

WMU Dietetic Internship Concentration in Sustainable Food Systems

The 2012 ACEND Accreditation Standards for Internship Program in Nutrition & Dietetics states that internship programs include a concentration “designed to begin development of the entry-level depth necessary for future proficiency in a particular area” and that the concentration area be chosen “on the basis of mission, goals, resources, and expected learning objectives.”¹

We have chosen Sustainable Food Systems as the concentration for WMU dietetic interns. There are many reasons for this, but we would like to make clear that the internship program’s primary commitment is to provide all interns with a program that enables them to receive a well-rounded supervised practice experience and an introduction to all core areas of the dietetics profession. Interns continue to gain experience in the three major areas of dietetics – clinical, food service management, and community plus experiences in long-term care and school food and nutrition -and they have the opportunity to explore areas of individual interest via the two-week Enrichment rotation near the end of the program.

Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) is an area of growing interest and relevance to dietitians, consumers, and the larger community. As citizens and nutrition professionals, we are facing state, national and global concerns that include challenging economic times for our state and nation, decreased plant and animal biodiversity, soil degradation, concerns about long-range energy sources, and climate change, all of which will impact our food supply. The American Dietetic Association stated, “It is the position of the American Dietetic Association to encourage environmentally responsible practices that conserve natural resources, minimize the quantity of waste generated, and support the ecological sustainability of the food system – the process of food production, transformation, distribution, access, and consumption.”² Sustainable food systems exist when food systems are “socially just and accessible, and support the development of local communities and economies.”³

Resources that make a concentration in SFS a logical choice at WMU include:

- Western Michigan University’s commitment to sustainability as a signatory of the Tallories Declaration, membership in University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF), establishment of the President’s Universitywide Sustainability Committee and campus Office of Sustainability;
- the presence of the Office of Sustainability and its resources on campus along with the undergraduate initiative, Campus Beet Café;
- existence of the Michigan Food Policy Council; Michigan is one of the first states with a state-level council on food policy;
- affiliations with Bronson, Borgess, and Metro Health Hospitals, signers of the Healthy Food in Healthcare Pledge (part of the Campaign for Environmentally Responsible Healthcare);

¹ Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, *ACEND Accreditation Standards for Internship Program in Nutrition & Dietetics Leading to the RD Credential*, Feb 2012.

² Position of the American Dietetic Association: Food and nutrition professionals can implement practices to conserve natural resources and support ecological sustainability, *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 2007;107:1033-1043.

³ American Dietetic Association Sustainable Food System Task Force, “Healthy Land, Healthy People: Building a Better Understanding of Sustainable Food Systems for Food and Nutrition Professionals. ADA, March 16, 2007.

- Fair Food Matters, a Kalamazoo-based organization whose mission is to build, educate, support and empower the local/regional community around local food;
- recognition that SW Michigan farmers produce among the most diverse kinds of fruits and vegetables in the U.S. and contribute to the Michigan economy;
- Kalamazoo Farmers Market, the People's Food Coop, DeLano Farms, and an abundance of other direct farm-to-consumer organizations and initiatives in the region;
- Can-Do Kitchen, a licensed facility for new & existing food businesses, local-produce processing, and job training, located in Kalamazoo;
- the C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at MSU (now the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems) in E. Lansing that, along with the Food Bank Council of Michigan and the Michigan Food Policy Council, has coordinated the Michigan Good Food Charter;
- Tillers International and W.K. Kellogg Biological Station within easy drives from campus.

Our program concentration intends to integrate knowledge with supervised practice activities that focus on the importance of sustainability. We intend to do this within our current curriculum using both didactic and on-site learning experiences. In Fall 2013 we initiated a four-day hands-on introduction to Sustainable Food Systems. Interns also participate in a group project component that focuses on one aspect of the food system so that they can study that in depth. The project varies from year to year.

SFS Concentration Learning Outcomes

The program has established the following learning outcomes (competencies) for interns to attain for this concentration:

SFS-1: Demonstrate understanding of basic SFS terms and concepts, and ways RDs can contribute to their implementation.

SFS-2: Demonstrate systems approach and leadership skills by producing a commercial menu with SFS theme: Design, market, execute, evaluate theme meal with SFS component in a healthcare or school food service setting

SFS-3: Implement a project that integrates knowledge of food and human nutrition with environmental and/or social justice implications for local clients/customers; group project to be determined by interns and program director each year.

SFS-4: Collaborate and coordinate with colleagues to accomplish production and completion of major group dietetic internship activity related to some aspect of sustainable food systems.

SFS-5: Apply knowledge of business plan writing to propose a new or modified SFS-related product or service in a healthcare or school setting.

In addition to these learning outcomes, interns will become acquainted with other aspects of sustainable food systems through field trips and guest speakers throughout the internship and integration of SFS into activities or projects in several of the rotations (Food Service Administration, School Food and Nutrition, Community). For those wanting more in-depth exposure, the two-week Enrichment rotation may be used for this purpose.