas System Health Insurance Plan, unless they show proof, via waiver, that their current insurance provides the benefits that meet the established minimum standards. All fees and premiums for the health insurance will be added to the student's tuition, annually. Such insurance coverage shall be maintained continuously throughout a student's attendance in the MS in Dietetic program. Students are responsible for immediately notifying the Office of Financial Assistance, should the status of their health insurance coverage change for any reason (e.g., voluntary change in policy, non-payment, etc.).

The University of Texas System SHIP covers preventive care services, inpatient, and outpatient care, as well as laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, and rehabilitative services. Urgent care and emergency care, mental/behavioral health services, and substance abuse treatment services are also covered. Preventive services, including immunizations, are generally covered at 100%, while students are typically responsible for a co-pay and/or coinsurance for most other services. Referrals are not required, and students will experience a cost savings for choosing in-network providers. Deductibles and maximum coverage limits are competitive with other available insurance products. Visit <https://utsystem.myahpcare.com/> for complete information about coverage, premiums, and optional services.

Students that are injured or become ill while at a health care facility or other experiential learning site as part of the program should notify their preceptor immediately and receive appropriate care as established by the guidelines at each specific practice facility (Emergency Room, Urgent Care, private physician, etc). In the event of a major injury, the Program

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Director should be notified. All costs associated with injuries or illnesses that occur while completing supervised experiential learning experiences (or other off campus field trips as assigned by instructors) are the responsibility of the student. UTRGV is not liable for injuries or health incidents that arise from the student spending time at experiential learning sites.

### **Dental, vision, and additional family health insurance**

Additional coverage for dental, vision, and additional family members is available through Academic Health Plans: <https://utrgv.myahpcare.com/> and is optional. Students coordinate coverage directly through AHP. Fees are not assessed as part of tuition & fees as is the case with student health insurance.

### **Liability Insurance**

The MS in Dietetic program adheres to the University of Texas Board of Regents rules regarding liability coverage. MS in Dietetic students are required to maintain liability insurance and are covered by the UTRGV liability plan only when participating in patient care during supervised experiential learning rotations. Students are NOT billed for this coverage, and it is provided and paid for by the College of Health Professions.

### **Automobile Insurance**

During any occasion that a student takes their own vehicle for supervised experiential learning rotations or experiences related to the MS in Dietetic program, students are required to have automobile insurance that follows Texas law.

## **6.6 Community Engagement Requirements**

A requirement for students in the MS in Dietetics program will be to complete public service hours every semester to help students gain a better understanding of the needs of their community.

Students will complete 10 hours per semester and keep a log of activities. Activities can include:

- Participation in state affiliate meetings and/or webinars
- Participation in local chapter meetings and/or webinars
- Student Organization sponsored activities such as health fairs, cooking classes/demonstrations, fundraising

## **6.7 UTRGV Academic Calendar**

The UTRGV academic calendar can be found at:

**[APPROVED Fall 2021 to Sum 2024 Acad Calendar - 09132021 \(utrgv.edu\)](#)**

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The UTRGV calendar has designated holidays. If students are participating in SEL I, II, or III and preceptor is working on designated holiday, student is required to attend. Special permission can be given based on cultural or religious observance; however, hours will have to be made up and scheduled with preceptor and approved by program director.

See approved academic calendar for designated deadlines to withdraw from the program and receive a refund of tuition and fees.