

DIETETIC INTERNSHIPS IN THE CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS:

A **Win-Win** Learning Opportunity For Your Internship Program

Opportunities for Dietetic Interns in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child Nutrition Programs provide nutritious meals and snacks to millions of children. These include the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. Administered by State agencies, each of these programs helps fight hunger and obesity by reimbursing organizations such as schools, child care centers, and after-school programs for providing healthy meals to children. With the passage of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, the nutrition requirements of these programs have been strengthened.

Dietetic interns are in an opportune position to provide nutrition technical assistance and training to help program operators meet the new nutrition standards while meeting their dietetic internship competencies. Additionally, a rotation at a State Child Nutrition (CN) agency can give dietetic interns the experience needed to take on positions at the State or local level in Child Nutrition Programs, making it a win-win for the dietetic intern and the State agency.

Benefits of a Rotation at a Child Nutrition State Agency

There are a variety of benefits of dietetic interns completing a rotation at a State agency that administers the Child Nutrition Programs, including:

- ◆ Placing interns in a State CN agency site can help train early-career nutrition professionals. This preparation may encourage them to accept positions at the State or local level in the CN Programs, preparing them to meet Federal and local certification as well as professional hiring standards.
- ◆ Partnering with a State CN agency can create a strong bridge between the university and the agency and serve as a potential opportunity for future educational opportunities.

The internship opportunities in USDA FNS programs provide our students an opportunity to see the programs and services they have studied in action. There is no substitute for working side by side with public health nutritionists and learning the ropes from the experts. – Tamara Randall, MS, RDN, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

*Please note, that while USDA strongly supports dietetic interns completing rotations at State agencies to improve the effectiveness of Child Nutrition Programs when appropriate, this support does not constitute endorsement of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, the accrediting agency for the Academy, sets standards for nutrition and dietetics education programs (including dietetic internships), evaluates programs against the standards and awards accreditation to programs demonstrating compliance with the standards.

Benefits of a Rotation at a Child Nutrition State Agency Continued

- ◆ By working in a State CN agency, interns can develop or improve the following skills:
 - Synthesize nutrition policy and nutrition science for the lay audience;
 - Strengthen both written and oral communication skills;
 - Gain hands-on expertise in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs;
 - Gain exposure and build networking opportunities; and
 - Experience working on a wide variety of nutrition technical assistance projects.

How to Reach Out to Your CN State Agency:

If you are interested in placing dietetic interns in a State CN agency, contact the appropriate State agency department. The Child Nutrition Programs are administered by the State department of education, department of health, or another department, depending on the State. You can find the contact information for the appropriate State agency for each Child Nutrition Program through the links below.

- ◆ Child and Adult Care Food Program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/cacfp-contacts>
- ◆ National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts>
- ◆ Summer Food Service Program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-contacts>

When you get in touch with the State agency, you can begin the conversation by discussing potential projects that an intern can help with. Some examples include:

- ◆ Developing flyers, handouts, and activities for hands-on learning to identify whole grain-rich foods, vegetable subgroups, and other key food groups;
- ◆ Developing and providing training on how to read a product ingredient list and Nutrition Facts Label;
- ◆ Revising existing sample menus or creating new ones;
- ◆ Conducting a presentation on the most current Dietary Guidelines;
- ◆ Conducting a nutrition education presentation;
- ◆ Supporting promotional and partnership activities that promote outreach in the Child Nutrition Programs for children, teachers, caretakers, and parents;
- ◆ Participating in, and supporting, onsite nutrition training opportunities; and
- ◆ Fostering creativity and new ideas.



We have graduated nearly 55 interns in the past 17 years. Many of our graduates have pursued careers in school nutrition or closely related fields. We know that we are making a difference, and feel that our legacy as dietitians will live on in the young professionals we inspire to stand out among their peers as responsible, well prepared school nutrition leaders. -- Beverly L. Girard, PhD, MBA, RD, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Sarasota County Schools, Florida