



SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS  
COMMISSION ON COLLEGES

November 15, 2024

Dr. Michael Amiridis  
President  
University of South Carolina - Columbia  
206 Osborne Administration Building  
Columbia, SC 29208

Dear Dr. Amiridis:

Thank you for submitting the following substantive change:

Substantive change:

**New Program-Approval**

**Master of Science in Performance Nutrition and Dietetics (MS-PND)**

Submission date:

**10/16/2024**

Intended Implementation date:

**8/1/2025**

Case ID:

**SC028734**

The University anticipates an enrollment of five students initially in the Master of Science in Performance Nutrition and Dietetics (MS-PND). Enrollment for the new program will include the fall semester only. After that, enrollment will occur each fall and spring semester. By year five, enrollment will grow from ten to twelve students per fall and spring semesters. The instruction will be delivered in person at the main campus. Online learning may be applied as needed to ensure continuity of scheduling, communication, and ease of access. The University was approved to offer distance education on December 5, 2003. The target audience will be those with an undergraduate degree, seeking to become performance registered dietitian nutritionists (RDN). The program is expected to be ongoing.

Focusing on performance nutrition will complement the existing exercise science and public health programs. This program will be considered an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) Future Education Model Graduate Program in which didactic and supervised experiential learning will be combined into a single graduate program. This includes providing nutrition care to non-competitive, recreational enthusiasts, non-traditional athletes, and individuals in the performing arts as well as traditional athletes and sports teams.

This program will be a two-year (5-semester) academic program in which students will progress toward achieving competency as entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists (RDN). The MS-PND program will be accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). Program graduates will qualify to take the national credentialing exam provided by the Commission on Dietetic Registration.



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The University is well-prepared to offer the new program. It is the state's flagship University, known for its supportive environment that provides a wealth of learning, health, and welfare resources to all University students, including the prospective students of the MS-PND program. The resources and support services available by the program faculty, students, and preceptors are plentiful.

According to the program's accrediting agency, there is a national shortage of RDN programs as the number of graduates from Didactic Programs in Dietetics (DPD) exceeds the number of openings in RDN programs. The demand is for more RDN programs that confer a graduate degree to meet the requirements to become an RDN. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, RDNs currently fill more than 78,000 jobs. The median salary is \$69,680 annually, which has increased by \$6,630 in the past three years. This is anticipated to further increase with the new RDN exam requirement for a graduate degree.

The new program will provide an educational experience to prepare competent, entry-level registered dietitian nutritionists for practice across regional and global communities. The University is committed to providing learning experiences that emphasize the application of nutrition in health and human performance, aligning with its mission to improve lives by serving its community.

Admissions requirements include candidates with an earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution who completed the prerequisite courses and met all other admission criteria. Applicants must meet the minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 from a bachelor's degree and all prerequisites. Applicants must submit official transcripts and a personal essay.

Graduation requirements include completing 44 credit hours with a minimum GPA of 3.0 and 1000 hours of supervised experience. Students must achieve all current ACEND professional competencies and a verification statement indicating eligibility to take the RDN exam. Students must also earn a rating or score equivalent to meet expectations or above in all evaluations of performance indicators associated with each professional.

The University identified 20 student learning outcomes (SLOs). Assessment methods to ensure student success include a Food Service Production evaluation, a Professional Competency Self-Assessment & Portfolio, and a Final Complex Case Study.

The University demonstrated compliance with Standard 10.7 of the Principles of Accreditation. It adheres to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) definition of a credit hour as a unit of measure representing the equivalent of an hour (50 minutes) of instruction per week over the term. All courses offered at the University are recorded in terms of semester hours.

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In addition, the University determines the amount and level of credit awarded for its courses. Each course is designed to support the progression towards achievement of specific professional competencies. Decisions regarding the number of credit hours and level of the proposed courses are proposed to the Curriculum Committee, department faculty, and Graduate Council.

The oversight of the new program involves several key roles. The program director will manage all aspects of program administration and oversee the students' educational experiences. The program coordinator will assist in managing the program, particularly in coordinating and delivering supervised experiences and handling daily operations. An Advisory Board will offer guidance and recommendations. Additionally, the department chair will act as the liaison between the school and the program director, providing general administrative oversight to ensure policy and regulatory adherence. The Graduate School oversees all graduate programs, including admissions, academic and student support, graduation eligibility, and compliance with University standards.

The University provided the curriculum program of study, course descriptions, and a projected schedule of course offerings. Three faculty are qualified to develop the curriculum and teach within the program. The University provided the qualifications of three full-time and one part-time faculty. It also provided the qualifications for two full-time and three part-time to-be-hired faculty. The qualifications appear to be adequate for teaching in the new program. Keep in mind the peer review team, which will assess the program as part of the institution's next SACSCOC reaffirmation review, will ultimately determine faculty qualifications.

In addition, for this graduate program, the University provided additional experiences within their faculty, including Certified Sports Nutritionist (CISSN) with the International Society of Sports Nutrition, EP-C – Certified Exercise Physiologist with the American College of Sports Medicine, CE- Certified Culinary Educator, CEC- Certified Executive Chef, ServSafe Food Protection Manager Certification, Certified ServSafe Instructor and Registered ServSafe Examination Proctor.

The University reports two full-time equivalencies (FTE) are sufficient to teach the new graduate program.

Library and learning information resources appear to be adequate to support the program. The University provided a list of resources in the program proposal. Students and faculty will utilize the library's digital collections to access discipline-specific resources such as Hunger in America, Menu Project, South Carolinian Cookbook Collection, United States Food Administration Food Conservation Notes, and Government Information USDA Periodicals.

The MS-PND students will have access to all academic support services provided to graduate students. They will be made aware of these resources in the in-person MS-PND program



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orientation led by the program director, the MS-PND Student Handbook, with the MS-PND Program Hub on Blackboard, and in each course syllabus.

Student support resources include an opportunities bulletin board, a graduate Student Resource hub, a Writing Center, and scholarly initiatives that appear adequate to support the graduate program.

Physical resources appear adequate to support the new program. These resources will prove to be invaluable to the MS-PND program, including the Center for Simulation and Experiential Learning, the McCutchen House Dining Hall, the Marriott Foundation Laboratory, the food service facilities within the Dodie Anderson Academic Building, the Center for Health and Well-Being, and learning spaces within the Arnold School of Public Health Research Center. Students will also engage in learning activities with the lead dietitian within the nutrition offices and the demonstration kitchen serving the University student population. Incorporating dietetics education within each of these facilities will enhance the interdisciplinary culture by increasing awareness of the role of nutrition in public health, healthcare, athletics, and food systems.

Beyond the equipment available at each facility, the MS-PND program will require nutrition-specific equipment within the program curriculum. The University provided a list of advanced equipment, which has been made available by University and community partners.

Financial resources appear adequate to support the new program. The University provided an estimated budget for the program's first three years. The budget reflects a positive return on investment anticipated to begin in year 3 of the 5-year start-up phase as each cohort increases. The estimated salary increase includes two full-time and five part-time faculty costs. ACEND accreditation renewal and site visitation fees are included in the estimated costs alongside the funds required to acquire and maintain educational support materials.

Should resources or enrollment not meet program revenue beyond year three, the contingency plan includes reallocating existing resources. If a lack of resources continues, a teach-out plan will be considered.

The University has an assessment protocol for all programs within academic units. The program assessment process occurs on a two-year schedule, during which programs report their assessment data to analyze student performance, evaluate program efficiency, and utilize results to influence program and/or assessment revisions. The faculty and department chair of MS-PND will determine if changes need to be made to individual courses and/or the program.

The Program Evaluation Plan (PEP) will inform the program director when the Continuous Program Improvement Plan (CPIP) is completed for the new MS-PND program in 2028.



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**The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reviewed the materials seeking approval of the Master of Science in Performance Nutrition and Dietetics (MS-PND). It was the decision of the Board to approve the program and include it in the scope of accreditation.**

An invoice for \$500 to help defray the cost of reviewing the prospectus is enclosed with the liaison's copy of this letter.

Should you need assistance, please contact Dr. Kelli V. Randall at 404-994-6545 or via email at [krandall@sacscoc.org](mailto:krandall@sacscoc.org).

Please include the Case ID number above in all submissions or correspondence about this substantive change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Belle S. Wheelan".

Belle S. Wheelan, Ph.D.  
President

BSW/DDG:lp

Enclosure (invoice with liaison's copy only)

cc: Mr. Donald Miles, Executive Director Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics,  
University of South Carolina - Columbia  
Dr. Kelli V. Randall, Vice President, SACSCOC

