Evidence-Based Nutrition Practice Guidelines and Toolkits: Located in the Evidence Analysis Library, these guidelines provide disease-specific nutrition recommendations using a systematic approach that assures nutrition care is based on scientific evidence. Toolkits accompany the guidelines and provide Medical Nutrition Therapy tools used for documenting patient encounters and collecting outcomes.

Educational Resources Center for Professional Development: The premier choice for lifelong learning, the Center for Professional Development offers conferences, workshops, meetings, lectures, live phone teleseminars and webinars, e-learning, CD-ROM and online courses, and audiotapes. ADA’s professional development opportunities are easily accessed through the Center under the Professional Development tab on the Member section of eatright.org.

Leadership Institute: ADA’s Leadership Institute is an integrated, intensive, multiformat training program in the theory and practice of leadership in dietetics. The purpose of the program is to enhance the leadership competencies of ADA members both conceptually and interpersonally, through a combination of information, skill development, and practice-based educational experiences.

Free Online Journal Continuing Professional Education (CPE): Since January 2008, ADA members have been able to easily complete their Journal CPE quizzes online at www.eatright.org. See which quizzes you’ve already completed and take one that’s still available to complete for credit. Quizzes are scored automatically online, and once all questions are answered correctly, CPE credit for completed quizzes may be added directly to your Professional Development Portfolio.

### Establishing a Peer Advising Program for Undergraduate Dietetic Students: An Account from Arizona State University

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**Introduction**

Ensuring the success of our dietetic students often drives our daily work routines and activities. Regrettably, important student success initiatives often get placed on the back burner due to a lack of time, money, and personnel. Fortunately, there may be an untapped resource that you and your colleagues may be inadvertently overlooking. Hint: they are sitting directly across the desk from you.

A handful of your dietetics students may already be answering phones, stuffing envelopes, and filing paperwork as paid “student workers” within your office, but what if the scope of their duties could be expanded and their pay lines eliminated? Does this sound too good to be true? It gets better. What if these students simultaneously accrued skills and experience that may ultimately help them to become more helpful, nurturing, and empathetic dietitians? Enter the peer advising program.
What is peer advising?
Broadly understood, a peer advising program extends the reach of professional faculty and staff academic advisors by enabling peer to peer advising experiences. These student-to-student academic advising encounters are based not only on academic, but also personal, experiences of dietetic students. Additionally, peer advisors may be the first point of contact for incoming college students and often assist first-year students in making the transition from high school to the university by sharing their strategies for academic success and knowledge of campus resources. Dietetic peer advisors foster student success and enhance student learning and development by being available to students and forming valuable relationships within their peer groups.

Collegiate Nutrition departments, units, or advising offices may have one or several students participate in an unpaid peer advising experience. Peer advisors often work in collaboration with professional academic advisors to assist dietetic students within the department advising or student services office. During the academic year, peer advisors often maintain regular office hours in their academic units and assist other students in selecting courses to best fit their academic major and career paths. Peer advisors may also share information about dietetic program resources and opportunities, and ultimately help their peers adjust to the stress typically associated with many dietetic programs of study.

More specifically, dietetic peer advisors are often able to help their peers review the importance of course prerequisites; clarify faculty expectations for specific courses; understand the process of applying for and securing a Dietetic Internship; explore dietetic career options and graduate programs; and become acquainted with dietetic-related clubs and organizations. Peer advisors may also participate in orientation programs; phone and email student outreach campaigns; and residential community activities. Peer advisors may also assist with administrative advising functions, such as managing student inquiry triage, scheduling advising appointments, and maintaining open lines of communication on nutrition advising web pages, blogs, Twitter feeds, and Facebook pages. Finally, peer advisors may also be expected to complete an academic assignment, often reflective in nature, related to their internship experience.

What do the peer advisors gain?
While some peer advising program facilitators elect to provide a financial stipend to their participating students, programs may also be successfully carried out as an academic exercise resulting in variable credit (either as an independent study, supervised project, or special topic omnibus course). For example, peer advisors within Arizona State University’s Dietetic program are awarded academic credit in exchange for their efforts. Credit hours earned are based upon the number of clock-hours per semester that each peer advisor spends on dietetics and advising-related initiatives.

Additionally, students who engage in educationally purposeful activities outside of the formal classroom setting, such as a Dietetic peer advising experience, might realize gains in cognitive and intellectual skill development (Anaya, 1996; Baxter Magolda, 1992); college adjustment (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999); moral and ethical development (Evans, 1987; Rest, 1993); practical competence and skills transferability (Kuh, 1995); and the accrual of social capital, psychological development, and self identity (Harper, 2004). Furthermore, peer advisors may gain valuable experience working in a professional office setting; exposure to the rewarding career paths available within dietetics education; professional references and letters of recommendation upon successful completion of the experience; opportunities to hone public speaking and interpersonal communication skills; and an ability to quickly assess situations and make appropriate individualized suggestions.

How does it work?
Establishing a dietetic peer advising program may be a tremendously rewarding and fruitful exercise. In order to get started, we recommend taking the following sequential actions:

Create the appropriate course and identify a faculty or staff member to supervise the peer advisor(s). You may need to create and submit a proposal to establish an appropriate omnibus course prefix and number for your peer advisors to enroll in. Oftentimes, the course will also need to have enrollment restrictions in place so that the general student body may not inadvertently enroll. You may also need to identify a faculty or staff advisor who will have coordinating responsibilities for peer advisor activities within your unit.

Recruit and interview candidates. If you do not already have potential dietetic peer advisor candidates in mind, you may need to forge a
recruitment campaign to advertise the peer advising opportunity to your Nutrition student population. In doing so, you may find the following sample advertisement verbiage helpful:

• Would you like to become a student leader within the Nutrition Department?

• Do you want to build your professional portfolio with skills suited to all types of careers?

• Do you have an interest in working with incoming and current nutrition students, helping them to choose classes and become more integrated into the university’s Nutrition community?

• If so, you are the ideal candidate to become a Dietetic Peer Advisor!

Choose your peer advisor(s). Peer advisors should be selected based upon their genuine interest in helping their peers adapt to the academy and succeed while in school. Applicants should be in good academic standing and demonstrate success as students. These students should also be able to set realistic goals for themselves and others. When “hiring” dietetic peer advisors, program coordinators at ASU seek students who have at least 24 credit hours completed, a minimum 3.3 (overall) GPA, the ability to serve as a role model for dietetics students, and students who maintain a positive and professional disposition.

Get started with your new dietetic peer advisor. Once “hired,” the coordinating faculty or staff advisor should schedule an initial meeting to introduce the syllabus (see Table 1 on page 15), or learning contract, register for the established course, and begin the dietetic peer advisor training process. Training peer advisors should be a collaborative effort and may include utilizing online instruction techniques, in-person training, and ongoing developmental activities. Typically, peer advisors rigorously train and gain experience in academic advising strategies before beginning their work as peer advisors in earnest. ASU’s training curriculum prepares dietetic peer advisors to manage issues related to academic advising and enables them to obtain a wide knowledge of campus resources available to students, such as career services, disability services, financial aid, housing, and the academic resource center.

Since the dietetic peer advising experience is typically facilitated as a graded course, we recommend that you ask your peer advisors to keep a log of their efforts, projects, and outcomes as the academic term progresses. It may also be useful to ask your peer advisor to share their personal and professional goals. Together, you and your student should list objectives of the peer advising experience and collaboratively identify ways in which these goals may be accomplished.

Dietetic peer advisor(s) may also need to complete the institution’s Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) training and sign a corresponding release form. It is important to note that students may be permitted access to the records of other students on a “need to know” basis. In other words, the dietetic peer advisors are essentially acting as agents of the institution by providing a service to their peers on behalf, or under the supervision, of a professional faculty or staff advisor.

Are you ready to tap your previously untapped peer advising resource and start moving your student success initiatives from the back to the front burner? If so, we hope that your dietetic peer advisors will gain skills and experience within your new peer advising program and ultimately become more helpful, nurturing, and empathetic dietitians. Let the peer advising begin!

Additional resources
Other peer advising programs at ASU:
http://uc.asu.edu/explorers/advisors.html
http://wpcarey.asu.edu/undergraduate/current-students/student-life/peer-advisors.cfm

National peer advising program exemplars:
http://advisingservices.ucdavis.edu/advising/peer/
http://www.college.upenn.edu/advising/peer.php

References


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**Table 1 Peer Advising Syllabus Sample:**

**NTR 499 - Peer Advisor Syllabus**

**Instructor:** Slim Jim  
**Contact Info:** slim.jim@asu.edu // 555-555-5555

**Course Description:**  
The purpose of NTR 499 Peer Advisor Training is to prepare students for their role in assisting Nutrition, Exercise and Wellness, and Health Sciences (NEWHS) students with advising needs under the supervision of a college Academic Advisor. This class will provide an opportunity for students to enhance general presentation, counseling, and advising skills as well as become proficient in course registration/requirements procedures for both ASU and the College of Nursing and Health Innovation. Students will be given the opportunity to shadow and participate in advising sessions with professional Academic Advisors (with the advisee’s consent), and reflect upon their experiences in the course through writing and dialogue.

**Course Goals:**
- Enhance presentation, advising, and counseling skills
- Learn and properly execute the fundamentals of both ASU’s and the College of Nursing and Health Innovation’s course registration processes
- Understand and effectively communicate critical tracking and other graduation requirements
- Gain confidence in speaking in front of a group
- Develop a positive and professional manner when interacting with students, parents, faculty, and staff
- To learn and impart the tools of registration and academic success to incoming students

**Assignments:**  
All assignments must be turned in by the beginning of the course session at which they are due. Arrangements for extensions can be made only in advance of the due date. Course grades will be assigned based on a 200 point scale.

**Attendance and Participation:** (55 points) Attendance and participation in NTR 499 is crucial to becoming a successful Peer Advisor.

**Student Interview Project:** (80 points total)  
You will seek out and collect specific student stories for each of our programs to be highlighted on our Web site. We are looking for how students are transformed by their attendance at our college.

**Evaluations:** (45 points total; 15 points each)  
Students will receive three evaluations one after their first mock advising session, the second after orientation programs have begun and the third commencing at the end of the course. Evaluations will be based on the student’s performance, primarily focusing on the student’s skill acquisition and execution.

**Reflections:** (20 points total; 10 points each)  
Students will engage in reflective writing throughout the peer advising experience. These 2 – 3 page reflections are designed to capture feelings, fears, questions and comments about training, the program and the position in general. More specific topics will be issued as the reflections come due. The final reflection should also incorporate a section on the student’s reflection on the experience as a whole and improvements for the future of the program.