

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

October 5, 2006

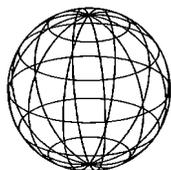
MEMORANDUM

To: Ralph Putnum
Chair, University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP)

From: Lorraine Weatherspoon, Director, Didactic Program in Dietetics
Gale Strasburg, Chair, Food Science and Human Nutrition

Subject: Request to Establish Admission as a Junior Requirement for the
Bachelor of Science Degree in Dietetics

Thank you for allowing us to attend the UCAP meeting on 28 September, 2006 to discuss our proposal to establish an overall 2.50 University grade point requirement for admission as a junior to the Bachelor of Science degree program in Dietetics. We appreciated the helpful comments made by the UCAP members. The discussion also helped us to think a little more in-depth about the questions that were raised. Therefore we were encouraged, when we received your memo of October 2, 2006 in which you informed us of the general support for our proposal, except for the need for more clarification regarding the proposal as well as alternative language, which will allow for the most judicious solution to the current enrollment challenges.



After careful review of the concerns, which were raised by the committee, we would like to provide the following additional information. We hope that our explanations and supporting documents will provide clarification and acceptable alternative language as requested:

- 1) **Support for at least a 2.5 GPA cut-point:** Attached please find a summary of all the potential internship programs that students may apply to nationally (Appendix 1). GPA cut-points for admission and mean or range of GPA's of current students are also included. The internship process is initiated usually in the semester that the student graduates (although some may apply at a later date if preferred). Based on data in Appendix 1, although, internship programs may have a GPA cut-point, it is obvious from the data presented, that the GPA of students who are accepted into the internship programs, is 3.0 or above for just about all of them for which data is provided. Please review the last two columns, which indicate the minimum GPA that is considered for potential acceptance into the internship program and mean GPA or range of current students—essentially the current interns. Less than 10% used a cut-point lower than 3.0, and it is clear that for the most part, the students who were actually accepted, had

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overall GPA's significantly higher than the minimum to be considered. In addition, the admission process is competitive, and given that our recent professional data show that intern applications far exceed internship openings, the chances of lower GPA students getting into internships in the future is going to be markedly reduced. It is also imperative that we keep in mind that the mean overall GPA of the current students regardless of cut-point was 3.0 and above for an overwhelming majority. For one of the programs that listed a minimum of 2.0 for consideration, the actual mean GPA of current students is 3.0. Therefore, we calculated that if a student was admitted in the junior year with approximately 60 credit hours and an overall GPA of 2.5, then they would need to obtain a mean GPA of approximately 3.5 for the remainder of the 60 credits required for graduation, in order to graduate with an overall GPA of at least 3.0 to make them competitive for the internship selection process. We have also attached a summary of the Spring and Summer 2006 graduating class (Appendix 2). The data is organized according to GPA and acceptance/non-acceptance into dietetic internships.

- 2) **Analysis of current students:** The memo from Dr. Eunice Foster was generated from Student Information Generator, and varies from day to day. Dr. Foster's data was generated on September 5, 2006. We analyzed the data that we have today (October 6) and all the students freshmen through seniors), who have a GPA less than 2.5 total 47 of a total of 370. This is how the 13% that you refer to was obtained. However at this time, we recognize that all students who are currently in the major would be allowed to proceed, should the committee approve the GPA cut-point, and only students entering the major in their junior year after approval, would be excluded. This could mean that potentially at least 35 juniors and lower class students might be excluded in the future if the numbers are similar at the time. This would reduce the total number of students in the major to 335, closer to our target goal of 300 or less **total** majors. Contrary to what is stated on your memo of October 2, we are not trying to limit class size to less than 300, but rather total number of students in the majors.
- 3) **Class Sizes and Program Quality:** Please see the attached pdf file of Dietetics classes for the Spring 2007 (Appendix 3). All the classes are at maximum or beyond. Since Dietetics is a professional degree program, we are bound by our accrediting agency's, Foundation Knowledge and Skills (Appendix 4) to guide our curriculum, professional classes include among other forms of facilitating learning skills, food laboratories and student presentations. In order to accommodate our increasing numbers, we have exceeded acceptable laboratory numbers (please see HNF 400 which has more than 25 per section for example), and student presentations and evaluations become a challenge when one has to resort to larger group sizes. In addition, our students have to do a foodservice experience on campus and while Housing and Foodservice had been wonderful partners, the larger numbers are becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate. We are concerned about the fact that one of our accreditation reviewers specifically

mentioned that we needed to consider “quality” rather than quantity with regard to student numbers. We anticipate that even with a potential reduction of at least 35 students per year for the junior and senior years, that we will achieve the necessary classroom size relief.

4) Evidence of Student Likelihood of Passing the Registration

Examination: It is unfortunately not required that students provide a name when they take the RD examination. Although we do receive yearly statistics for MSU on passing rates for the RD exam (see most recent - Appendix 5), some of the students do not identify themselves. The number that provide names, varies from year to year. The accrediting agency requires that programs have an overall **first time** passing rate of at least 80% over a 5 year period. This is true for both the internship and undergraduate didactic programs such as ours. Our first time passing rates have been dropping over the past 5 years. We are striving to improve the scores. Based on data reported by programs across the country, via our Dietetics Educator’s Practice Group list-serve, there is convincing evidence that overall GPA is an important criterion to ensure success in this respect, and the data presented in Appendix 1 attests to this, when one looks at the average GPA’s of those currently in internship programs. It is obvious that internship directors are being very careful about who they select. At MSU, we also have a Dietetic Internship program. In an attempt to provide you with some verification, I talked to our internship director today about the interns who she has selected from MSU as well as her policies and criteria. She indicated that one of her first goals as director, was to implement a higher GPA cut-point. She was successful in changing that from 2.5 to 3.0. Similar to other programs, she has preferred higher GPA students. Even though her cut-point is 3.0, her mean GPA for her current students is 3.5. In addition she indicated to me that the only 3 students since her tenure, who were accepted with a GPA of less than 3.0 were MSU graduates. They had GPA’s of 2.4 or below. Two have never passed the exam after several attempts, and one passed after 4 attempts.

5) Student Input: As indicated in the meeting, our most recent accreditation site visit occurred in April, 2006. Findings from our self-study and site visit were sent to us in a report dated June 29, 2006. Since this process required input from students independent of the faculty, we were pleased to hear that the students and alumni were very positive about their experiences at Michigan State University. However, there were concerns expressed by the sophomores and juniors about more faculty support and individualized guidance through the internship application process. Addition faculty and students reported negative consequences because of the increase in enrollment from 219 students in the Fall of 2002 to 366 students in the Spring of 2006. We are fully cognizant of the fact that a GPA cut-point alone is not the only measure, which we need to employ to ensure that our program is of high quality. Therefore, we are also in the process of reviewing our curriculum.

6) **Alternative Language to Proposal:** The concerns about a lack of clarity and the potential for ambiguity were well noted. We would like to amend our language as follows:

“Enrollment in the dietetics major is limited. Dietetics is a professional degree, which requires acceptance into a competitive internship in order to complete the requirements for eligibility to take the registered dietitian examination. While a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5 is necessary to be considered for admission to the Dietetics major in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, it does not guarantee admission. Admission decisions are based primarily on cumulative University grade-point average.”

We hope that this additional information will be sufficient to for the committee to better understand our rationale for the GPA cut-point and what we hope to accomplish. A GPA cut-point of 2.5 was selected for all of the reasons mentioned above, and even though we might obtain a larger reduction in student numbers overall if we asked for a higher GPA, we were trying to be as inclusive as possible to benefit the maximum possible students. We are looking forward to hearing the outcome of this second request.