

Harper College
Survey of Dietetic Technician Graduates

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Introduction

In January 2008, Harper students that received dietetic technician degrees between FY03 and FY07 were asked to complete an online survey regarding their employment status and feedback on the Dietetic Technician Program. Twenty-nine graduates were surveyed and seventeen completed surveys were received for a response rate of 58.6%.

The report is organized into an Introduction, a Results and Discussion Section that presents the results from the survey, and a Summary Section. Verbatim comments from the survey are presented in Appendix A.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Employment of DIT Graduates

Are you employed as a Dietetic Technician? (N=17)	n	%
Yes, in a hospital	2	11.8
Yes, in a long-term care facility	4	23.5
Yes, in a wellness center/community program	0	0.0
Yes, in a school	0	0.0
Yes, in another facility	1	5.9
I'm not employed as a Dietetic Technician	7	41.2
I'm unemployed	3	17.6
If you're employed but NOT as a Dietetic Technician, then what is the ONE BEST reason why: (N=7)		
Preferred to work in another field	1	14.3
Found better paying job in another field	1	14.3
Could not find a job in my field of preparation	1	14.3
Worked previously in my field of preparation but changed	1	14.3
Other	3	42.9

Regarding employment, 41 percent of the respondents stated that they were not employed as a dietetic technician, while 24 percent indicated that they were dietetic technicians employed in long-term care facilities. Another 18 percent stated that they were unemployed, but there was no general trend to indicate the reasons why these respondents were unemployed.

Table 2: Preparation of Dietetic Technicians

How did Harper's Dietetic Technician program prepare you to practice as an entry-level Dietetic Technician? (N=17)	n	%
Very prepared	9	56.3
Somewhat prepared	7	43.8
Not very prepared	0	0.0
Not prepared at all	0	0.0
Not applicable	1	

All respondents to this question indicated being prepared to practice as an entry-level dietetic technician after graduating from Harper's Dietetic Technician Program, including a majority of the respondents (56%) that reported being very prepared.

Table 3: Dietetic Technician Classification

Are you a Dietetic Technician, Registered (DTR)? (N=17)	n	%
Yes	7	41.2
No	3	17.6
Have not taken the DTR exam	7	41.2
If YES, when did you take the DTR exam? (N=6)		
Within 6 months of graduation	5	83.3
Between 6 months and 1 year of graduation	1	16.7
If you have NOT taken the DTR exam, why not? (N=8)		
I have little or not time to take the exam	1	12.5
Not prepared/ready to take the exam	1	12.5
I have been out of school for too long	0	0.0
Continued my education to four-year status	1	12.5
I am planning on taking the exam soon	2	25.0
Exam not needed for my current job	3	37.5

The same number of respondents (41% each) indicated that they were a registered dietetic technician (DTR) or that they have not taken the DTR exam. Of the respondents that received DTR status, a clear majority (83%) took the DTR exam within six months of graduation. Of the respondents that have not taken the DTR exam, 38 percent reported that the exam was not needed for their current job and 25 percent reported that they will be taking the exam soon.

Table 4: Educational Status of Graduates

Have you pursued a four-year degree since leaving Harper? (N=16)	n	%
Have not been enrolled in a college/university since leaving Harper	8	50.0
Have been enrolled in a four-year school, but am not currently enrolled	0	0.0
Currently enrolled in a four-year school related to my program at Harper	2	12.5
Currently enrolled in a four-year school in an unrelated program	1	6.3
Have completed a four-year degree	5	31.3

Half of the respondents to this question have not been enrolled in college since leaving Harper, while 31 percent went on to complete a four-year degree.

Table 5: Dietetic Technician Classification

Are you a member of any professional/community organizations of which you are a member? (N=17)	n	%
Yes	8	47.1
No	9	52.9

Respondents were split regarding their membership in professional or community organizations; 53 percent were not a member while 47 percent were members of professional organizations.

Summary

In January 2008, an online survey was e-mailed to 29 Harper graduates (FY2003 to FY2007) with dietetic technician degrees. After two e-mail notices to these graduates from the program coordinator, 17 completed surveys were received resulting in a 58.6% response rate.

An equal number of respondents (41% each) reported that they either were or were not employed as a dietetic technician; 24 percent of the respondents indicated working as dietetic technicians in long-term care facilities and 12 percent indicated working in hospitals. All respondents reported being prepared for an entry-level dietetic technician position after graduating from Harper's Dietetic Technician Program, including a majority of respondents (56%) that reported being very prepared to work in the field.

An equal number of respondents (41% each) indicated that they either were a registered dietetic technician (DTR) or have not taken the DTR exam; nearly all of the graduates that received DTR status (83%) took the DTR exam within six months of graduation. Of the respondents that have not taken the DTR exam, 38 percent reported that the exam was not needed for their current job and 25 percent reported that they plan to take the exam soon. Regarding educational status, half of the respondents indicated that they have not enrolled in college since leaving Harper, while 31 percent reported that they have obtained a four-year degree. Respondents were split when indicating whether they were members of professional or community organizations; 53 percent were not while 47 percent of the respondents reported that they were members of professional organizations.

Appendix A
Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Have you pursued a four-year degree since leaving Harper?

Survey ID Q4major

- 14 Associate of Applied Science Degree in Le Cordon Bleu Pâtisserie and Baking
- 15 Hospitality
- 16 Dietitian

Please list any professional/community organizations of which you are a member.

Survey ID Q5org

- 4 The Bridge Youth and Family Services of Palatine
- 5 American Dental Hygienist Association
- 6 ADA and IDA
- 9 ADA, Illinois Dietetic Association, North Suburban Dietetic Association, West Suburban Dietetic Association.
- 11 American Dietetic Association
- 12 ADA, Dietary Managers Association
- 13 ADA
- 15 American Dietetic Association & Illinois Dietetic Association

What areas would you suggest that we improve or emphasize within the Dietetic Technician program at Harper to help our graduates get jobs in the future?

Survey ID Q6

- 1 Emphasize - Wellness based classes, Wellness Marketing, Better qualified teachers. Teachers have great job related qualifications, however not always skilled when transitioning to classroom setting.
- 5 I thought the program prepared us well to transition from student to professional. Although I chose a different career, I felt confident with my knowledge and skills to work in the field. I use my dietetics knowledge as a dental hygienist everyday.
- 6 More prep for the DTR exam. From what I have heard from others that have taken it is that they haven't passed it yet and it has stuff on there that we didn't use in practice at the facilities we interned at. I feel like there should have been a prep course on the exam and perhaps more of a focus on medications than there was. I am afraid to take the exam because it costs so much and how do they expect us to pay for it when we have no job, just got out of school and have a crap load of tuition bills.
- 7 Include higher level Bio classes, it will help students better. Improve the clinicals...most of the time the facilities find students as a burden and want to get away with us. Some that I went were really good, but I had some hard time at other facilities that I refuse to mention. Only when students get ample training in clinicals will they feel confident to go out and get a job.
- 8 I felt the program showed the diversity available in the field.

- 9 1. Restructure program to provide more credits that could be transferred to a 4-year school for dietetic students that wish to go on to the RD, as I feel DTR positions are increasingly disappearing. Actively seek students who want to pursue a career in dietetics and show them they can start at Harper, and transfer later to finish the RD. 2. Increase marketing of the Dietary Manager's program to reach potential dietary managers who live and work in the area to increase enrollment in that part of the DT program. My recent experience and observation suggest that the DTR is a dying breed. The ADA has provided little support of the group in recent years and is rumored to be moving to do away with the certification. Major corporations that provide food and nutrition support to hospitals and long-term care facilities are employing RD's exclusively. I feel that the DTR certification will have little marketability in the near future. My experience at Harper in the DTR program was a very good one, but unfortunately the market is changing.
- 10 Push to broaden the opportunities outside of the usual hospital/nursing home. Where are the jobs in disease prevention; teaching people how to eat properly to avoid hospitals/nursing homes?
- 11 Overall, I really enjoyed the program and my Harper experience. I have a Master's in another field, and I was impressed with most of the faculty at Harper. However, there were a few of my dietetics classes that I felt could have had better instructors. Some I felt could have been more rigorous (food science class being one of them). The clinical portion of the program was a mixed experience, with some facilities being great learning experiences, and others a waste of time. I would recommend a clinical rotation in a school for a different take on the dietetics experience.
- 12 Encourage them to volunteer at facility levels in food and nutrition department. Work in the field while attended school.
- 14 More hands-on training.
- 15 I think that it would of helped me to have a sit down study group, or class for the DT exam. I was not well prepared enough when I took the exam on my first try.
- 16 Preparing for DTR exam!

What areas would you suggest that we improve or emphasize within the Dietetic Technician program at Harper to encourage our graduates to take the DTR exam?

Survey ID Q7

- 1 Give practice exam every semester so students become comfortable with test and have a better idea of questions asked.
- 4 At one point just before graduating there was an exam to see how prepared we were. I did not do well on it and believe that much of the information asked on the exam was not covered in the classes I had taken.
- 5 I think if students felt more confident going into the exam, more students would take it. A comprehensive review would probably boost confidence. Each week leading up to the exam or graduation, review sessions could be available for each class that was previously taken to review key concepts. This also give students the opportunity to ask questions regarding areas they feel weak in. I hope this helps.
- 6 See above.
- 7 DTR exam must be made as a part of the curriculum. They must be taken even before the students graduate.
- 8 Speak openly about higher pay level, importance of credentials, and seeming more qualified to potential employers.
- 9 1. Offer a workshop in test-taking skills. 2. Provide a simulated DTR test-taking experience before graduation. 3. Provide a mentor program for one-on-one encouragement for grads to take the exam soon after graduation.
- 10 Demonstrate why the exam is important. Doesn't seem to carry much weight.

- 11 I took the exam within three months of graduating, as that was my goal. It needs to be emphasized that in this employment market, a credential is helpful and even essential to let employers know that you are at a certain level of expertise. My first and current employer really wanted a DTR, and eliminated those who were not, even though they had job experience in the field that I did not have. There could also be a better meshing (this is just a wish) with the ADA of how to turn the DTR into an RD. Right now it is really impossible for people who have switched careers to pursue an RD credential. The programs are just not user friendly. If Harper could offer a four year program, I would sign up in a minute!
- 12 More hands on experience in working in the profession while attending school. Practice exams and study groups for different areas of the exam involving the teachers at Harper in the study groups. Maybe a different set of study groups for 2 hours on a Saturday in different areas on the exam. Students will have the freedom to attend those they feel they need more knowledge in prior to the exam.
- 15 I suggest to take the exam as soon as you can while the information is fresh in your mind. The longer a person waits, it will be much more difficult to pass. I continued my education, which didn't help, & my mind was sidetracked.