Supervised Experiential Learning
An Initial Guide
About UNE Online’s Nutrition Programs

The mission of the Applied Nutrition programs is to prepare individuals for leadership roles in the nutrition field, to advance knowledge and expand skills that promote excellence and innovation in all areas of nutrition practice, and to emphasize evidence-based best practices to support the well-being and health outcomes of individuals, families, and communities through education, research, and service.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to SEL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL Sites</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceptors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Process</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction to Supervised Experiential Learning (SEL)

A distinctive feature of all Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) programs accredited under the Future Education Model (FEM) is the “supervised experiential learning (SEL)” requirement. Supervised experiential learning gives the students the opportunity to learn and apply their knowledge of nutrition and dietetics to real life situations under the guidance of professionals known as preceptors.

At UNE, students will complete 510 SEL hours in the first year and 540 in the second year, as well as in-class SEL experiences, which total to 1214 hours of supervised experiential learning. Prior to admission into the program, students are required to secure 400 hours (out of the total 510 needed) for the first year. Through the SEL hours, students gain valuable hands-on experience that can be directly connected to concepts in the graduate courses they are taking during the program.

PRO TIP: It is estimated to take 6-9 months to secure your SEL sites for year one. This process includes outreach to sites, scheduling meetings with the preceptors, and finalizing the affiliation agreements. These SEL sites must be approved and secured prior to enrolling in your first class. To apply for the Master of Science in Applied Nutrition - Registered Dietitian Nutritionist Focus (MSAN-RDN) at UNE, students should first speak with an enrollment counselor at (855) 751-4447 or nutrition@une.edu to confirm that you meet the base requirements for admission.

As a part of ACEND accreditation requirements for FEM programs, SEL hours must be done concurrently with the graduate coursework. This supports active learning in clinical, community and food service management sites while enrolled in the MSAN RDN Focus program.

SEL sites and hours are pre-approved by the MSAN Assistant Director/Director RDN Focus and site preceptor, and must align with the plan of study which is generated based on the expected date of matriculation. Students working to locate their hours can be provisionally accepted during this process.

In this program, the courses consist of two parts that will be completed concurrently: 1) a three-credit graduate course and 2) a corresponding one-credit SEL lab course. In addition, students will complete 90 hours of SEL during the corresponding lab course (an estimated 15 hours per week). The total time estimate for participation in course work and SEL hours is close to 40 hours per week. Based on accreditation requirements, students must complete this program on a full-time basis.
SEL Sites

An SEL site is the location where the preceptor oversees students engaging in supervised experiential learning hours. Students gain hands-on experience assessed by attainment of nutrition competencies.

Depending on the type of SEL, the site may be a hospital, food bank, fitness center, school, treatment center, or private practice setting. Hours may be completed through telehealth or virtual alternatives as allowed by ACEND and approved by the program. All SEL sites must be approved by the MSAN Assistant Director/Director of RDN Focus to ensure that the required competencies of the SEL will be offered and supported by the preceptor. The MSAN Assistant Director/Director of RDN Focus will determine with the preceptor if the site may be used for multiple courses.

A distinctive benefit of the MSAN RDN Focus at UNE is the student’s ability to complete their SEL at sites most convenient to them with no relocation required. Most RDN programs—even online ones—require students to be on-site for a portion of the program. However, as of the 2020-2021 school year, UNE is one of only a few institutions to offer the didactic program for RDNs completely online.

The three primary types of SEL sites:

**CLINICAL**
Hospitals or medical centers with in-patient facilities as well as outpatient facilities and private clinical settings where Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) is practiced.

**COMMUNITY**
Organizations that work with food systems, food access, nutrition communication and education such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the Dairy or Beef Council.

**FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT**
For profit or non-profit institutions that offer meal planning programs such as K-12 public schools, college or university dining, hospitals, long term care facilities, etc.
PRO TIP: If you are applying to an SEL site that has a relationship with a current dietetic internship, there is a possibility you will need to search for alternative sites or consider dividing up your hours between a few facilities. You might also offer to complete your SEL hours on the weekend if the facility can accommodate this option.

Students are responsible for finding and securing their own SEL sites and preceptors. It is important that the students are very clear on what the Future Education Model is, the specifics of the UNE RDN Focus program, and what they need from the preceptors. The FEM Future Graduate (FEM-FG) program is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) and is a graduate-level, competency-based dietitian nutritionist program that integrates coursework and at least 1,000 hours of supervised experiential learning for RDN eligibility. More information on the FEM can be found here.

If an approved SEL site becomes unavailable for any reason, UNE will work with students to find an acceptable alternative site. In addition, MSAN RDN students are required to join the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)—at a reduced student rate—upon enrollment in their first course, which will allow them to access a list of potential preceptors via the Academy website.

Preceptors

A preceptor is a practicing and credentialed nutrition professional or an expert in a related field who provides instruction, training, and evaluation of students during their supervised experiential learning hours.

Examples of professionals that may serve as preceptors include—but are not limited to—registered dietitian nutritionists (RDN), licensed dietitians (LD), certified dietitian/nutritionists (CDN), physicians, registered nurses (RN), nurse practitioners (NP), clinical nurse specialists (CNS), physician assistants (PA), food service directors, nutrition educators, pharmacists, social workers, psychologists, physical therapists, program directors, and healthcare administrators.

To find a preceptor, students should start by reviewing the SEL toolkit (provided to students when they reach out to the UNE Online enrollment team) and compile a document with prospective sites and preceptors. Next, the students will schedule a meeting with the MSAN Assistant Director / Director of RDN Focus to review this document. Upon approval from the MSAN Assistant Director / Director of RDN Focus, students can then begin outreach to potential SEL sites and preceptors by phone, email, or an in-person interview. When contacting a potential preceptor, students should follow the process laid forth by the program to ensure clear communication about the program and needs of the student. Being organized and clear when reaching out to preceptors is imperative to successfully securing sites. When conducting outreach via email, make sure to use your UNE email for any school-related communications.

PRO TIP: Students may have multiple preceptors if attending different sites or engaging in different types of SEL at the same site. Although students should prepare a list of prospective preceptors, they should not reach out to those preceptors until having a meeting with the MSAN Assistant Director / Director of RDN Focus.
Once students have found potential SEL sites and preceptors, they need to plan out their expected weekly schedule for the first year SEL hours. The amount and type of SEL aligns with the student’s plan of study (see sample below) and coordinates with the preceptor’s schedule. The plan of study will be completed prior to starting the course.

**PRO TIP:** Preceptors are working professionals that offer their time and expertise to work with potential students. Being respectful, organized, and clear when reaching out to preceptors is imperative to successfully securing sites.

### MS Applied Nutrition, RDN Focus, 2 year Full-time Student Plan of Study Example

Sample Plan of Study to guide selection of SEL for FT Student seeking admission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 Spring</th>
<th>Year 1 Summer</th>
<th>Year 1 Fall</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Didactic Courses</strong></td>
<td><strong>Didactic Courses</strong></td>
<td><strong>Didactic Courses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring A</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spring B</strong></td>
<td><strong>Summer A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APN 601 (3 Cr) Trends &amp; Issues in Nutrition</td>
<td>APN 605 (1 Cr) Nutrition Across the Lifespan</td>
<td>APN 610 (3 Cr) Research Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APN 602 (1 Cr) Trends &amp; Issues in Nutrition Lab</td>
<td>APN 606 (1 Cr) Nutrition Across the Lifespan Lab</td>
<td>APN 611 (1 Cr) Research Methods Lab</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>SEL Type</strong></th>
<th><strong>Required Hours</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinical</td>
<td>20 Hours 30 Hours 30 Hours 90 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>20 Hours 30 Hours 30 Hours 90 Hours 90 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.S.M.</td>
<td>20 Hours 30 Hours 30 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>510 Hours</strong></td>
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Application Process

To apply for the MSAN RDN Focus at the University of New England:

1. **Speak with an enrollment counselor:** First, prospective students should reach out to (855) 751-4447 or nutrition@une.edu to confirm that they meet the admission requirements.

2. **Determine your start date:** The enrollment counselor will help prospective students determine their anticipated start date (spring, summer, or fall) based on their prerequisite course needs and other details.

3. **Begin your online application:** After the start date has been decided, prospective students can then begin their online application and start to compile their required essays, references, a current resume, and an official transcript confirming completion of their bachelor’s degree.

4. **Prepare for your meeting with the MSAN Assistant Director/Director of RDN Focus:** Once the application has been started, the enrollment counselor will connect applicants to the MSAN Assistant Director/Director of RDN Focus to discuss locating preceptors and sites, and to prepare a tentative plan of study. For this meeting, applicants should review the SEL Toolkit and prepare a list of potential preceptor sites they are considering in their local community for the three different types of SEL hours (Clinical, Community, & Food Service Management).

**PRO TIP:** UNE provides an SEL toolkit to help you navigate how to secure the SEL sites. This toolkit also includes example copies of each form that you and your preceptors will need to complete and submit with your application. The toolkit will be provided to students by the enrollment team and should be reviewed prior to the student’s first meeting with the MSAN Assistant Director / Director of RDN Focus.

**A note on prerequisite courses:** If prospective students need to take prerequisites, they can do so either prior to finishing their application (we call this taking “non-matriculated” courses) or after they complete their application and are accepted (in which case they will be called a “provisionally-accepted” student until their prerequisites and SEL planning are all complete). Please know that due to the length of time the SEL planning process takes (typically six to nine months), prospective students may be taking their prerequisite courses either before or in the same months that they conduct their SEL discussions, preparation, and outreach. All prerequisite courses and all SEL preparation must be complete before a student can officially start their core MSAN RDN Focus curriculum.

As an ACEND accredited program, the UNE MSAN RDN Focus and required SEL hours are structured to produce successful and practice-ready registered dietitian nutritionists.
SPEAK TO AN ENROLLMENT COUNSELOR TODAY!
Our enrollment counselors are available to discuss the best path for your education. Contact us today!
(855) 751-4447
nutrition@une.edu
online.une.edu/applied-nutrition