

Locating Preceptors for Supervised Experiential Learning

What are preceptors?

A preceptor is an expert or specialist, such as a Registered Dietitian(RD)/Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). However, not all your preceptors must be RDNs. Preceptors should be someone involved with the field of nutrition and dietetics in some way. They should also be in a position to help guide your experience in the internship and help arrange experiences. Clinical supervised experiential learning (SEL) must have a RD/RDN as a preceptor, however the clinical site does not need to be large hospital. Skilled nursing facilities with rehabilitation units are a possibility for a clinical site.

How many preceptors are needed?

The Applied Nutrition – Dietetics program requires SEL in three areas: clinical nutrition/medical nutrition therapy, community nutrition and food service management.

For the 2021-2022 program, students will complete Community Nutrition SEL in the Fall Semester, from August 23 – December 8 (16 hours/week, 240 hours) and Food Service Management SEL in the Fall Semester from August 23 – December 8 (16 hours/week, 240 hours). Students will complete Clinical Nutrition SEL in the Spring Semester, from January 12 – May 4 (24-32 hours/week, 360-480 hours).

How to locate preceptors

It will take effort on your part to locate and identify potential preceptors for your SEL. Here are some tips for this process:

- Talk with your advisor or Program Director
- Attend state and local Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics events to network and meet professionals working in your area
- Contact people you have worked or volunteered for previously
- Cold calling facilities (this may be frustrating, but sometimes you are able to make a connection)
 - If looking for a foodservice preceptor, as to speak with the Kitchen or Dietary Manager
 - If looking for a clinical preceptor, ask to speak with the Clinical Nutrition Manager or Director of Nutrition
- Search for preceptors on Eatright.org/pro – you have to be an active Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics member to access -
<http://www.eatrightacend.org/ACEND/content.aspx?id=6442464994>

Information to share with preceptors

It is important to be organized and professional when making contact with potential preceptors. Be sure to introduce yourself and explain that you are planning to apply to a distance program, which means you are responsible for finding preceptors for SEL. You will want to be able to provide them with the following information when asking them to consider serving as your preceptor:

- What SEL(s) do you want to do under their supervision?
- How many hours (in weeks) are you requesting to spend with them?
- When are you requesting to spend time with them and can you be flexible with the dates?
- Do you have any unique qualifications that might help you to be more of an asset to them at their facility (such as bilingual, experience working with veterans, CPR certification, etc.).

We recommend that you draft a well-formed email to send to preceptors that includes a personal introduction, your purpose, and the key information listed above.

Information for Prospective Preceptors

Serving as a preceptor is an amazing opportunity for professional development. Preceptors can provide critical mentorship to help future dietitians develop into effective dietetics professionals. Through this process both the preceptor and the student often learn new best practices in the field together. Additionally, students are educated and prepared to offer valuable assistance in supervised experiential learning (SEL) settings under the proper training and supervision.

Preceptors who supervise graduate student interns at the University of Arizona are expected to:

- Provide the prospective student with a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), as documentation of your commitment to serving as a preceptor for the agreed upon rotation. The intern will provide this document to you to sign after you have agreed on tentative dates. This document must be included when the applicant submits their application.
- Provide training and supervision to students for SEL hours they have agreed to oversee. Serving as a preceptor is very similar to the way you might train a brand new employee at your facility.
- Arrange unique learning opportunities for the student while they are at your facility, as you are able.
- Enter evaluations of the students(s) level of competency during and after their rotation

Benefits to serving as a preceptor:

- Give service to the dietetics profession to help train the up and coming dietetics workforce and add preceptor/mentorship to your resume.
- Stay up to date on topics and research as your student engages you with questions.
- Students can assist in completing special projects that you have been hoping to get done but have limited time to dedicate.
- Make a difference in the student's life; provide them the training they need to begin their career.
- Earn Continuing Education Credit Hours while acting as preceptor.

Information from the Academy for preceptors:

<http://www.eatrightacend.org/ACEND/content.aspx?id=6442464994>