UNCG Dietetic Internship Policy on Professional Impairment

All Dietetic Interns are accepted through the Graduate School and therefore subject to Graduate School policies. The following is found in the University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s Graduate Bulletin, Department of Nutrition section.

Nutrition faculty are responsible not only for the development of their students, but also to the profession and to the public. The faculty have a responsibility to teach and supervise their students, which is typically done in the context of an amicable relationship. However, they also have a responsibility to protect the public from incompetent professionals and to maintain the standards of the profession. Unfortunately, it is possible that not all students are capable of becoming competent professionals who will maintain standards of the profession. In these cases, faculty are obliged to take action when they have determined the student is professionally impaired. Students who experience continued serious difficulties and do not function effectively in academic and/or interpersonal situations will be counseled early, made aware of career alternatives, and if necessary, dropped from the program.

I. Definition of Professional Impairment

Professional impairment has been “defined broadly as an interference in professional functioning that is reflected in one or more of the following ways: (a) an inability and/or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one’s repertoire of professional behavior, (b) an inability to acquire professional standards skills in order to reach an acceptable level of competency, and (c) an inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction, and/or excessive emotional reactions that interfere with professional functioning.” (Lamb et al. 1987. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice 18: 597-603.

Examples of behaviors which may be evidence of professional impairment include the following. The list contains examples, and is not intended to be definitive; (1) violation of professional standards or ethical codes, (2) inability or unwillingness to acquire and manifest professional skills at an acceptable level of competency, (3) behaviors that can reasonably be predictive of poor future professional functioning, such as extensive tardiness or poor compliance with supervisory requirements, (4) personal unsuitability to the profession, e.g., substance abuse, chronic and disabling physical problems, (5) interpersonal behaviors and intrapersonal functioning that impair one’s professional functioning such as psychopathology, inability to exercise good judgment, poor interpersonal skills, and pervasive interpersonal problems.

II. Possible Actions to Follow Manifestations of Professional Impairment

This list contains examples, and is not intended to be definitive. These actions are not hierarchical and need not be applied in each case; (1) a formal reprimand, (2) an unsatisfactory grade (U) in a practicum course with the requirement that the course be repeated, whether it was an elective or required practicum, (3) personal therapy, (4) leave of absence, (5) required additional practicum or course work, (6) increased supervision (e.g., more frequent supervision, more than one supervisor), (7) formal probation, (8) recommendation of withdraw from the program or changing to another program, (9) recommendation of formal dismissal from the program by the Dean of The Graduate School.
III. Nutrition Department Retention and Remediation Procedure for Dietetic Interns with Identified Performance Problems

1. When the Dietetic Internship (DI) Director is notified by the DI Site Director that a dietetic intern's performance problems exist, the DI Director and DI Site Director will schedule a meeting with the dietetic intern to discuss her/his performance.

2. If the supervised practice rotation site will allow the dietetic intern an opportunity for remediation, an action plan for improvement, including timelines for follow-up and re-evaluation of performance at the site for determination of achievement of action plan items, will be developed by the DI Director in consultation with the DI Site Director and Director of Graduate Studies. The action plan will be shared with and explained to the intern for formal agreement.

3. In the event that the dietetic intern’s supervised practice rotation site is no longer willing to host the dietetic intern for the planned supervised practice experience, then the dietetic intern has two options: a) withdraw from the program; or b) request consideration to be placed at another supervised practice site, if available. If the intern is granted her/his request to be considered for placement at another available supervised practice site, an action plan for improvement, including timelines for follow-up and evaluation of performance at the new site for determination of achievement of action plan items, will be developed by the DI Director in consultation with the DI Site Director and Director of Graduate Studies. The action plan will be shared with and explained to the intern for formal agreement. The UNCG DI Program is not obligated to secure additional sites for a dietetic intern who is terminated from a supervised practice rotation due to performance problems and professional impairment. Failure to complete the DI program's core competencies and scheduled supervised practice hours will result in the dietetic intern’s being unable to complete the DI program.

4. The DI Director will follow-up on the action plan at regular intervals. In consultation with the DI Site Director and dietetic intern, a determination will be made as to whether the intern is making progress on achievement of the action plan items. If it is determined that the dietetic intern failed to achieve the action plan items according to the timeline stated in the action plan, then the DI Director will request a meeting with the Graduate Committee and the dietetic intern to discuss her/his performance.

5. Following the meeting with the intern, the Graduate Committee will determine whether to extend the timeline for improvement or recommend formal dismissal from the Dietetic Internship Program. See Section IV.5 of this document for next steps.

IV. Due Process; Evaluation of Professional Impairment

1. There is a written policy on professional impairment that is systematically
distributed to all NTR graduate students, with signatures evidencing student review of the policy. Copies of this will be included in each student’s folder.

2. Each dietetic intern will review this policy and sign a form verifying that she/he has read and understands the policy. The signed form will be kept in the intern’s permanent DI file at UNCG.

3. All students will receive written notification of problems, including written descriptions of specific incidences that may evidence professional impairment, from the Director of the Graduate Program in Nutrition. Such written notification will be placed in the student’s departmental file.

4. The student evidencing professional impairment will usually be given an opportunity for remediation (although individual circumstances may not allow this, and this is not legally required), with specific descriptions of problems, suggestions for remediation, time limit, and notice of consequences if remediation is not successful, all noted in writing. Such written evaluation will also be placed in the student’s departmental file. See Section III of this document: Program Retention and Remediation Procedure.

5. When the judgment is made that serious professional impairment exists and that the consequences to the student are major, the student may request a hearing in which the student may present his or her view of the situation. The hearing will be convened by the Director of the Graduate Program in Nutrition and will include member of the Graduate Committee in Nutrition, the member(s) of the faculty who are making judgments of serious professional impairment, the student’s adviser, and the departmental chairperson.

6. Following a hearing, the student will receive written notification within one week that includes: the nature of the problem, opportunities for revision if any, the basis for the decision, and the opportunity for appeal. Such written evaluation will also be placed in the student’s departmental file.

7. After receiving written notification, the student may request an appeal within 14 days to the Chairperson of the Department of Nutrition. The appeal panel will include some persons who are different from those making the original decision, such as a faculty member within the department or school, a faculty representative of The Graduate School, and a member of the faculty selected by the student.

8. The results of the hearing and appeal will be forwarded to the Chairperson of the Department of Nutrition, who may accept, reject, or modify the recommendations. If the Department Chairperson accepts the recommendation to change to student’s program of study, or dismiss the student from the program, this recommendation will be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate School who, upon further consideration, will notify the student in writing.