



**Accreditation Standards for Clinical Nutrition Programs**

**Excerpted from the Accreditation Handbook**

2026 Edition

Adopted 6/2/26

## Standard IV: Program of Study

### General Program Requirements

1. Program length: Master's degree program must contain a minimum of 30 semester credits of core graduate level coursework required of all students who are granted the degree, excluding prerequisites and electives.
2. The program's curriculum must be designed to cover the competencies outlined below with sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge.
3. The following coursework is required to support competency:
  - a. 15 semester credit hours of clinical or life sciences, at least three semester hours of which must be in human anatomy and physiology or the equivalent; and
  - b. 18 semester credit hours of nutrition and metabolism, at least six semester hours of which must be in biochemistry.
4. These requirements may be met through core coursework of the Master's program or from a combination of core coursework and prerequisites required of all students who are granted the degree.
5. Course content and rigor for all courses within the Master's degree must be appropriate to Master's degree level training.
6. Separate from the 30-semester credit of core graduate level courses, additional credits in clinical application may be offered within the degree program that count towards SPE hours as defined by ACNPE guidelines (See Accreditation Handbook for SPE Programs).
7. A curriculum map must be developed that ties course learning objectives to competencies and shows progression of didactic courses from introductory to more advanced learning activities, building on previous knowledge or experience to achieve the appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge by completion of the program.
8. Programs may be taught using an online, on-campus, or hybrid delivery format.
9. Programs are responsible for ensuring compliance with USDE professional licensure requirements.

# Core Competencies

## Preamble

The following core competencies outline the skills and knowledge expected of a graduate of a master's degree program in clinical nutrition. These competencies may be attained either entirely through core courses of the master's degree program, or from a combination of core coursework completed in the program and coursework completed as a prerequisite requirement to enter the program. Programs may determine the appropriate breadth and depth of knowledge for each topic required to enhance learning outcomes for their students.

### A. Fundamental Principles of Nutrition Science

Describe, evaluate, analyze and/or apply the following principles:

1. Information Literacy specific to practical application of evidence-based research
2. Nutritional Biochemistry:
  - i. Structure, function, and metabolism of carbohydrates, proteins, lipids, micronutrients, and nucleic acids;
  - ii. Enzymes, co-factors and organic acids;
  - iii. Pathways of intermediate metabolism, with specific emphasis on the role of macro- and micronutrients in these pathways;
  - iv. Specific biochemical imbalances involved in common chronic metabolic conditions;
  - v. Principles of genomics, genetics, and epigenetics; and
  - vi. Nutrient digestion, absorption, and transport.
3. Anatomy and Nutrition-related physiology:
  - i. Structure and function of organ systems;
  - ii. Physiological concepts of homeostasis and allostasis and relationship to body systems;
  - iii. Functional aspects of digestion, absorption, and excretion; and
  - iv. Relationship between gastrointestinal health and health of other organs and body systems.
2. Pathophysiology, including functional, biochemical, and molecular changes related to disease. For example:
  - i. Inflammation
  - ii. Metabolic stress
  - iii. Nutrition deficiency/excess
  - iv. Hormonal dysregulation
  - v. Gut microbiome disruption

### B. Fundamental Principles of Nutrition

Describe, evaluate, analyze, and/or apply the following principles:

1. Physiological changes and nutritional needs associated with life cycle stages, including: pregnancy and lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood

2. Effects of age, gender, and physical activity on body composition and energy expenditure
3. Disease risk and prevalence related to socioeconomic status, geographic residency, ethnicity, and life cycle stage
4. Calculation of individual caloric requirements and estimation of caloric values of specific meals
5. Functions of the gut microbiota and impact on human health and vitality
6. Differentiating food allergy, intolerance, and sensitivity
7. Role of nutritional excess and insufficiency in relationship to health and disease
8. Maldigestion and malabsorption and impact on macronutrient and micronutrient status
9. Role of dietary supplements and botanicals in human health and disease prevention

### C. **Nutrients and Foods in Human Health**

Describe, evaluate, analyze, and/or apply the following principles:

1. Nutrients and food components:
  - i. Functions of macronutrients, micronutrients and accessory nutrient co-factors in the body;
  - ii. Food sources of macronutrients and micronutrients in dietary recommendations;
  - iii. Function of soluble and insoluble fibers;
  - iv. Role and application of prebiotics, probiotics, and fermented foods in GI health;
  - v. Principles of nutrient density;
  - vi. Role of bioactive components in foods in health maintenance and disease management; and
  - vii. Key nutrients used in food fortification.
2. Nutrient requirements:
  - i. Based on current USDA guidelines for preventive and therapeutic interventions; and
  - ii. Based on stage of life, genetics, and health or disease status.
3. Nutrient Insufficiency/deficiency and toxicity:
  - i. Signs and symptoms of macronutrient and micronutrient insufficiency/deficiency; and
  - ii. Tolerable upper intake levels of nutrients and symptoms and treatment of nutrient toxicity.

### D. **Fundamental Principles of Medical Nutrition Therapy**

Using evidence-based practice in accordance with the Personalized Nutrition (PN) care model for individuals and groups, demonstrate working knowledge of fundamental concepts necessary to perform the following:

1. **PN assessment** using quantitative and qualitative inputs, including:
  - i. Comprehensive medical and nutrition health history;

- ii. Laboratory biomarkers and determination of criteria for ordering/recommending laboratory tests and/or requesting test results;
  - iii. Genetic and genomic factors;
  - iv. Family health history;
  - v. Nutrition physical examination including anthropometric measurements and other physical indicators of nutritional imbalances;
  - vi. Dietary intake (food records, dietary recalls, food frequency questionnaires, computerized analysis of food intake);
  - vii. Lifestyle, cultural, socioeconomic factors, and social determinants of health;
  - viii. Readiness and motivation for change;
  - ix. Eating behavior(s); and
  - x. Clinical status and referral need.
2. **PN interpretation of assessment findings** including:
- i. Identify and relate objective and subjective data, including risk factors for disease and dysfunction, dietary patterns, and laboratory assessment; and
  - ii. Create a nutritional diagnosis.
3. **Formulation of actionable personalized medical nutrition therapies** and interventions, and provide nutrition education, nutrition counseling, and ongoing care for individuals and groups.
- i. Utilize a systems approach to support optimal health, and prevent, manage, and treat a broad range of chronic and acute health conditions for which there is significant evidence that medical nutrition therapy plays a key role, including:
    - a) Underweight, overweight, malnutrition, and obesity;
    - b) Cardiometabolic conditions; including insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes;
    - c) Endocrine-related disorders; including bone disorders, type 1 diabetes;
    - d) Immune and autoimmune disorders;
    - e) Gastrointestinal disorders;
    - f) Cognitive and neurological disorders;
    - g) Mental health and mood disorders; including eating disorders;
    - h) Hematological disorders; and
    - i) Other disorders for which nutrition plays a key role, such as: mastication and swallowing, hepatic, respiratory, and dermatological disorders.
  - ii. Develop short- and long-term interventions using:
    - a) A range of appropriate, personalized interventions including therapeutic diets and foods, targeted dietary supplements, and lifestyle modifications;
    - b) Safety considerations relating to contraindications, drug-nutrient and nutrient-nutrient interactions, drug-nutrient depletion, adverse effects; and

- c) Good manufacturing practices and quality assessment of dietary supplements, botanicals, and nutraceuticals.
- iii. Develop an understanding of conditions which require specialty training, such as: cancer, renal, bariatric surgery, and use of enteral/parenteral nutrition support.
- 4. **PN monitoring, measurement, and evaluation** of qualitative and quantitative indicators relevant to the health conditions defined in the initial assessment and nutrition intervention plans to determine progress made toward direct nutrition outcomes, clinical and health status outcomes, and client-centered outcomes. This includes the following:
  - i. Identification of the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators to track progress for each individual;
  - ii. Review readiness to proceed along the stages of the intervention; and
  - iii. Review and adjust the nutrition care plan to meet evolving needs.

## E. Fundamental Principles of Public Health

Describe, evaluate, analyze, and/or apply the following principles:

1. Impact of environmental factors on nutritional status and health (i.e., heavy metals, pesticides, herbicides, persistent organic pollutants, etc.)
2. Nutritional epidemiology and chronic disease risk factors
3. Food safety and quality, including:
  - i. Food safety and sanitation causes and preventative measures for common food borne illnesses and populations at risk for food safety issues;
  - ii. Food quality including environmental toxicity; and
  - iii. Food sustainability and security.
4. Basic principles of food systems management

## F. Fundamental Principles of Behavioral Modification

Describe, evaluate, analyze, and/or apply effective behavioral counseling strategies to:

1. Identify and address a client's individual dietary challenges
2. Set realistic goals based on a client's identified expectations and readiness/ability for change
3. Support clients to make changes needed to meet goals

## G. Fundamental Principles of PN Professional Practice

Describe, evaluate, analyze, and/or apply the following principles:

1. Compliance, regulations, and laws, including:
  - i. Relevant state licensing laws;
  - ii. Code of ethics and scope of practice relevant to the PN professional's credentials, such as CNS;
  - iii. Relevant federal laws such as HIPAA and Open Notes.
2. Recognize the importance of working in collaboration with other healthcare providers for integrative care

3. Referral of clients to other healthcare providers when care requires services outside the scope of practice of the PN professional or enhances clinical outcomes
4. Responsible use of technology and artificial intelligence
5. Cultural competency and humility across diverse backgrounds and identities
6. Responsible use of dietary supplements and botanicals