

Come on Baby, Light My Fire: Tips for Matching a Dietetic Internship Script for Webinar on 1-28-21

SLIDE 1

SUZI: Hello everyone—thank you for joining us today. I'm Dr. Suzi Baxter, Diversity and Inclusion Liaison for the South Carolina Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, abbreviated as "SCAND" and the moderator for today's webinar. During the live webinar only, closed captions will be shown below the slides; to my knowledge, closed captions will not be visible on the recorded webinar.

Microphones for all attendees are muted. To ask a question or make a comment for only me as moderator or the speaker, please type it in the "Q & A" box. Questions typed in Q&A only come to me and the speaker; also, you can make your questions anonymous to the two of us by checking anonymous in the Q&A box. To share a comment, please type it in the "Chat" box and select the recipient or recipients of the message – either panelist and/or attendees. If you select all attendees, then everyone on the webinar sees your comment in the Chat box. Additional tips for matching a dietetic internship are welcome and will be used in future webinars!

You may be aware that the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has a Diversity and Inclusion Statement which reads, "*The Academy encourages diversity and inclusion by striving to recognize, respect and include differences in ability, age, creed, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, size, and socioeconomic characteristics in the nutrition and dietetics profession.*"

The South Carolina Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, or SCAND, has its first ever Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. This webinar is part of the Strategic Plan. SCAND welcomes all nutrition and dietetics students because **you** are the future of our profession! Please know that SCAND is a resource for students and is working to help students even more. This webinar is an example.

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This webinar has 3 learning objectives. After attending this webinar, each attendee will be able to:

- 1: List 2 ways to strengthen their dietetic internship application,**
- 2: List 2 things to begin doing now to strengthen their dietetic internship application, and**
- 3: Identify where to go on the SCAND website for information about diversity and inclusion.**

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The url for the SCAND website is www.eatrightsc.org. You can access the **Diversity and Inclusion page** on the SCAND website by typing "diversity-and-

inclusion” at the end of the url as shown at the bottom of the slide. Or, you can click on the tab for “*Professional Development*” to access the pull-down menu and from it select “*Diversity and Inclusion.*” The Diversity and Inclusion page currently highlights an assortment of information including the 11 winners of the Diversity Mini-Grant (Sharon was one of these winners), 5 key points of the SCAND Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, brief descriptions of web articles by the Academy, links to 3 webinars on dietitians with disabilities, and information about Diversity and Inclusion awards by the Academy. Within 3 – 4 business days, the Diversity page on the SCAND website will include links to download the slides, script, and recorded webinar.

Now I want to introduce you to our webinar speaker, **Sharon Sweat**, a dietetics intern via the distance/online program at the University of Northern Colorado where she is also working on a Master of Science. She will graduate this summer. Sharon earned her Bachelor of Science in Dietetics via the distance/online program at the University of Northern Colorado in May, 2017. This is Sharon’s second Bachelor’s degree as she also earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Promotion from Coastal Carolina in August, 2012. Sharon has professional paid experience as an Enrollment Specialist with the Healthy Outcome Program at the Eau (“Oh”) Claire Cooperative Health Centers in Columbia, SC for 3.5 years, Administrative Assistant at the same location for 2.75 years, Student Assistant Receptionist at Coastal Carolina University for 8 months, and Student Assistant Tutor in College Algebra at Coastal Carolina University for 5 months. She has volunteer experience at Red Hill Baptist Church, SCDHEC SNAP Education, Christ Central Ministries, Food Share, Harvest Hope Food Bank, Eau Claire Cooperative Health Centers, and Coastal Carolina University Counseling Services. Sharon is a member of the Academy, the National Organization of Blacks in Dietetics and Nutrition or NOBIDAN, Public Health/Community Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group, Women’s Health Dietetic Practice Group, and Columbia Midlands Dietetic Association. Like me, Sharon is a cat lover; her cat is named “Dirty Diana” or “DD” for short! It has been my sincere privilege to precept Sharon last week and this week. This has been my first experience precepting and it has been wonderful! Sharon, I am handing the microphone and controls over to you!

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SHARON: Thank you Dr. Suzi! Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to our webinar! Some of you may already be familiar with what the DI process entails. For those of you who are just diving into this, there are three major parts for the DI Process: the Applicant Guide for Supervised Practice, DICAS, and D&D Digital.

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The Applicant Guide for Supervised Practice is a guide that is released every academic year (2020-2021). You should use this to search early for DIs that are a

good fit for you. It is the most up-to-date reference available, with detailed information on Dietetic Internships (DIs), Coordinated Programs in Dietetics (CPs or CPDs), Individualized Supervised Practice Pathways (ISPPs), and Future Education Model Graduate Programs (FEMGPs). The majority of these accredited programs participate in the Applicant Guide, but additional programs can be found at the end of its Table of Contents. Your DPD program may provide that source or it can be found on the Internet. However, some may be available for free, while others you may have to purchase, so keep that in mind.

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DICAS is where your DI application is submitted. It is an online applicant portal for students who apply to DI programs that participate in DICAS Match. It is considered to be a very convenient, state-of-the-art, web-based application service that allows students to apply to any number of participating DI programs by completing a single online application. DICAS is a service of the Academy, that is designed to simplify and streamline the application process while providing considerable flexibility, electronic submission of applications, ongoing communication with applicants, and excellent customer service.

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D&D Digital is where the match happens. It is a clearinghouse to help applicants obtain an internship from their rankings and to help DIs obtain applicants from their choices. It also helps to eliminate unfair pressures and premature decisions in appointments by internships, and acceptance or rejection of appointments by applicants.

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Here's where all of your hard work and dedication will come in! You may have already started talking about this application in a professional development class, or you may have already looked into the process yourself. Either way, this webinar would be a preparation guide for you. Usually, a DI application would consist of: a Personal Statement, an Up-to-date resume, a Transcript(s)/GRE Score(s) if you have more than one. They want transcripts for all schools that you have attended, even if you only took one or two classes, a Verification Statement or Declaration of Intent, and Letters of Recommendations or L-O-Rs. Some DI programs may request a certain number of these (2, 3, or 4), so it can vary from program to program.

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Some DI programs may also ask for additional supplements to include with your application, such as an electronic portfolio or an application coversheet. While these things may seem simple to remember on your own, it is encouraged to ALWAYS CHECK EACH DI PROGRAM'S SITE FOR WHAT IS REQUIRED.

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Now it is time to get things started! It's a great idea to prepare your application as early as possible! Believe me when say you do not want to wait until the last minute to put it together AND ask for L-O-Rs! DI Directors and selection committees can easily spot a rushed application, with incorrect spelling or use of grammar, missing supplemental documents, not having up-to-date information, and even having the incorrect DI Director name or program on the application when doing multiple submissions.

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Now if you wish to find out what makes an DI Program glow, go find out! Search for those unique details that another program may not have. There are a few ways to do so. Attend dietetic association meetings (local, state, or national) and DI Open Houses. If you are familiar with the Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (FNCE)- the Disney World of Nutrition and Dietetics as some may call it, that's a great way to get connected with others who may be in a DI program you're interested in. You could ask relevant questions about the program and send follow-up emails, but do not ask about something that is already on the website. This helps YOU to show interest and for DI Directors to see your interest. Spend time reviewing DI programs, as this will help you to see which programs would be good fit for you. You could also highlight in your application why you are a good fit for them and why they are a good fit for you. This could be similar to making a sales pitch- "What's in it for me?" and "What's in it for them?"

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Do your Research! After all, dietetics is considered to be a research field. (I got that from my DI Director!) DI Directors enjoy students who look into specific rotations or offerings their programs have and like to see them discussed in their personal statement. Keep in mind that it is not a game changer to say things like, "I am excited to join the DI program at _____ for it's mission and goals." That's like giving the same love letter to multiple people, with the name changed. Anyone can say that, and it is easy for applicants to change the program name to another one. Mention something unique from their website or in the open house presentation that drew you to apply. What sparked you about that program in particular? What made them stand out above the rest? Make sure to review the program's website and handbook before contacting the program director and definitely before an interview about anything.

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Now for your Personal Statement! And as I go through the remaining slides, some of them may refer back to this. You want to tailor each personal statement to

a specific internship, because not every internship has a similar structure of focus. Start it off with something unique that you have to offer the program. (that's where your research comes in). Do NOT start out saying you want to be a dietitian to help people because you, or a family member, have a health issue that was managed by diet. EVERYONE who applies wants to help people. Instead, discuss if you have done a project that made a difference in a group or individual's life. For example, did you conduct research that was innovative? Participate in a public policy initiative or campaign that influenced legislation or regulations related to nutrition and health? Did you help improve the contents of a WIC food box to include fresh fruits and vegetables, instead of just canned fruits and vegetables, through a policy change? Or maybe you helped improve a virtual teaching curriculum that aids in helping SNAP recipients know what to shop for or how to shop for food while getting the most out of their benefits. Talk about what sets you apart from other applicants! When describing your strengths, give specific examples to illustrate them. Consider what strengths you bring to the table, what weaknesses you know you need to work on (starting now), and what will you bring to that specific DI program. Don't say "I am a self-starter and highly productive." Give an example of an experience, project or campaign that illustrates those qualities. Think of something you have accomplished that would make the selection committee think they have to accept you.

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Another tip would be to look up the verbiage from Competencies for the Registered Dietitian (CRDNs) and work that into your personal statement. Have other people review your Personal Statement and resume. You could also use resources at your university and from your DPD Director.

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On to Sharing Work Experiences! Having various experiences is good, but having paid or volunteer experience with RDNs truly helps. It could be in a hospital nutrition department or kitchen, or with RDNs in private practice or consulting. DI's may have a preference on experience in a healthcare setting and/or direct patient care. The purpose of dietetics-related experience prior to the internship is to develop professional attributes and gain exposure to health-related processes, nutrition education, and management procedures. Hands-on work experience in dietetics-related settings requiring professional communication helps to ease the transition of students from the academic setting to rotations in the professional workplace. This could show a potential DI program that you are likely prepared for various DI rotations since these won't be entirely new environments for you. You could also try finding opportunities online at preRD.org, which you will have to check often as it updates. However, if you're unable to gain these experiences before applying, list experiences to showcase your strengths. They could be leadership skills, flexibility, cooperating with other team members, etc. DI directors and selection committees

are looking for what you are capable of through your strengths and weaknesses that you want to improve on. Talk about how the program would help you to improve in those weaknesses. An example may be weakness in clinical assessments and diagnosis, but wanting to improve through a program that emphasizes clinical nutrition. Another skill would be to show that you are willing and able to adapt to changing environments. For instance, adapting quickly to new rotations, navigating different preceptor personalities and work styles, and any number of other unexpected circumstances could arise. Show how you pay attention to detail or how organized you are, as these attributes go a long way in an internship with lots of variables or moving parts that you have to work on. There's looking ahead of schedules for daily tasks, ensuring you have an ample amount of materials to handout for a SNAP-Ed class before it beginnings (at least a day in advance if possible). These are just a few examples.

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Now yes, the DI's want to be impressed with you, but do not let it get to a point where your application sounds like, or looks like, it's repetitive. Leave the extra padding behind for them to get a grip on your experiences! It takes time to go through each submission, and some DI selection committees may have hundreds to go through! It also doesn't necessarily increase your chances of getting matched. If someone, for example, lists every activity he or she did for a student dietetic association as SEPARATE DICAS entries, interest maybe lost. Instead, combine all experiences under 1 entry in DICAS of the student dietetic association with total hours, using bullet points for some of duties or activities under this 1 entry. You could use the more meaningful experiences instead of the ones that you only spent an hour with. In short...a "longer" DICAS application does not mean a longer list of total experiences.

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While GPA and GRE scores are important considerations, it is always preferred to also have a well-rounded candidate that has sought out nutrition-related experiences outside of required classroom hours. Volunteer and leadership experience is also impressive (Brownie Points!). Interns with these attributes also tend to be more self-directed and work well independently, which are two other important characteristics. Be active in the Student Dietetic Association and local, state, and/or the national Academy. Consider other opportunities such as food banks, soup kitchens, Meals on Wheels, and community events. If you are someone that works when volunteer opportunities occur, reach out and see how else you could get involved. There's virtual nutrition education and email or distance participation. As an undergrad at University of Northern Colorado, I was involved in their student dietetic association distance-wise. I was still able to contribute through sharing recipes to post on the site and volunteering within my state of residency, to

name a few. Bottom line- get your name and face out there! It shows how dedicated you are to not only the profession, but to giving back to your community. Take the initiative, and be proactive!

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BE... Descriptive! Be... Be... Descriptive! When working on this section of your application, give details about the companies or programs under your work and volunteer experiences. I know..., "But it's already on my resume. Why should I have to list everything again?" I've been there and I know the feeling, but here's a few reasons. You want to paint a picture of what takes place at each experience so that directors and committees have a better idea of them! For example, Sunnyside Nutrition and Associates. Is it a private practice, an afterschool nutrition education program, a long-term care program, or something else? You should also show the number of hours you completed for each experience, as 4 hours versus 40 hours can make a big difference in your application being... "lit".

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Now looking at this example of work and volunteer experiences, you can see that it only gives a sneak peek of what an individual has completed. You will notice a few empty spaces that would leave you questioning things about the applicant. Or not, if you do not have the time to do so, which may lead to moving on to the next applicant. If in the DICAS portal you are allowed to leave some of these details blank, I would not recommend it. It maybe time consuming, but it will be worth it.

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And here is an example of more detailed work and volunteer experiences. These are like bigger pictures that can help directors and selection committees see the applicant, before even meeting him or her.

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This is similar to the previous slide, that focused on volunteer experiences. This one is just a paid work experience. This is what you want, and its what they want also.

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Now in this section, it's good to list any scholarships or awards received, whether they are through your school, the local or state dietetics association, or the Academy. Some DI Directors may be on the selection committee for those scholarships, so your name may ring a bell. That's similar to how I got to where I am now. I was having trouble trying to find new preceptors during COVID, and after being encouraged to reach out to my local dietetic association and SCAND, Dr. Suzi volunteered to be my next preceptor, along with others who have expressed their

interest in taking me as an intern. Dr. Suzi recognized my name as a recipient of the SCAND Diversity Mini-Grant, which she created! It's thanks to her and others for helping me to continue my dietetic internship. You could do the same reaching out through your local and state association for opportunities. Give an idea of what you are involved in, not just a part of. Do you hold an elected or appointed position? Are you an active member of a DPG like Dietetics in Health Care Communities, or a MIG like the National Organization of Blacks in Dietetics and Nutrition (NOBIDAN)? Please share!

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For your L-O-Rs, ask people who can provide an outstanding recommendation for you. Pick them wisely, choose someone who knows you well and will actually take time to write a pleasant letter on your behalf. Supervisors and professors are good options, but never ask friends or family members. (Don't worry, they'll still love you.) Ask them early to give plenty of time. Pay attention to their response also; if someone seems hesitant in doing a letter for you, kindly and respectfully let them know that it is okay if they cannot do it and that you will find someone else, and still thank them. It is also helpful to provide them with your updated resume which highlights your grades, experiences, and activities.

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Everyone wants to have some fun and socialize. You can still do that, but do it in a responsible and dignifying manner. Avoid posting embarrassing or unsavory personal information or photographs on the Internet. Everything doesn't need to be seen, and everything doesn't need to be heard. Avoid criminal behavior which may make you ineligible to work in many healthcare facilities and prevent you from completing your education. Never misrepresent or falsify information regarding your education, work experiences or credentials, as it could ruin your professional reputation and jeopardize your career. It's a small world, especially in the dietetics field. You never know who knows who.

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Now the last things you would want to do before hitting submit are: Double check your application(s). Make sure that you "crossed your 't's and dotted your 'i's"; spell check everything (meaning thoroughly read through it); sometimes Word or Pages may not catch everything for you. Make sure your personal statement(s) matches with DI program(s). Check that all necessary supplemental documents are included with each program (which may vary), such as the L-O-Rs, transcripts/GRE scores, and resume and manage your time for the DICAS application, because computers and the Internet are great at knowing when you are trying to get something done at the last minute. Tech issues may occur. Be on time so that you are not stressing.

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So you got the call or email for an interview? Excellent! Whether it is virtual or in-person, you should respond quickly. While interviews may be easy for some individuals, others may find themselves to be uncomfortable with them. This is the time to do some mock interviews to help you calm your nerves and prepare. Remember, they want to know the real you, not just the professional side of you. What makes you shine bright like a diamond? What makes you glow?

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Wherever you go, always carry yourself in a respectful and professional manner, and have a positive attitude and outlook. And of course, believe in yourself!

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And it's Match Day! There is a 50% chance of getting matched with a DI program. If you receive a match on Appointment Day ... CONGRATULATIONS! You should be given instructions to contact the DI director of that program and accept your match within the required timeframe designated by D&D Digital (in other words, right then and there)!

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Now if you happen to not get matched with an internship, that is okay. You could either use this opportunity to improve future application(s) by contacting DI Directors the day you find out that you were not matched. Ask why you weren't matched. It's advice that is coming directly from the person who participates in choosing interns for the program that you are interested in. You can get feedback on your experiences, personal statement, L-O-Rs, and etc. You never know- they could have even made a mistake and could actually offer you a spot right then and there. It may have happened before in the history of Match Day, but never say never. OR you could pursue 2nd rounds. This is when you apply to programs that have unfilled positions. It's like being put on a waiting list for a class, but for an internship. ISPPs become available as well, and some distance DIs usually have interns secure their own rotations. There is no harm in applying for second round matching. This is increasing your chances of getting into a DI within the same cycle. D&D will have a list of programs with unfilled spots and you will have to reach out and apply to them. I didn't get matched until my second attempt a year later. And I'm glad I didn't throw in the towel after the first one. I'm saying this to let you know that it is possible to get matched. Hang in there and don't give up on your goals!

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Some of you may be familiar with Diversify Dietetics. It is 501(c)3 organization that provides a community for students, professionals and educators dedicated to

increasing ethnic and racial diversity in the nutrition and dietetics profession. Their MISSION is to increase the racial and ethnic diversity in the field of nutrition by empowering nutrition leaders of color. Their VISION is of a nutrition profession that reflects the diverse communities we serve. They offer neat benefits such as mentoring, help with DICAS, and local meet-ups among other things. You may find more information at www.diversifydietetics.org. And now I would like to hand it back over to Dr. Suzi!

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SUZI: I want to briefly summarize take-away points from today's webinar.

Sharon provided numerous **ways** to **strengthen** your dietetic internship **application** such as:

- proofreading to eliminate all spelling and grammatical errors,
- making your personal statements memorable for example by highlighting your paid or volunteer experiences with dietitians, and
- using sales pitches to cater your personal statements to the specific dietetic internship to which you are applying.

Sharon also provided numerous **things** to **begin doing now** to **strengthen** your dietetic internship **application** such as:

- gaining paid or volunteer experiences with dietitians in person in your district/region or virtually via SCAND or your Affiliate, opportunities listed online at preRD.org, and opportunities listed at Diversify Dietetics, and
- obtaining leadership and committee experience through elected or appointed positions in the nutrition/dietetic association at your university, your district dietetic association, SCAND or your Affiliate, Dietetic Practice Groups, Member Interest Groups, and/or the Academy
- Remember, these experiences broaden your network of professional colleagues, which can be extremely valuable when you identify people to write letters of recommendation!

I shared that the url for SCAND's website is www.eatrightsc.org and its Diversity and Inclusion page is found under the "Professional Development" tab. This page will include links to the slides, script, and recording of this webinar within 3 – 4 business days.

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Now for some **food for thought**. As nutrition and dietetics students, you know that **variety** is every dietitian's business. For the future of the nutrition and dietetics profession and for the health of our patients and clients, **diversity and inclusion** must also be every dietitian's business.

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Here is a list of websites where you can find resources used for today's

webinar.

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Sharon and I acknowledge and sincerely thank the many people who shared tips to help with matching a dietetic internship.

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Now we have time to answer some of your questions that you have typed in the Q & A box.

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Remember, the dietetic internship match is in your hands! Thanks again for participating in our webinar! Have a great rest of your day!