

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## for California WIC Employees



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Statewide Career Development Coordinator



California WIC is working to provide you with the latest information on educational programs and resources to help you achieve your career goals in community nutrition. If you have questions or would like help preparing for the RD exam, please complete the "California WIC Career Development Questionnaire" and e-mail it to: [nnesa@projects.sdsu.edu](mailto:nnesa@projects.sdsu.edu).

**Q. What kind of career development services are offered to employees?**

**A.** The statewide career development coordinator is a resource to all California WIC staff regarding requirements and educational options available to becoming a registered dietitian. The type of assistance provided includes individualized career counseling, information on current dietetic programs, WIC and non-WIC dietetic internships, application procedures and scholarship resources. Another important aspect of career development is to support "RD eligible" WIC employees in preparing to pass the national registration exam for dietitians.

**Q. How can I become a registered dietitian?**

**A.** To become a registered dietitian, you must complete educational and professional requirements established by the American Dietetic Association (ADA). Traditionally, these programs are offered on campus at accredited colleges or universities. Today, however, there are also a few “distant learning” programs accredited by the ADA that meet the same requirements. Below is a description of the two paths to become a registered dietitian:

1. Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) is an accredited college or university program with a baccalaureate or graduate degree. To become a registered dietitian, graduates from a DPD program can apply for an approved dietetic internship (DI). A dietetic internship is an accredited, supervised practice program providing a minimum of 900 hours. The internship may be full-time or part-time and vary from six months to two years in length. After successful completion of the DI you are eligible to take the national registration examination for dietitians to be designated as a registered dietitian.

2. Coordinated Program in Dietetics (CP) is also an academic program in a college or university with an accredited baccalaureate or graduate degree. The difference is that a Coordinated Program includes both didactic instruction and a minimum of 900 hours of supervised practice experiences. The practice experience is usually taken concurrently with the degree program during the last two years. Following graduation with a bachelors or masters degree students are eligible to take the registration examination to be designated as an RD.

For more information and a list of accredited and approved DPD or dietetic internships, go to the ADA Web site’s page on The Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education at [www.eatright.org/cade](http://www.eatright.org/cade).

**Q. Can I apply for a WIC dietetic internship without going through the national computer matching process?**

**A.** Yes, if you are a WIC employee for any agency in California, you can apply for the Central Valley WIC Dietetic Internship and the San Diego WIC Dietetic Internship without going through the computer matching process. WIC employees are given selection priority which means you apply directly to the WIC internship and you do not apply using ADA’s computer match system. The WIC programs are part-time and located on-site in the San Diego and Central Valley areas. Important selection criteria include your WIC work experience, and a strong desire to work for a WIC agency in California as a registered dietitian upon completion of the internship. For more information on the [WIC dietetic internships](#) click here.

**Q. I'm ready to complete the requirements for becoming a registered dietitian but where do I start?**

**A.** If you have been out of college even for a little while, it may be frustrating trying to find out what is required and what programs are available to you. There are more options today than ever before for completing the requirements, especially for working students. The best place to start is by complete the "California WIC Career Development Questionnaire" then e-mail it to: [nnesa@projects.sdsu.edu](mailto:nnesa@projects.sdsu.edu). The statewide career development coordinator will work with you to determine which options and resources are best for you.

**Q. What is "distant learning"?**

**A.** "Distant learning", "distance education", "e-learning", "internet" or "online classes", and "Cyber School" are all terms used to describe courses offered on the internet. Distant courses range from short-term training workshops to undergraduate, graduate programs and dietetic internships. All class "lectures", course work, assignments, and exams are on the internet. Communication with your instructor and classmates is almost entirely through e-mail, interactive chat rooms, and discussion forums. For students who are accustomed to a traditional classroom setting, it can be a difficult adjustment and you will need good time management and sound computer skills. One of the major benefits of distant learning is more flexible hours and your geographic location is not a factor with online classes. You can access courses on your own time and in your own space instead of commuting to classes on campus. However, most courses are scheduled during fall, spring, and summer and classes, all assignments, and exams must be completed in the required timeframe, just like a traditional college class.

**Q. There really isn't a dietetic internship in my area, should I look into a distant program?**

**A.** What's great about the distant program is you can complete your entire dietetic internship in your own community and hours are usually more flexible than a traditional dietetic internship. However, the challenge is you are required to locate your own preceptors and facilities as part of the application process. Generally, you will spend at least 20 hour a week in a supervised practice setting, plus you will have additional assignments, readings, projects, and exams online each week. There are many pros and cons to each distant program and you must carefully consider all the requirements before you choose this option. Distant internships can be costly in time and tuition, so you want to make sure this is the right program for you.

**Q. I'm getting ready to take the RD exam and I'm nervous about taking a test on the computer. How can I be better prepared to pass the exam?**

**A.** As a WIC employee you may be eligible for the RD Exam Study Program offered at no cost to you or your agency. It includes online study assistance, tutoring and monitoring as well as access to DietitianExam.com an interactive, web-based review with tests that simulate the RD exam. If you would like assistance, complete the "California WIC Career Development Questionnaire" then e-mail it to the statewide career development coordinator at: [nnesa@projects.sdsu.edu](mailto:nnesa@projects.sdsu.edu).

**Q. I was eligible to take the RD exam a couple years ago but for personal reasons did not take the exam. Can I still take the exam?**

**A.** You can take the exam but ADA/CDR authorization is for one year so you must reapply for another year. Since you have been out of school for awhile, you would benefit from a "refresher" course online in medical nutrition. Cosumnes River College ([www.crc.losrios.edu](http://www.crc.losrios.edu)) offers several online courses through their Dietetic Technician Program. A 3-day RD exam review workshop is also very important and Breeding and Associates offers two in California ([www.dietitianworkshops.com](http://www.dietitianworkshops.com)). The last step in preparing for the RD exam is the online program DietitianExam.com described above.

**Q. Are there any scholarships available for a dietetic internship?**

**A.** Yes. The California Nutrition Corps Scholarship was established to support California WIC employees who are advancing their professional careers. This scholarship helps employees in an approved dietetic internship or employees taking upper division college or graduate-level coursework. Information is available on the California WIC Association website, [www.calwic.org](http://www.calwic.org). Other scholarships are offered through universities but only for students enrolled in a degree program and not for a post graduate dietetic internship. Another source of scholarships and individual grants often overlooked by students is through religious organizations, private foundations, labor unions, businesses and local community groups. A good place to start your search is with professional organizations connected with allied health and nutrition careers and local organizations and businesses in your community. Finding resources to help finance your education is no easy task but may be well worth the research. The following Web sites will help you get started in your search:

[www.fastweb.com/](http://www.fastweb.com/): This is a free customized list of financial aid sources with a database of more than 400,000 private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants, and loans.

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org): A government-sponsored financial aid information site where you'll find a variety of free information including private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants and loans.

[fdncenter.org](http://fdncenter.org): A list of resources for students seeking financial aid. They also offer a fee-based service for students searching for individual grants online with detailed descriptions of more than 5,600 foundation programs.

[bhpr.hrsa.gov/dsa/pages/privloan.htm](http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/dsa/pages/privloan.htm): A number of market rate loan programs are available to health profession students through the private sector. Programs are also available at national banking institutions and state health education programs.

**Q. I work for WIC, is there any help paying off my student loans?**

**A.** If you have a Federal Perkins student loan, you may be able to request that the loan be “discontinued” and you will not have to repay the balance. Guidelines include working full time in an agency (like WIC) providing services to high-risk families from low-income communities. Information is available on the Web site [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov) under “repayment” or in the *Student Guide, Financial Aid from the US Department of Education 2003-2005*, page 16-17 or call 1-800-433-3243.

**Q. I love my career as a WIC RD and I'd like to help others get into the profession, how can I help?**

**A.** One of the best things you can do is be an educator, role model and mentor for your profession. There are many opportunities to educate students about dietetics and WIC by volunteering for career day at local schools and colleges or offering to tutor students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Check with your WIC agency and see if there are opportunities for you to mentor and tutor dietetic students and interns or contact local dietetic programs. We found that one of the most important factors that helped WIC dietetic interns successfully complete the program was their WIC work experience and mentoring and role modeling by WIC RDs.

**Q. Will nutrition be a good career in the future?**

**A.** Nutrition continues to be a growing area of study, especially concerning disease prevention. Federal and State health objectives specifically address the important role of public health nutrition professionals; this is one of the fastest growing healthcare jobs in the US. In California and throughout the nation, we have a rapidly growing need for well-trained nutrition professionals who have the

language and culture skills of the participants we serve. That's why California WIC is working to provide you with the latest information on educational programs and resources to help you achieve your career goals in community nutrition.