

# MSCN PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

## Programs Overview

The Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition (MSCN) degree program transforms students who are passionate about nutrition into leaders and healers in the field of clinical nutrition. Students gain the professional knowledge, skills, and behaviors 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. The MSCN 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. Additionally, the program includes a novel Virtual Health Center Experience where students practice applying new skills and knowledge safely in a virtual training environment.

Graduates will be prepared for success in private clinical practice or to be employed 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 MSCN degree, opportunities to earn industry-specific certifications are embedded within the curriculum to help students increase their competence and further distinguish themselves in their field.

## Program Mission

To educate and inspire 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.

## 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 literature and 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, practice management, and interactions with all other professionals.
6. Utilize skills for scholarship and lifelong learning to remain current in the field of clinical nutrition.

## 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. Currently, the state of Arizona has no regulation for dietetics and nutrition practice. There is currently no licensure law in this state outlining restrictions and/or regulations for the field of nutrition.

Graduates of the MSCN 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 MSCN program may also supplement students' existing clinical training/credentials with expertise and an advanced degree in nutrition.

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 unable to practice in seven states at this time. 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 (<https://theana.org/advocate/>) and/or contact the licensure board for the state in which they plan to practice.

## Certification

Sonoran University's MSCN 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 MSCN program fulfills the didactic requirements to sit for the CNS certification exam offered through the BCNS. The MSCN'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.

Sonoran University also offers a postgraduate self-paced, telehealth-based SPE Program to support graduates in meeting the remaining SPE hours. When candidates apply for their CNS credential, the BCNS reviews each candidate individually, including current course descriptions, transcripts, and experience to determine eligibility. To learn more about becoming a CNS, visit the American Nutrition Association's website (<https://theana.org/certify/CNScandidate/>).

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 MSCN 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.