



Dietetics Program Changes Frequently Asked Questions March 2021

Practice Education Placements

Q: What day of the week will UBC-led academic days be, and will this take place every week? Will this impact student learning in the practicum setting for 4-5-week placements?

A: The UBC instructor-led days in the year 3, 4 and 5 practicum courses will occur every week, and the day of the week has not been finalized. Based on feedback, it will likely not be on Friday. The intention with UBC-led days is to enhance student learning, not take away from it. Having a shared approach between preceptors and UBC instructors will help to (1) ensure students can meet all of their competencies, (2) address complex topics such as advocacy and cultural safety, (3) support students and (4) support preceptor workloads.

Q: When will the transition period occur for the existing program practice education placements (PEP) and the revised PEP model?

A: Current students in the program will complete the program that they started. Students will be entering the new BSc program model starting September 2021. There will be overlap in May 2022 & May 2023 when year 3 and 4 students in the revised program will be completing their placements in May while the year 5 students of the pre-existing program model will be underway in their placements. We recognize the placement capacity issues this will cause and are exploring options to manage this. Ideally, we will be seeking alternative organizations and placement settings for the new year 3 and 4 placements, at least for the first 2 years, to manage this capacity issue. By 2024, this overlap issue will be resolved as all years of program students will have transitioned to the new practice education model.

Q: Regarding the 4-5-week May 2022 placement, is there a possibility that one site will have a 3rd year student at the same time as a 5th year student?

A: Yes, although we hope to avoid this as much as possible in 2022 & 2023 by seeking new year 3 and 4 placements in different organizations/practice settings than we are currently using for year 5 students.

Q: When is the outline for expectations of a 3rd year placement going to be shared?

A: This is in the works right now! We anticipate that we will have details to share at the June 2021 Program Update webinar (exact date still to be determined).

Q: What areas will the alternative practice placements be in?

A: Practice settings which are being underutilized will be explored, such as long-term care, group homes, complex care facilities, primary care and private practice settings in different regions across the province. We will be reaching out widely to identify dietitians who are interested in being preceptors for the new year 3 placements in May 2022.

Q: How will practicum placements be done for remote/Indigenous practicum experiences if not by health authority?

A: Full implementation of rural, remote and Indigenous placements will be a longer-term project, as there is much work to be done in terms of relationship-building to incorporate these placements in a just and sustainable way. We are exploring how to tap into available resources across the province so that students can get rural exposure but not necessarily depend on a health authority. For Indigenous focused placements, we will be inviting Indigenous community members and stakeholders to provide feedback and help shape how this might look for effective partnerships with UBC Dietetics. Teaming students up is an option to lessen the financial burden when they are placed in rural/remote settings.

Q: Scheduling students in the summer is really challenging with staff vacations. Is there an option to try to avoid July and August for practice education placements?

A: There are currently no plans for summer placements for the revised BSc program. New placements in year 3 and 4 are planned for May. The revised year 5 will finish by April. Once we receive approval for the MND program, we will consider how best to schedule those placements, with the aim to avoid the summer months when possible.

Q: Will the Nutrition Care modules during practicum be the same in the MND program as in the undergraduate program?

A: We have not completed this level of planning yet, as the proposal for the MND has not yet been approved by the BC government. Our plan is to have expectations well defined for the students and the preceptors.

Q: What have been the identified concerns from health authorities regarding splitting up the placements?

A: Overall there is support from health authorities for the placement changes and restructuring of the program model. A concern raised is the amount of administrative work required to set up a student for a nutrition care placement setting and accordingly, many health authority representatives indicate the desire for a longer placement. One proposed model would be to have Year 3 placed outside of a health authority, but have Year 4 and 5 be within a health authority. Other considerations would be for longer placement lengths than the current minimum of 3 weeks, and revising how we typically think of “modules” for placements. This is more in line with the updated ICDEP v.3.0 requirements.

Another concern raised was the expansion of the program while undertaking major program changes. The BSc cohort will remain at the current level of admissions, and the MND program is expected to have a small cohort to start. We are also considering evidenced-based practicum models such as pairing students up to help counteract expanded student numbers, such as for the 2022 and 2023 overlap for May practicum placements.

Q: Will there be an instructor on site for the dietetics students while they are doing their practicums?

A: Prior to COVID-19, UBC Dietetics Program educators were on site during the practicum year to facilitate teaching sessions and support students, preceptors, and site coordinators on a regular basis. We plan to resume this as soon as it is safe to do so, and will be looking for opportunities to provide even more direct support to students, preceptors, and placement sites. The widespread adoption of virtual platforms (e.g. Zoom) by placement sites will provide ongoing opportunities for us to connect with students and sites more frequently even after COVID restrictions are lifted. We are advocating for additional staffing to support expanded responsibilities of the UBC dietetics team.

Q: What would additional UBC support look like? Will it focus on supporting students who struggle during PEP?

A: To truly support students (and preceptors and placement sites), larger systemic changes are needed in how we teach and supervise students in the practicum component of the program. The program changes we are making will support this type of systems change. Specifically, we are aiming to share the teaching and student evaluation responsibilities between UBC instructors and preceptors in all of the practicum courses. With more UBC-instructor involvement in the teaching and evaluation activities of the practicum courses, we can better support students who may struggle during their placements.

Q: Indigenous placements: could students be placed in areas that don't have dietitians yet? There is a lot of value in engaging with the Indigenous communities and learning from Elders.

A: Yes! Other dietetics programs in Canada have done this with much success and we hope to explore this option too. We do utilize some non-dietitian preceptors for some placements already, and this has generally been successful. Learning from Elders is an amazing opportunity that we look forward to exploring further with communities who are interested in engaging with us.

Q: What will be the expectation for preceptors to assess students' demonstrating cultural competence in practice?

A: The new Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice (ICDEP) have specific performance indicators for equity, diversity, and cultural safety that we will be aligning the program with. This is a complex topic that we recognize may be quite new for many preceptors. We plan to ensure that any new competencies to be assessed in placements will be well incorporated into preceptor orientation and education that we host, to ensure that preceptors feel well-supported. There are also many preceptors who are leaders in this area who we hope to learn from as well.

Q: Will the practice education placements for the MND be shorter than in the undergrad?

A: We have some draft ideas for placement length, but no finalized decisions have been made. This will be planned in more detail once the MND has been approved. We will await valuable learning in the revised PEP model of the BSc cohort as well. At this point, we suspect longer placement lengths than the current minimum of 3 weeks. This is in line with many other health professional practicum training programs.

Q: How will the curriculum changes impact preceptors? Will preceptors be taking on more students?

A: We recognize that many preceptors feel unable to take on more students. We do not intend to ask these preceptors to take on more. We also know from needs assessments completed over the years that there are many dietitians (and non-dietitians) that are interested in being preceptors, but have not had the opportunity or have never been asked. Our hope is to invite new preceptors to be involved, and to honour the capacity of those preceptors who have dedicated their time and energy for many years. As always, we will ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for preceptor orientation and support, to ensure that all preceptors feel ready to support students in the new program model.

Q: We are completely overwhelmed. Although we think these are necessary steps, we remain worried about the burden on front line dietitians. What steps are being taken to address these concerns?

A: This is completely fair given the state of health care at the moment. The first new year 3 placements will not begin until May 2022, so we hope that the COVID situation will be much more stable by that point. We have been engaged in a lot of contingency planning for placements since the pandemic began

in 2020, and will continue to do so, in order to adapt to the changing situation. We intend to place year 3 students in pairs in May 2022, so we are only looking at 18 additional placements beyond our usual number.

Q: Ending in April is scary - we used to have year-long training. How will the new PEP be different in terms of achievement of ICDEP?

A: We understand that this change can feel scary. Keep in mind that the practice education experience in the new program model will roughly be the same number of weeks – it will just be distributed across the 3 years rather than all in year 5. This is being done to align with what other dietetics programs and health professions do across the country and around the world. Evidence in the teaching and learning literature supports that integrating placements throughout the program in this way results in more effective student learning and competency attainment.

Q: If more students will be placed in private practice placements, will this diminish their skills for acute care settings (where many graduates work in soon after graduation)?

A: Nutrition Care competencies can be achieved in placements in a variety of settings, including private practice clinics and acute care settings. As an accredited program, it is our mandate to ensure students demonstrate all competencies needed for entry-level practice as a dietitian, regardless of nutrition care setting. UBC appreciates that a large proportion of employment opportunities in BC are currently in acute care settings.

As our ultimate goal is to expand the program, we will be seeking out areas of practice outside of health authorities that will help students meet the nutrition care competencies as outlined by ICDEP, while better dispersing the preceptor load.

Alumni survey results show that up to 47% of graduates also pursue private practice, so exposure to more private settings better prepares our students for practice opportunities in the province.

Q: This year, it has been a huge challenge for students to get face to face counselling experience with clients because of COVID. What are your plans to address this?

A: We recognize this has been a major struggle with COVID restrictions. We are constrained by regional and placement site COVID restrictions and provincial public health orders at present. Many students in all program years have had to do their counselling and patient care virtually, which has still resulted in successful attainment of competencies. Shifting to the virtual environment is both a pro and a con; many health care services will likely remain virtual even after COVID, so in some ways students this year are gaining a unique opportunity to build skills in an innovative practice setting. We will continue to follow along with the evolution of COVID restrictions and adapt the program as needed to ensure students can complete the program safely.

Curriculum Questions

Q: How does the program plan to address and implement the new 2020 UBC Indigenous Strategic Plan, specifically “Goal 4: Indigenizing Our Curriculum”?

A: The Dietetics Program at UBC is committed to integrating Indigenous-focused curriculum within all dietetics core courses in the program. One project already underway is a collaboration with McGill University on creating modules for course instructors to integrate Indigenous perspectives in core dietetics courses. In the MND program, we have enlisted the help of a dietitian who identifies as

Indigenous to develop a specific Indigenous Health in Dietetics course. The goal is to eventually create an undergraduate-level course equivalent. Students in the current program have been engaging in interprofessional learning on Indigenous cultural safety for several years. We recognize the need to do more and will be exploring opportunities to enhance the curriculum as we make program changes over the coming years.

Q: Is there any consideration around trauma-informed practice in the program?

A: Trauma-informed practice is an important topic which should be included throughout the program curriculum. These topics will be addressed directly in the Indigenous Health in Dietetics course (MND Program) in addition to the counselling course (offered in both BSc and MND Program). We had the privilege of having our Indigenous health course be developed by a dietitian who identifies as indigenous and works in Indigenous communities. There will be a lot of opportunities for self-reflection and understanding of Indigenous history.

Q: Will there be a business and entrepreneurship course included in the undergraduate program?

A: FNH 415 “Business Concepts in Food and Nutrition” is already included in the undergraduate program and covers foundational business concepts with a focus on food, nutrition and health careers. The masters level course is tailored more for dietetics business and entrepreneurship and the goal would be to eventually to have a course like this for the undergrad program. Incorporating more private practice and industry placements in practicum courses will give students a much better practical exposure to business and entrepreneurial career paths and provide valuable networking and mentorship opportunities with dietitians in this sector of the profession.

Q: Will electives be removed from campus courses in the current model?

A: No, electives remain in the undergraduate program, but will be reduced from 12 to 9 credits. In the Master’s program there is no mandatory elective credits required, but students may choose to take elective courses on top of the required core courses.

Q: How will the FNH 340 (Food Theory) and FNH 341 (Food Theory Applications) courses be combined?

A: These two courses will be combined into one course, FNH 340 (Food Theory and Applications) for a total of 4.5 credits (formerly 6 credits total). The lecture will be 1.5-hours per week, and there will be an associated 3-hour food lab component each week. It is imperative students develop the applied skills in the lab, so the time allocated will remain the same. The reason behind this change is the overlap in ICDEF competency mapping, in addition to feedback from students that the courses overlap greatly.

Q: Students in the current model can sometimes struggle during Nutrition Care placements. Will the new curriculum changes address this?

A: Our intention with the program changes is to enhance and support student learning by addressing long-standing feedback we have received from students, preceptors and placement site coordinators. At present, a very small percentage of our students encounter struggles in their practice education placements; however, we are very aware that these struggles do exist and cause a lot of hardship for students and placement sites. Student learning struggles are multi-factorial, and it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact solution needed. With this in mind, we are implementing a variety of changes that will support better student learning for all students, including those who may struggle. Changes that are being implemented to better support student learning include: offering new courses in counselling and nutrition care, exposing students to real-life practice environments earlier, and integrating UBC instructors more closely during PEP to enhance students learning and competency attainment. Evaluation of the impact of these changes will be essential and will occur regularly, especially in the coming years.

Q: Can a basic pharmacotherapy course be added to the dietetics curriculum, if it hasn't been added already?

A: We recognize pharmacotherapy as an advantageous skill for the Nutrition Care domain of dietetic practice, but it is not included in accredited entry-level dietetic practice competencies. Pharmacotherapy is covered in the required nutrition care courses, as it relates to medical nutrition therapy. There currently is no additional space in the curriculum to add an extra course; students could choose to take a pharmacotherapy course as an elective if desired.

Q: What does the counselling course consist of? Basic introduction to "methods" (CBT, motivation interviewing etc.) or more hands on learning?

A: We are just beginning the course content planning process, so nothing is set in stone yet. At this point, we are aiming to address a variety of theoretical models and frameworks for nutrition counselling as well as ensure there are adequate practical learning opportunities. We have collected lots of wonderful feedback from students and preceptors over the past ~ 15 years of the program on the needs for nutrition counselling skills. The feedback we received indicates that more practice/hand-on learning is desired, so that will definitely be addressed.

Q: Will students entering the program in 2021 eventually have to take the new counselling/nutrition care course later in our degree?

A: Students entering the program in September 2021 will be following the new program, and will take the 3rd year counselling course and nutrition care courses in January 2022 (Term 2). Students who entered the program in 2019 and 2020 will not have to take any of the new courses; they will follow the program requirements that they started with. This is a common practice at UBC as degrees and programs changes frequently in all faculties.

Q: For students applying to the program in 2022, can you clarify what will be evaluated based on the new updates that are different compared to previous years?

A: Students entering the program in Sept 2022 will follow the new program requirements and will be evaluated on that curriculum.

Q: Is cultural safety going to be integrated into the program (e.g. San'yas Cultural Safety curriculum)?

A: There are many wonderful resources/curricula that currently exist on the topics of cultural safety, cultural competence, health equity, social justice, diversity and inclusion and other related topics. Our intention is to work towards ensuring that learning and skill building on these topics is integrated into multiple courses in the program, as well as all practicum placements (this would be an example of a topic that UBC instructors could take on during practicum placements). This will be an area of continuous evolution as we learn more and evaluate successes and areas for improvement over the coming years. At present, we are working with Indigenous dietitians from McGill University to help guide some of the campus course content. Additionally, all dietetics students in Year 3 and 4 participate in interprofessional education sessions related to Indigenous Cultural Safety within their professional practice courses.

MND Program

Q: When will the graduate program be offered?

A: The goal is to start offering the MND program in September 2022, but this is pending program approval from the BC Provincial Government.

Q: Why was a capstone project chosen for the Master of Nutrition and Dietetics program?

A: There needs to be a differentiation between the undergraduate and graduate research projects. The capstone project will be done in pairs and the students will be teamed up with a research preceptor. The projects are not the same level of intensity as a thesis-based research project.

Q: Will the capstone research projects for the MND program be UBC-based only?

A: No, the capstone research projects will have students paired with a research preceptor from a variety of settings and practice areas and will not be limited to UBC-based research projects.

Q: Will the research component be shorter in the MND program than in the undergraduate program?

A: There will be a research component in the MND program, but we haven't mapped out the specific details on how the practicum will be broken down week by week. There will be some dedicated time during HUNU 579 (PEP 1) in the MND to work on research-related activities in order to successfully move onto HUNU 581 (PEP 2: Capstone Research). We will continue to solicit feedback from the community regarding mapping out the placement weeks and schedule, as each practice domain has indicated a desire for increased length of student placements.

Q: Will the Master's program be available for internationally trained dietitians to be able to practice in BC?

A: Yes. Applicants to the MND program will need to have an undergraduate degree and meet specific pre-requisite requirements, similar to other allied health programs. The goal is to have the MND program accredited and therefore meet practice requirements for internationally-trained dietitians to practice dietetics in BC.

Q: What is the best way to stay informed about progress on the proposed Master's program?

A: Attend our upcoming program update webinars in June and fall 2021. The timeline for approval from the BC Government is completely unknown unfortunately, so we may not have more details for some time.

Student Numbers

Q: Will each health authority need to increase the number of students they can support each year? Will the health authorities have to plan how this looks?

A: No – we recognize that this is a not a feasible or sustainable strategy to pursue. We have always considered the health authorities as our partners in dietetics education and hope to maintain those relationships as we implement program changes. There are many possible ways to explore increasing placement capacity, and we are in the process of examining options which we will discuss further with our practice partners as move from development to implementation.

Q: For a few years, there will be fewer dietitians graduating before the number will go up. Do the numbers add up?

A: There will be a small increase in total number of students graduating from UBC dietetics once the MND program is approved. We are unable to decrease admissions to the BSc cohort within the Faculty of Land and Food Systems. We expect about 8-10 MND students to be enrolled in the first year of running, and other strategies such as pairing undergraduate practicum students will help alleviate practicum placements needed. Eventually, when both programs are running at steady state, UBC dietetics will graduate 50-55 dietitians per year to help meet workforce shortages in the province.

Q: How many people are expected to enroll into the Master's Program?

A: We are expecting to enroll 15-20 students overall, but for the first year the program is offered (Fall 2022), we are expecting around 8 students.

Q: Will the increase of 3-4 students per year be for both programs or just the undergraduate program?

A: There are no plans to increase the cohort of undergraduate students at this time. The cohort size will remain at about 36 students admitted per year. We expect about 8-10 MND students to be enrolled in the first year of running, and other strategies such as pairing undergraduate practicum students will help alleviate practicum placements needed. Eventually, when both programs are running at steady state, UBC dietetics will graduate 50-55 dietitians per year to help meet workforce shortages in the province. The goal is to have 50 students total from Master's and Undergraduate students (not 50 for each program).

Financial Support

Q: Will there be additional financial burden for students with the curriculum changes?

A: The revised undergraduate program will have a small financial impact on student tuition, as there is a net increase of 2.5 credits. There also may be some financial implications for students if they need to relocate for placements, similar to other allied health training programs. The expectations for financial costs associated with the program will be clearly outlined for students on application websites so students can plan ahead for the cost of their education.

Q: Will there be any financial supports available for students?

A: The Faculty of Land and Food Systems and UBC as a whole have various scholarship and bursary options to support students in financial need. There is a new bursary actively in the works for students in the program needing financial support, spearheaded externally by an alumnus of the program. In the Master's program there will be 4% of program revenue set aside for student financial aid. Master's level students also may have access to funding opportunities not often available to undergraduate students.

Q: I'm very curious about the decision to fundraise for the "rural and remote placements", why? What have you done "upstream" to help lower income folks become RDs?

A: This fundraiser was initiated and managed by a program graduate; the UBC Dietetics Program was not involved in this initiative. The funds raised will be managed by the Faculty of Land and Food Systems, along with other scholarships, bursaries, and donations.

We agree there is a huge upstream issue with access to higher education; lower income folks are systematically excluded from opportunities to gain access to the dietetics program and profession. Solving

this will be a longer-term advocacy initiative. UBC has recently committed to increased resources for furthering equity initiatives, which presents opportunities to raise our voice as a program and profession.

Master's versus Undergraduate Training

Q: What will be the differentiating factors between the undergraduate and master's program in terms of job qualifications? Will there be a dichotomy, and how will this impact the workplace?

A: It is a similar concern that has come up with programs that also have alternative entry-to-practice education pathways, e.g. the Doctor of Pharmacy and Masters of Social Work programs (which concurrently run with an undergraduate program), and previously when the Bachelors of Occupational Therapy and Bachelors of Physical Therapy existed along with the Master's equivalents. We will be employing similar strategies to clearly outline differences in skill set and expectations. Both the undergraduate and Master's dietetics programs will meet national entry-to-practice accreditation requirements. The two programs will have very similar learning outcomes, with the biggest differentiating factor being the MND will have more curriculum dedicated to research skill development.

Master's graduates are not meant to replace the undergraduate cohort in the workplace. The intention is that the two programs will be complementary. Master's graduates might be more equipped for supervisory and managerial roles given they will have prior educational (and possibly career) experiences after completing their previous undergraduate degree. The MND program also offers a few courses which are not available in the BSc program, such as a leadership course. There will be more community engagement to help inform program development once the program is approved by the BC government.

Q: Will an expedited Master's program for dietitians who already have a Bachelor's degree be offered?

A: Yes, we hope to eventually create a Master's program for practicing RDs who would like to further their education. At present, this is still in the initial brainstorming phase and no plans or timelines have been discussed, given the number of current program changes being implemented.

There is also a possibility of offering shorter certificate programs that could act as continuing education, as well as lead into the Master's program. These certificates could be offered to other healthcare disciplines who are interested in nutrition/dietetics for continuing education as well.

Q: If certificates in nutrition/dietetics are offered to other healthcare professionals, would that increase the competition for the dietitians? The public might prefer to see a physician or other healthcare professional who also has a dietetics certificate.

A: We are not aware of such cases happening in Canada so far. If this occurred, it would be a regulatory issue the College of Dietitians of BC would address with regards to the practice of dietetics. The MND program will be available to people with an undergraduate degree in areas other than dietetics. As the only dietetics program in the province, it is an opportunity to leader other healthcare professionals with regards to evidence-based nutrition and the interdisciplinary nature of dietetics.

Q: Can people with a Bachelor's in nutrition who have worked for many years apply to the Master's program?

A: Yes, if they are not already practicing registered dietitians. The MND program is not meant for students who already hold an RD credential. Students from other accredited dietetics undergraduate programs in Canada, but did not complete practicum components are eligible for the MND program.

Diversity

Q: Will you diversify teaching staff in the coming years? Teaching and admissions staff should be equally as diverse as the applicants.

A: Absolutely agree. We are beginning work with two consultants this month (March 2021) with expertise in equity, diversity and inclusion. We look forward to hearing the recommendations they may suggest in this area. We are also currently undertaking a project to diversify our program stakeholder engagement mechanisms (e.g. committees, guest speakers, admissions reviewers etc.) as we recognize there is a great need to pursue a more diverse and inclusive strategy.

Q: How are you planning on being inclusive and diverse in the application process without checking off a diversity box?

A: Pursuing change with integrity and authenticity is a core value of our program team. We recognize that changes need to go beyond “checking off a diversity box”.

We have piloted a few changes to our admissions process this year and hope to learn more from the consultants we are working with in the coming months as to how we can pursue change in a meaningful and sustainable way. We are also nearly finished a project with year 5 students, focused on reviewing and revising our admissions processes. The results of this project will be presented at the Year 5 Research Exchange that will be happening in May 2021.

For admissions to the program, we no longer require applicants to have volunteer or work experiences with dietitians, or exposure to a healthcare environment. We are looking exclusively at transferrable skills from professional or personal experiences, which will support more diverse applicants with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. We are also in the process of removing the requirement for applicants to obtain references, which will reduce bias in the selection process and support greater equity for those who did not have access to references that met our past criteria.