Tips for Applying to Dietetic Internships

Becoming a Registered Dietitian is a 3-step process and takes much advanced preparation

Step 1: Apply to the General Dietetics option at Chico State. If accepted, graduate Chico State with a B.S. in General Dietetics.

Step 2: Apply for a dietetic internship (DI) program the final semester of your undergraduate program. You will want to apply for several programs (5-10) but you will only be matched to one.

Step 3: After completing the dietetic internship, sit for the R.D. exam. Passing the test means you’ve become a Registered Dietitian.

Tips for Becoming a Competitive DI Applicant

The following points explain the dietetic internship application process, what the internship programs look for and what you can do to prepare during your undergraduate years to build up your resume and stand out as an applicant.

Each program emphasizes different applicant characteristics. There is no formula for guaranteed entrance into a dietetic internship. On occasion, outstanding students are not matched and no one knows why. However, there are certainly things you can do to increase your chances. Here is a list of ways you can increase your marketability for a dietetic internship, ultimately increasing your chances of obtaining a match for a dietetic internship.

- **Use summers and winter breaks wisely.** Try to gain as much experience in the field of nutrition and/or food science as you can during these times. Even if you’re only able to volunteer or work for a month or so, that qualifies as experience and is looked highly upon by internship directors. Consider getting involved in programs such as the NACUFS summer internship ([http://www.nacufs.org/careers-internships](http://www.nacufs.org/careers-internships)), the Summercise Nome Alaska nutrition internship, and diabetes camps.

- **Get as much work and volunteer experience as possible.** Consider obtaining these experiences in your hometown where there may be more experience opportunities than in Chico. Visit with NFSC professors to inquire about various externship opportunities in Chico and surrounding communities.

- **Think outside the box.** Explore towns surrounding Chico such as Red Bluff, Paradise, Oroville, and Orland. There are many job opportunities there that may be unsought by Chico State students. Take advantage of any available opportunity.

- **Think clinical.** Clinical experience is often highly regarded, whether it’s through a hospital, or skilled nursing facility. Don’t be afraid to make cold calls asking if they need any volunteers or employees at their facility.

- **Impress your professors and managers.** It is very likely that you will be asking your current manager, preceptor, mentor, and NFSC professors to write letters of recommendations for you in the future. It’s best to get to know them as early as possible. Go into their office during office hours and ask them about additional externship and volunteer experiences in nutrition and research. They are there to help you.

- **Study.** Realize EARLY ON that grades matter! Competitive GPA’s fall within the 3.5 to 4.0 range. On occasion, students within this competitive range are not matched to a DI. Students with GPA’s between 3.0 and 3.5 are sometimes matched if they have strong work experiences in the field of nutrition and foodservice or other applicant qualities such as a double major, are bilingual/bicultural or who have shown strong leadership skills. Students with GPA’s below 3.0 are very rarely matched.

Some programs emphasize dietetic coursework and science coursework. Most programs have a science GPA minimum of 3.0. Therefore, it’s important to prioritize your time wisely so that you study hard for classes such as chemistry,
biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, and advanced human nutrition. In addition, many programs look highly on achieving A's in your MNT course series.

- **Become well-rounded.** Selection committees look for well-rounded candidates who are involved in diverse activities such as student government, clubs, sports, sororities/fraternities, and professional organizations such as the Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics (AND).

- **Seek leadership opportunities.** Run for a leadership role in clubs or student government on campus. A great club to get involved in is the Nutrition and Food Science Association.

- **Expand your horizons.** Seek experiences with culturally diverse groups. Cultural diversity experience can include studying abroad or working with minority groups in a community nutrition or healthcare setting. In addition, seek opportunities to become more educated on various cultures.

- **Network.** It’s important to get to know nutrition professionals and internship directors. Attend a variety of professional meetings including the Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), California Dietetic Association (CDA), and Northern Area Dietetic Association (NADA) conferences. While at conferences and symposiums, approach nutrition professionals and internship directors. Most are more than willing to spend time with future colleagues. Ask them how they got started—you will be amazed at the variety of paths people have taken.

Introduce yourself including your name, school, and what excites you about the profession of dietetics. Next, ask them a question such as, “What is it that you do in the area of dietetics and how did you become interested in that area?” If you are speaking to a dietetic internship director, come prepared with specific questions about their program such as, “What can you tell me about the rotations in your internship program?” or, “What tips do you have for applicants?”

**Sample networking script:** “Hi, I’m Melanie Morgan and I’m a senior in the Chico State dietetics program. I’ve recently become interested in nutrition counseling. I noticed that in your dietetic internship, you have a 4-week rotation at an eating disorder clinic and another 4-week rotation at a WIC clinic. What can you tell me about those experiences?” (DI director responds...) “Gosh, that sounds like such a great opportunity. I appreciate how your program provides a variety of experiences with different audiences. You’ll be seeing my application in February. Do you have any tips for me on my application?” (DI director responds...) “Those are great suggestions! Thank you for your time. It was so nice to meet you.” (Shake hands, if it seems appropriate.) After each networking experience, be sure to ask them for a business card and when you get home, send them a brief email thanking them for taking the time to speak with you.

- **Variety, Balance, Moderation.** Just as with obtaining a variety of foods in your diet, you want your work and volunteer positions to include a variety of diverse audiences and experiences. A variety of experiences including work experience, extracurricular and volunteer activities look the best on applications. You need to balance these experiences with studying, socializing, and having fun. It is equally important to practice moderation with your lifestyle choices. Sometimes, in an effort to cope with the stress of college life, students turn to drugs, alcohol or disordered eating patterns. Not only will these choices decrease the time left for studying, and working, but could also result in a criminal record. Dietetic internships do background checks on all of their interns. Therefore, students with a criminal record may not be able to complete a dietetic internship. The Counseling Center is available on campus to assist in managing stress and is free of charge to all CSUC students. [http://www.csuchico.edu/counseling/index.shtml](http://www.csuchico.edu/counseling/index.shtml)

**Additional Resources:**

- This is a great article with many helpful tips written by Valerie Buchanan called Getting In: The Keys to Unlocking the Door to a Dietetic Internship [http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/3463](http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/3463).
- When applying to dietetic internships, most participate in a computer matching process. More information regarding computer matching can be found at [http://www.eatright.org/ACEND/content.aspx?id=6596&terms=matching](http://www.eatright.org/ACEND/content.aspx?id=6596&terms=matching).