

MSACN PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

Program Overview

The Master of Science in Applied Clinical Nutrition (MSACN) is a comprehensive graduate degree program designed to support the complete didactic and clinical education needs of students who wish to earn the Certified Nutrition Specialist® credential. The program transforms students who are passionate about nutrition into leaders and healers in the field of clinical nutrition. Students gain the professional skills and the clinical experience necessary to develop and implement effective and evidence-based nutrition related services to support individual and public health. The innovative and 100% online curriculum has been developed with input from experts and thought leaders in the field of nutrition.

Like the MSCN program, the MSACN trains students in nutritional sciences, self-care, whole food nutrition, and the responsible use of dietary supplements while also covering emerging topics such as nutrigenomics and microbiomics. With a special emphasis on personalized nutrition, students will be uniquely qualified to deliver care to diverse populations with an appreciation of socioeconomic and cultural considerations that can impact health access and outcomes. Additionally, the program includes a novel Virtual Health Center Experience where students practice applying new skills and knowledge safely in a virtual training environment. While the MSCN program ends there, the MSACN program continues with an additional six-month clinical practicum, the Applied Clinical Training Experience. This ensures that upon graduation, MSACN graduates not only meet the academic requirements to sit for the CNS® exam but also the complete 1,000 hour Supervised Practice Experience requirements for the CNS® credential. Sonoran University is proud to be the first university to offer a master's degree program that meets 100% of the didactic and clinical training requirements for the CNS® credential.

MSACN students also participate in novel Interprofessional Education experiences as part of their core curriculum, so graduates have advanced training in how to work effectively as part of a health care team. Overall, MSACN graduates will be prepared for success in private clinical practice and in integrative practices, community health, or corporate settings.

The program also introduces students to innovative ways to leverage their training from developing a telemedicine practice to becoming an entrepreneur in the multi-billion-dollar natural foods and dietary supplement industry. In addition to their MSACN degree, opportunities to earn industry specific certifications are embedded within the curriculum including a *Certificate in the Principles of Nutritional Genomics* from the American Nutrition Association, which helps graduates further distinguish themselves in their field.

Program Mission

The MSACN program educates and inspires the next generation of leaders and practitioners in the field of clinical nutrition to use evidence-based practices to safely, ethically, and effectively enhance the health and well-being of the people and communities they serve. Incorporating a clinical practicum, the MSACN program advances graduates' development as competent and caring practitioners of personalized nutrition.

Program Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the MSCN program, graduates will be able to:

1. Utilize knowledge of nutritional sciences to describe the relationship between nutrients and human health and disease.
2. Apply clinical nutrition knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices to support effective and evidenced-based care of clients.
3. Apply critical thinking and analytical skills in the review of nutrition-related scientific literature and in the nutritional evaluation and management of clients.
4. Demonstrate professional leadership and communication skills to cultivate collaboration and effective outcomes in the practice of clinical nutrition.
5. Demonstrate ethics and professionalism in client care, in practice management, and in interactions with all other professionals.
6. Utilize skills for scholarship and lifelong learning to remain current in the field of clinical nutrition.
7. Demonstrate, through a clinical practicum, the ability to provide effective, compassionate, and evidence-based personalized nutrition care to clients that is appropriate for supporting the management of illness and the promotion of health.

Scope of Practice

Requirements for the practice of nutrition vary from state to state (and country to country), with a wide range of certification types available. According to the American Nutrition Association (2024), Certified Nutrition Specialists® (CNSs) can practice some level of personalized nutrition counseling in forty-six of the fifty-three US jurisdictions (including DC, Guam, and Puerto Rico). Nineteen of these states have a licensure or certification pathway for CNSs. CNSs are currently unable to practice in seven states. Arizona remains the only state without any regulation of nutrition or dietetics. For current updates on state laws, we recommend students visit the American Nutrition Association's website and/or contact the licensure board for the state in which they plan to practice.

Graduates of the MSACN program may wish to work as clinicians in private or integrative practice settings, while others may wish to work as consultants, writers, educators, or business leaders in the food, supplement, or natural products industry. Others may opt to go on to earn a PhD or a clinical doctoral degree. The MSACN program may also supplement students' existing clinical training/credentials with expertise and an advanced degree in nutrition.

Certification

Sonoran University's MSACN program has been developed to meet the eligibility requirements of several national board certifications, most notably the Certified Nutrition Specialist® (CNS). Before qualifying for CNS certification, the Board for Certification of Nutrition Specialists (BCNS) requires a graduate degree in the field of nutrition from a regionally accredited university, specific coursework, a passing grade on the CNS examination, and 1,000 hours of Supervised Practice Experience (SPE).

Sonoran University's MSACN program fulfills the didactic requirements to sit for the CNS certification exam offered through the BCNS. The MSACN's Virtual Health Center Experience and Virtual Grand Rounds have also been vetted by the BCNS and approved for CNS candidates to earn 349 SPE hours (250 hours observational; 99 hours direct) and meet the required competencies for the SPE. Students in the MSACN program are able to complete the remaining 651 SPE hours through the program's practicum, the Applied Clinical Training Experience.

When candidates apply for their CNS credential, the BCNS reviews each candidate individually, including current course descriptions,

transcripts, and experience to determine eligibility. The American Nutrition Association's website offers detailed information about becoming a CNS.

The CNS credential is the most frequent, non-RD credential recognized in state nutrition regulations and is:

- The only non-dietetics credential and examination widely named in state nutrition licensure laws
- Listed by the U.S. Department of Labor as an advanced nutrition credential in the definition of the "Dietetics and Nutritionists" profession in its Occupational Outlook Handbook
- Listed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid as among those potentially eligible to order therapeutic diets in hospitals
- Fully accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA)

Private professional associations awarding nutrition credentials currently recognized by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies include:

- Board for Certification of Nutrition Specialists (BCNS)
- American Clinical Board of Nutrition (ACBN)
- Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR)

Both BCNS and CDR are recognized by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in its Occupational Handbook definition of Dietitians and Nutritionists. The MSACN program prepares students to sit for the BCNS exam. It does not prepare students to sit for the CDR exam.

Since certifying organizations may change eligibility requirements, students are advised to contact the appropriate board with any questions and to verify eligibility. Students are advised to also review licensing requirements by state for the most up-to-date information.