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Program Closure/Reorganization - Dietetic Internship

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

June 20, 2020

Dr. Belle Wheelan
President
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, GA 30033-4097

RE: Program Closure/Reorganization – Dietetic Internship

Dear Dr. Wheelan,

Please consider this letter notification of the program closure/reorganization of the Dietetic Internship program offered by The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, effective summer 2021.

The University's Department of Nutrition is reorganizing the program's content into an existing Master of Science in Nutrition degree program as a concentration in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics. The Dietetic Internship program is not a stand-alone program, but one to which students accepted to graduate study and who have also completed an undergraduate Didactic Program in Dietetics accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) have been able to apply. As part of the reorganization process, ACEND accreditation currently associated with the Dietetic Internship would transition to the Master of Science concentration in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics.

The reorganization aligns with changes in the approach to nutrition and dietetics education programs nationally. ACEND put forth a call in 2017 for demonstration program applications to begin the process towards implementing sweeping change to education programs that prepare credentialed Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs). The standard of education for educating RDNs has long involved completion of an ACEND-accredited undergraduate program followed by separate application to competitive ACEND-accredited supervised practice programs. The move now is toward implementing an educational model that is competency-based and that integrates supervised experiential learning in a step-wise fashion throughout the curriculum in a single accredited graduate-degree granting program to meet educational requirements for RDN credentialing.

In summer of 2018, the Department's application to reorganize current content of the Dietetic Internship into a demonstration program, classified as a Future Education Model Graduate Program, was accepted by ACEND. Since that time, the Department has gone through the required curricular procedures at the University to prepare for this shift. This process has involved a committee of departmental faculty and review and input from all departmental faculty during regularly-scheduled faculty meetings. Several new practicum courses have been added to provide greater structure to the supervised experiential learning at both the undergraduate preparatory and graduate levels. A partnership has been developed with Cherokee Health Systems, which is a large comprehensive community healthcare organization that is both a Federally Qualified Health Center and licensed Community Mental Health Center that includes integrated primary care and behavioral care offices in 13 counties in East Tennessee. They serve a patient population that is both ethnically and culturally diverse using a multidisciplinary team approach in which medical, behavioral, and other health care professionals work together to provide preventive care, primary health care, health behavior assessments, and interventions. The partnership with Cherokee Health Systems will have students undertaking patient care experiences there across four semesters as they develop competency and autonomy in practice. This will augment clinical and community experiences that are already part of the Dietetic Internship in its current form.

No current faculty members are negatively impacted, and the director is transitioning into a role in the revised program. One new clinical faculty member joined the Department in 2019-2020, and a second will join the faculty in 2020-2021. The first of the new undergraduate preparatory courses were offered at the junior level in spring 2020. It is anticipated current rising seniors in the undergraduate Nutrition-Dietetics program will be able to apply to the master's concentration in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics beginning with the fall 2020 semester, with classes beginning summer 2021.

This reorganization is of benefit to current undergraduate students who aim to become RDNs as they will be able to transition seamlessly from undergraduate study to graduate study and complete both degrees (B.S. and M.S.) in five years. With the increased capacity made possible through the Cherokee Health Systems partnership and clinical faculty, the size of the annual cohort will be able to expand initially from the usual 9-10 students enrolled in the internship up to 20 students. Additional capacity may be possible as the reorganized curriculum becomes established.

Students already accepted to the Dietetic Internship will be able to complete the current program without change to curriculum, available resources, or cost. Currently, 9 students are completing the Dietetic Internship in summer of 2020, and 11 additional students will be completing the Dietetic Internship in summer of 2021.

Belle S. Wheelan
July 20, 2020
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It is important to note that students must have completed graduate degree requirements in order to earn verification of program completion. Enrolled students will be able to complete other requirements for their graduate degree program through December 22, 2022, at which time full transition to the M.S. concentration in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics will be complete.

Please let me know if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Heather G. Hartman
SACSCOC Liaison

Cc: Dr. Donde Plowman, Chancellor, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK)
Dr. John Zomchick, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor, UTK
Dr. Robert J. Hinde, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, UTK
Dean Ellen McIntyre, College of Education, Health, and Human Services (UTK)