

UNIVERSITY  
OF WYOMING

**G**raduate  
**P**rogram in  
**N**utrition and  
**D**ietetics

## **PRECEPTOR HANDBOOK**

University of Wyoming

Graduate Program in Nutrition and Dietetics (GPND)

*Updated April 2026*

The University of Wyoming is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution. Persons seeking admission, employment, or access to programs of the University of Wyoming shall be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, gender, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, or political belief.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE GPND DIRECTOR

Jeff Gilis, MS, RDN

Jeff Gilis obtained a Master of Food and Nutrition degree from Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, OH and completed the Human Nutrition Dietetic Internship program through The Ohio State University in Columbus, OH. He has been a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist since 2013. Prior to becoming a full-time faculty member at the University of Wyoming, he was a full-time faculty member for five years at the University of Northern Colorado in the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics. As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Jeff has practiced in clinical inpatient and outpatient, community, and sports nutrition settings. Prior to becoming a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Jeff was a Certified Personal Trainer through the National Council on Strength and Fitness.

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## ACCREDITATION

Program accreditation is necessary because dietetics is a unique profession that requires a defined educational process based on established national standards. The accreditation process requires a detailed description of how a specific program meets the national educational standards and an on-site evaluation by accreditation reviewers. The process is completed every seven years and is undertaken by:

The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)  
of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
120 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 2190  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
Phone: (800) 877-1600 ext. 5400

ACEND is responsible for setting the national standards and for evaluating, recognizing, and publishing the list of programs that meet these standards. The GPND at UW is a candidacy program in Cohort 4 for the Future Education Model Graduate Program (FEM-GP).

A link to the ACEND accreditation standards that the GPND complies with, abides by, and is governed by can be found [here](#).

## PROGRAM MISSION

The mission of the GPND at the University of Wyoming is to equip graduates with the knowledge, skills, and experiential learning required to succeed as a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). We aim to prepare credentialed graduates to become proactive leaders who enhance the physical, social, and economic well-being of individuals, families, and rural communities. By promoting healthy and sustainable living across the lifespan, we uphold the values of lifelong learning, community engagement, and discovery, empowering graduates to contribute to sustainable systems in Wyoming and beyond.

Goal 1: To prepare program graduates to be successful in their career as professionals in nutrition and dietetics.

Goal 2: To prepare program graduates to participate in lifelong learning, leadership roles, and civic engagement.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The GPND length consists of 5 semesters (2 of which are Summer terms) and 1,120 Supervised Experiential Learning (SEL) hours. Total graduate course credits per semester and SEL hours are divided as follows. Included below each term is the course that will include SEL hours.

Semester 1 (Spring): 2 total graduate course credits; 165 SEL hours

- FCSC 5149: Foodservice Management & Leadership Experience; 2 credits; 165 SEL hours (On Site 10 hrs/week for a 15-week semester)

Semester 2 (Summer): 5 total graduate course credits; 275 SEL hours

- FCSC 5148: Community and Public Health Nutrition Experience; 5 credits; 275 SEL hours (On Site 24 hrs/week for a 10-week term)

Semester 3 (Fall): 9 total graduate course credits; 165 SEL hours

- FCSC 5240: Clinical Nutrition Experience I; 2 credits; 165 SEL hours (On Site 10 hrs/week for a 15-week semester)

Semester 4 (Spring): 9 total graduate course credits; 165 SEL hours

- FCSC 5250: Clinical Nutrition Experience II; 2 credits; 165 SEL hours (On Site 10 hrs/week for a 15-week semester)

Semester 5 (Summer): 6 total graduate course credits; 350 SEL hours

- FCSC 5260: Clinical Nutrition Experience III; 6 credits; 350 SEL hours (On Site 32 hrs/week for a 10-week term)

This program is an ACEND candidacy accredited Graduate Program that includes graduate coursework and the supervised experiential learning hours to be eligible to sit for the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist examination upon successful program completion.

## OUTCOME MEASURES

### ACEND-Required Program Objectives Aligned with Goal 1 (above)

1. At least 80% of program students will complete program/degree requirements within 2.25 years (150% of program length).
2. Of graduates who seek employment, at least 80% are employed in nutrition and dietetics or related fields within 12 months of graduation.
3. At least 80 percent of program graduates take the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists within 12 months of program completion.
4. The program's one-year pass rate (graduates who pass the registration examination within one year on first attempt) on the CDR credentialing exam for dietitian nutritionists is at least 80%. \*
5. At least 70% of employers who respond to the employer survey will rate graduate preparation for entry-level practice as average or higher.

### Additional Program Objectives Aligned with Goal 2 (above)

1. At least 40% of program graduates who respond to the Alumni Survey will indicate they have an advanced certification (e.g., board-certified specialist in sports dietetics, certified diabetes care, education specialist, etc.)
2. At least 40% of program graduates who respond to the Alumni Survey will indicate they are or have been preceptors for dietetics practice.
3. 30% or more of program graduates who respond to the Alumni Survey will hold leadership roles in a professional or community organization.
4. At least 60% or more of program graduates who respond to the Alumni Survey will indicate they participated in at least one community service activity during the past year.

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The GPND supports the University of Wyoming's official statements (below) relating to equal opportunity, discrimination, harassment, etc.

A campus environment characterized by diversity, free inquiry, and free expression and balanced by interpersonal civility has been, and continues to be, a top priority of the University of Wyoming. Civil discourse is an essential aspect of the search for and transmission of knowledge. Words and actions that promote and encourage self-worth, respect, and dignity are consistent with the University's mission.

Conversely, words or actions that reflect prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination are antithetical to the mission of the University and cannot be countenanced. Specifically, racist and other discriminatory or harassing conduct based on happenstance of birth, including but not limited to gender, color, disability, sexual orientation, religious preference, national origin, ancestry, or age, impair and disrupt legitimate University functions.

Every effort, within the context and protection of First Amendment rights, will be expended to eliminate such conduct from the campus community. Teaching our students to live productively in a multicultural/multiethnic society is a process that must take place within a constructive and harmonious multicultural/ethnic environment here at the University of Wyoming. It is the obligation of the faculty, staff, students, and the administration of the University of Wyoming to provide this environment.

Further information, as well as links to file a report, can be found at the following link: <https://www.uwyo.edu/reportit/eorr/index.html>.

## EXPECTATIONS OF PRECEPTORS

General expectations for preceptors include consistent and reliable communication with interns and with the GPND management team, if necessary. Preceptors are also expected to provide/create activities/experiences/etc. necessary to achieve the competencies provided by the GPND Director or Coordinator for that given rotation. Preceptors will be required to evaluate each student on each of the required competencies to be met at the given site/rotation. A form will be provided for this evaluation and will be expected to be completed and returned to the director or coordinator upon completion of the experience/rotation.

Optional bias training is provided in Appendix A of this document should any preceptor wish to participate. This is not a required training; however, it is encouraged if the preceptor is interested.

All preceptors are required to provide a copy of CDR credential, LD license, and/or other relevant professional licensure.

All preceptors are highly encouraged, but not required, to complete the complimentary Preceptor Training Program found at the following link (8 CPEUs are provided upon completion): <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/acend-training-and-volunteer-opportunities/preceptors-and-mentors/preceptor-training-program>.

Information provided by ACEND for preceptors can be found at this link, including CPEUs available for precepting: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/acend-training-and-volunteer-opportunities/preceptors-and-mentors>.

## EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

Students should serve as assistants and students to preceptors and should never be a drain on the preceptor's workflow. After a brief orientation, review of facility policies and procedures, and training specific to the site (charting, etc.), students are expected to function independently under supervision of the preceptor(s) while completing the SEL hours at each site. Students are expected to conduct themselves professionally at all times, including, but not limited to, adhering to dress code, site rules/regulations, maintaining consistent punctuality, communication, engagement, and active listening.

## COMMUNICATION

Regular communication between students, preceptors, and GPND leadership is expected. The GPND Director will check on student progress. For all SEL courses, there will be mandatory scheduled mid-semester teleconference meeting(s) with the instructor, preceptor, and student. GPND leadership is always happy to discuss SEL-related needs via phone or meet virtually to answer questions, clarify assignments, and monitor progress. Students at SEL sites are also expected to submit required feedback, didactic work, self-assessments, and preceptor evaluations in a timely manner. Students will be asked to evaluate the individual facilities, supervisors, the program director, faculty, and the GPND experience, in general. This evaluation is valued and considered vital in the process of improving and maintaining the program.

As a preceptor who is volunteering their time and asking little in return, please know that GPND leadership holds all students, faculty, and program graduates to a high standard. The GPND is a program that carries high expectations for its students, faculty, and graduates. Students are always expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Preceptors should never have to experience unprofessional behavior. The GPND extends zero tolerance for students who exercise rudeness in any type of correspondence or interaction with preceptors. Preceptors who receive disrespectful emails or unprofessional behavior from a GPND student should notify GPND program leadership immediately via email or phone. GPND program leadership will address the situation immediately.

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES RELATED TO AFFILIATION AGREEMENTS

### *Issuance of Agreements with SEL Sites*

UW will make every effort to obtain affiliation agreements with potential SEL sites. The GPND Director will work to ensure an appropriate representative from each site is provided with an opportunity to sign an affiliation agreement. In most cases, agreements are not required if the site is part of UW. In no instance are sites allowed to use students to replace employees. There will be no compensation as part of the GPND.

### *Selection Criteria for SEL Sites*

The GPND Director will select sites with preceptors willing and able to participate in educating future dietetics professionals. Sites will be considered for their potential to provide students with observational and/or hands-on experiences that are relevant to individual course content and align with course competencies.

### *Maintenance of Affiliation Agreements with SEL Sites*

Students will be given an opportunity to evaluate SEL sites at the end of the semester in which they participate in the rotation. The course instructor or GPND Director or Coordinator will communicate with the preceptor from the site at least once annually to assess the relevance of experiential learning activities. Student evaluations will be reviewed by the course instructor and GPND Director as needed after the semester is finished. The GPND Director will consider student feedback along with any significant changes in course content and/or learning resources at the sites when determining whether sites should be included in future semesters. Sites will no longer be used if the course instructor or GPND Director determines that a site no longer has adequate resources to participate in the education of UW dietetics students.

Proposed supervised experiential learning (SEL) facilities, both internal and external, will be initially evaluated by the GPND Director or other assigned program faculty member using the Facility Evaluation Form to determine the adequacy and appropriateness of the SEL facility. If the program is deemed adequate, the program director or assigned faculty member will evaluate the facility annually to ensure the facility continues to meet the required criteria to be a SEL facility. The affiliating institution's preceptor will coordinate with their facilities general counsel and the University of Wyoming office of general counsel to establish and or renew an affiliation agreement or memorandum of understanding. Internal facilities associated with the University of Wyoming do not require an affiliation agreement or memorandums of understanding (MOU). The University of Wyoming office of general counsel will review and issue an affiliation agreement or MOU. Signature Authority has been delegated pursuant to [UW Regulation 7-2: Signature Authority](#). Only those individuals who have been delegated authority can sign contracts, and those individuals are only allowed to sign after the office of general counsel approves contracts for signature. All affiliation agreements must include the rights and responsibilities of both the sponsoring organization and affiliating institutions, organizations, and or agencies. Affiliation agreements or an MOU must be signed by both the sponsoring organization and affiliating institution, organization, or agency prior to student placement at the facility. The program director will be responsible for tracking affiliation agreements expiration dates for external affiliating institutions and will contact the external institution's preceptor and legal department a year prior to the expiration to facilitate affiliation agreement contract renewal.

Agreements will remain in effect for the stated contract length; this may vary from three to ten years. Annual student placement at SEL sites will be dependent upon course enrollment, student preferences, course competencies, and other logistical considerations.

## STUDENT HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Per University & SEL site requirements, students are responsible for completing their Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR), Varicella, current Influenza, current COVID-19, Hepatitis B series, and current TDAP immunizations, as well as a current 2-step negative tuberculosis (TB) test. Students are also required to show record of vision screening for color blindness.

## PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE

Students are required to purchase professional liability insurance. Liability insurance is a requirement for our affiliation agreements for a majority of our SEL facilities; therefore, student liability insurance is required and needs to provide \$1,000,000/\$3,000,000 coverage. We recommend students purchase coverage through [Proliability](#).

## CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

All students are required to complete state and national background checks prior to starting at any SEL sites. The results of these background checks will be provided directly to the GPND Director. Should any issues arise within the results of these background checks, all pertinent information will be shared directly with the preceptor(s) at the SEL sites prior to students arriving on-site.

## DRUG TESTING

To meet all individual site requirements, students may be required to undergo drug testing. Students should clarify the type of screening needed with their preceptor, the volunteer coordinator, or the Human Resource Department of the specific site. If a student is taking a prescription medication that will show up on the screen (e.g., Ritalin), it is recommended to have the drug screening done at the physician's office so that they can verify the drug is prescribed under a doctor's care. Students will also need to clarify the time frame in which the testing should be completed.

## STAFF RELIEF

The educational purpose of supervised practice is implemented with the intention that students are not used to replace employees when the operation is short-staffed. While it is appropriate for preceptors to use a hands-on approach to familiarize students with the routine of the operation by having students shadow or work side-by-side with them, there must be potential knowledge or skills developed relative to the experience if this is the case. It is important to establish

expectations up front regarding the position of a student, rather than an employee. Please contact the program director should any issues arise.

## REMEDIATION

Students who do not meet a required program competency at the minimum of 73% or equivalent to a rating of 4-6 (meets expectations) on a 9-point Likert scale must continue to be onsite until the specified competency is completed.

Students who receive poor formative or summative performance assessment, remediation will be required. The program director, student, and preceptor will discuss areas of improvement and appropriate actions. Remediation is determined on a case-by-case basis. A variety of approaches will be used, depending on the need. Typical strategies include one-on-one meetings, additional time spent at a particular site, additional time spent in the didactic format, additional projects, case studies, assignments, and/or simulations. For students who do not meet competencies for all or part of an experience and require remediation, additional hours above and beyond the minimum requirement of 1,120 hours will be required.

## DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

For students who leave or are dismissed from a site prior to completing required competency or time at the site, the director is not responsible for replacing that site. For students who elect to refuse to comply with site requirements for any reason, the burden of replacing the site, preceptor, or completing SEL hours falls to the student. Students who are dismissed from a site due to disciplinary action relevant to the site are subject to additional disciplinary action relevant to the GPND's policies and procedures.

For students who fail to make the expected progress toward entry-level competence, who violate University or site requirements, who have not made the expected progress, or who have violated site or University policies may be terminated from the program.

## ATTENDANCE/ABSENCE/LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Students are advised that it is imperative that they are punctual for all rotations. Students are prohibited from regularly leaving a site before the end of their daily hours for personal reasons. This includes leaving the site early on a regular basis for work or other personal responsibilities. Students who violate this policy will be subject to a written warning, dismissal from the site, and/or removal of the program.

It is recognized that absence from work due to illness or other emergencies is sometimes unavoidable. In the event of delay or absence, students are asked to notify the preceptor before a shift begins and indicate when return is expected. Students must call each day they are unable to attend. The program director should be informed via email within 24 hours of the missed shift, but all preceptors should receive a phone call as soon as safely possible.

The learning experiences missed will have to be made up, depending on the competency involved. Make-up days should be arranged with the preceptor for that rotation and/or the program director. Frequent unexcused absences are grounds for potential dismissal from the GPND.

### INCLEMENT WEATHER

Students should exercise caution in hazardous conditions; however, students are expected to report to rotations in inclement weather. Policies for travel during weather emergencies may vary from county to county or state to state and may limit travel to only essential personnel, in which case, the student will not report to the site. When traveling in inclement weather, students should anticipate delays and prepare accordingly. Students are expected to contact the facility if a delay is expected and be prepared to make up any missed time. If bad weather is anticipated, it may be possible for the preceptor to give projects that can be worked on at home. Students are expected to make up any missed hours.

### PERSONAL DAYS/HOLIDAYS

Students are not expected to attend SEL sites during holidays or breaks observed by the University of Wyoming (i.e., any days where classes are not held). Students are expected to communicate this in advance of any holiday in question with preceptors.

Time off due to illness, other health issues, or family emergencies will need to be made up in the form of hours added beyond the usual ending date with preceptor approval.

This program is an accelerated 1.5-year program, that includes Summer terms, with didactic coursework and SEL each semester. Vacations must be scheduled during the breaks in the program (breaks before/after Summer courses, Winter Break, Spring Break). Observed holidays within academic semesters include Labor Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, Independence Day, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Leaves of absence are available in certain circumstances and with permission from the GPND Director and course instructor.

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRECEPTORS AND STUDENTS

Students are expected to maintain a professional relationship with preceptors and all other persons met and interacted with at a rotation site over the course of the entire rotation. As a manner of professionalism and personal safety, students are prohibited from any contact with preceptors or other individuals met through the rotation experience, including interactions off-site, interactions on-site after professional hours have ended, or any other situation outside of the professional realm. This includes email, cell phone, and social media use that is conducted for any reason beyond professional development. Students who violate this policy may be subject to immediate dismissal from the rotation site and/or the GPND. For students who violate this policy resulting in the dismissal of the rotation experience, the GPND Director will not be responsible for securing a replacement rotation site.

Similarly, should a preceptor violate any of the terms written above, their affiliation agreement with the GPND and their ability to supervise GPND students will be terminated immediately and indefinitely. Relationships with students throughout the duration of the rotation are expected to remain entirely professional in nature and romantic or otherwise personal relationships are not tolerated, acceptable, or considered professional conduct.

## PRIOR TO SCHEDULED SUPERVISED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING HOURS

Prior to the start of the rotation, preceptors should establish expectations regarding dress code, time at the facility, start time, location, lunch breaks, pre-rotation assignments, and other site-specific information. The program director will connect the student to the preceptor via email to allow for this communication to occur prior to starting the rotation. The program director, or other program staff, will also provide important paperwork to the preceptor, as needed.

## FIRST WEEK OF ROTATIONS

- Review competency forms, field notes, and assignment expectations. Students enter each rotation with varying levels of experience. Discussing potential sources of anxiety and strategies to overcome those concerns is helpful.
- Establish goals for assignment completion and discuss opportunities for students, including observing medical procedures, working with other key members in the organization's team, projects to be completed, and programming or presentations that will be developed and/or delivered, as applicable to the setting.
- Consider implementing the organization's new employee training process for new employees to orientate students. Some sites require training. If not, students should review the facility's policy and procedures manual. Students in all relevant locations

should know the emergency codes, sanitation and isolation procedures, and the use of the two identifiers before providing patient contact or care.

- Students typically begin by observing preceptors in the first few days, including patient assessment and charting techniques specific to the facility. Students generally benefit from hearing preceptors verbalize their thought process. As the preceptor, discuss the identified problem, the goal, and what you are looking for to determine if the student has questions.
- Consider helping students role-play your job, especially patient education and calculations. If time is limited, it may be more practical to allow the student to outline their strategy in detail rather than utilize role-play.

## SUBSEQUENT WEEKS OF ROTATIONS

- Have the student participate in education sessions by interviewing the patient for relevant information and observing them. Have them progress to providing education under your supervision.
- The case load should increase in either quantity or level of difficulty. Students also need to learn to prioritize their daily case load. Having them walk through the process is helpful.
- Typical targets: 4 assessments per day is beginning level. 8 assessments/follow-ups per day is entry level.
- Students will evaluate the nutritional status of individuals and groups using anthropometric, biochemical, and clinical indicators.

## USE OF TECHNOLOGY AT SEL SITES

Personal laptop or tablet: Preceptors should establish the expectation for personal laptop use at the start of the rotation and as needed. Appropriate use of a personal laptop or tablet during individual rotations will vary according to the site. Student access to site computers may be limited by log in restrictions and preceptors may have projects that will require computer use for research, handout development, or analysis. Preceptors may also allow students to work on journal entries or other assignments during downtime, however, requirements that are assigned by the preceptor while on site and completing the day's work takes priority over course-related work.

Cell phone use: Students are expected to keep cell phones on vibrate/silent at all times while onsite. The use of cell phones, text messaging, and other media formats is prohibited while working at a supervised practice site, except during designated break times. If there is a need to check for and/or receive a call, students must inform the preceptor in advance that an anticipated

call is expected. With preceptor approval, the student may excuse themselves to take an important call. Failure to adhere to this requirement may result in dismissal by the site.

Individual preceptors may allow use of electronic devices for work-related tasks, such as researching information not available in other resources, however, preceptor approval must be obtained before using devices for this purpose.

## TRAVEL TO/FROM SEL SITES

Students are responsible for providing their own transportation and assuming the costs of travel to and from assigned experiential learning sites. Students assume full liability for negligence or any incidents during travel. If students use a UW vehicle, pursuant to University policies, the University has liability for its negligence as long as policies are followed and the use is for official University purposes. Details on UW Vehicle Use can be found in the UW Vehicle Policy.

## DRESS CODE

Students are advised of the following:

Dress codes vary among facilities and ultimately are at the discretion of the preceptor. Casual dress that may be permissible on a college campus is not acceptable in any area of the work environment, which includes affiliations. For example, blue jeans or other jean type pants, yoga pants, cords, cargo pants, capri pants, shorts (casual or dress), midriff tops, open back tops, tube tops, bare shoulders, spaghetti straps, halter dresses, mini-skirts, and t-shirts are examples of unacceptable clothing types. Sundresses and open-toed shoes are also not acceptable. Sleeveless shirts, unless covered by a jacket, should also be avoided. Note that denim pants/jeans are not considered business casual in most settings. Students must obtain prior approval from the preceptor before wearing jeans/denim when reporting to sites. While preceptors may have additional guidelines, the following dress code protocol should be followed at all times:

- Jewelry should be restricted to a watch and wedding and/or engagement ring. Wearing earrings must comply with site policy.
- Hairnets/hats are generally required in the food production, receiving/storage, and food service areas, though, hair that is restrained may be acceptable depending on department policy or state law. Facial hair, if present, is to be neatly trimmed at all times and may not be permissible depending on site policy.
- Clean, white, or conservative color (beige, brown, or black) leather/faux leather shoes with closed-toes and heels are required – some facilities require that they indicate they are non-skid on the bottom. Thin platforms, high heels, wooden soles, or canvas tennis

shoes are unacceptable. Clean leather/faux leather or vinyl athletic shoes may be acceptable.

- Skirts or dresses must be no shorter than 2 inches above the knee.
- Open-toed shoes are typically not allowed. It is suggested that heeled shoes be no greater than 1 1/2" high and rubber-soled as hospital floors are highly polished and often slick.
- Nail polish, if allowed, should be neutral in color.
- Lab coats and scrubs are subject to each sites' guidelines and ultimately are at the discretion of the preceptor.
- Students should always display their program or site-issued nametag on the outside front of their shirt or lab coat/jacket.

## VERIFICATION OF PRECEPTOR HANDBOOK REVIEW

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (printed name), acknowledge that I have read and understand all of the content within this document and have had the opportunity to have any questions answered.

I agree, as a preceptor for the Graduate Program in Nutrition and Dietetics (GPND) at the University of Wyoming, that I will uphold the values, guidelines, policies, and procedures outlined in this document throughout the duration of my time as a preceptor.

I agree that should I not uphold the values, guidelines, policies, and procedures listed in this document, my affiliation with the University of Wyoming Graduate Program in Nutrition and Dietetics can and will be terminated.

I understand the expectations of preceptors, including adherence to policies and procedures related to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics for the Profession of Dietetics and agree to abide by them when precepting GPND students.

Preceptor Signature (electronic signature accepted):

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Date:

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Appendix A  
Optional Bias Trainings



### **Unconscious Bias and Microaggression Training for Preceptors**

*If you complete the following preceptor training, please indicate completion by checking the corresponding boxes under “Training” below. Please write your name and signature indicating your completion of this training.*

#### **Training**

- Take the unconscious bias self-quiz and grade your responses
- Watch the National Education Association [video on implicit bias](#)
- Read the article “How to Identify and Tackle Your Unconscious Biases” (below)
- Read the article “Test Yourself for Hidden Bias” (below)

#### **Additional Resources**

- [National Education Association](#) (NEA)
- [Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics](#) (ACEND)
- [Kirwan Institute](#)

Preceptor Name:

Signature:

Date of Completion:

# How to Identify and Tackle Your Unconscious Biases



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*No one wants to believe they have biases, but we all do, even if we don't realize it. So how do we confront them? Here, we learn about unconscious biases, plus how to recognize and disrupt them.*

**By Lora Korpar**

If you think you have no biases, you are wrong. Unconscious biases affect even the best people, taking root early and sticking as they age.

“Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing,” the [University of California at San Francisco](#) says.

We can't help but hold unfounded beliefs about different races, ethnicities, sexualities, genders, people with disabilities and other groups based on what we have learned all our lives. And these unconscious biases can impact how we treat others in the workplace.

However, we can fight unconscious biases. Though you might not have consciously learned the bias, you can work to dismantle it.

[Yvette Durazo](#) is a diversity, equity and inclusion specialist and a workplace relationship expert. [Misty D. Freeman, Ed.D.](#), is the director of special education for Houston County Schools and an equity coach who provides training on microaggressions and unconscious bias. [Kelly Charles-Collins](#) is an unconscious bias expert and keynote speaker advocating

for companies to create “safe, inclusive and accountable cultures that respect and embrace people's humanity.”

I spoke with Durazo, Freeman and Charles-Collins to examine why unconscious bias exists, how to recognize it in yourself, how to fight it and what steps we can take to make a more inclusive workplace.

## **How Unconscious Bias Happens**

Durazo and Charles-Collins say unconscious bias comes from a life's worth of experiences and assumptions.

“We're constantly creating meaning out of our experiences,” Durazo said. “Also, other people that influence us throughout our lives have in one way or another shaped our implicit bias.”

“We categorize people based on characteristics,” Charles-Collins added. “And when we make these snap judgments, it's our brain's way of reacting.”

Bias can be dangerous because it affects our behavior toward certain groups of people, Durazo said. In the workplace, this can occur in comments and microaggressions that pile up over time.

According to Freeman, examples of biased workplace comments could include telling a person of color you are surprised they speak English well or asking to touch their hair.

Charles-Collins added that unconscious biases also permeate the hiring process. For example, job postings written with gendered descriptions or recruiters could avoid ethnic-sounding names.

Biases can also go beyond ideas about groups of people. Charles-Collins cited an example of an attorney hiring for a big law firm who said they didn't look at resumes from people who went to specific colleges. Or you might make a snap judgment about a person's age based on whether they have a Gmail or an AOL email address.

“Sometimes we don't realize that we're behaving or thinking in a certain way that in reality doesn't go hand-in-hand with the experience that we have in front of us,” Durazo said.

## **Making an Unconscious Bias Conscious**

These biases, by definition, are under the surface, which makes them harder to identify. But it is possible to look inward and discover your unconscious biases.

Charles-Collins said the key is to take a moment and slow down your brain's split-second decisions after you meet or interact with people.

“The easiest thing is for people to take a deep breath, because when you just take that moment, what happens is that the conscious part of your brain gets engaged,” Charles-Collins said. “So when you turn off the instinctual part of your brain, then you can start to analyze.”

What are the attributes you first notice in people? It could be anything from their skin color or gender to how they dress or whether they are smiling. Once you have evaluated your thoughts, try to find patterns in the attributes you notice most in certain groups of people.

“There is something that catches our attention and then causes us to create stories about that particular person before we even have a conversation with them,” Charles-Collins said.

Durazo said another way to recognize your unconscious biases and the harm they might cause is to pay closer attention to your co-workers.

“Sometimes certain individuals don't have that social awareness and they say certain things and they don't realize that it didn't sit well with people around them,” Durazo said. “So it is important to have that inner and outer awareness in order to realize that, and then take responsibility for it and start shifting and changing the way that you communicate.”

## **Fighting Unconscious Bias**

Charles-Collins said all unconscious biases often can't be unlearned because we will continue to have more throughout our lives. However, we can disrupt the biases.

“A lot of people are aware of their biases, but they don't realize the impact of them,” Charles-Collins said. “So you have to be aware of the impact, then you can disrupt it. And what I mean by ‘disrupting’ is doing things consciously to make sure that even if you have that bias, it is not impacting people in a negative way.”

You can disrupt your biases by looking past an initial concern about a person and look deeper into their background. The most important thing is to refuse to use your bias to cause harm.

Freeman added that a good way to tackle a bias about someone’s culture is to be open to learning more about it.

“Sometimes sensitive subjects become offensive to others, and it shouldn't be that way,” Freeman said. “I think we should all be more receptive and willing to learn about different cultures and how they affect people and how they operate in the workplace.”

She said to view inclusivity as a strength because of the diverse perspectives it brings to the workplace.

“We're all unique, and I think that's what brings diversity, that's what brings unique ideas,” Freeman said. “But we have to be open and receptive to learning about different people.”

If you are the subject of someone else’s bias, Freeman, Durazo and Charles-Collins recommend having a conversation to inform the person that their words are hurtful.

“They're conversations that need to be had and make people aware that this is a microaggression and this is something that's insulting,” Freeman said. “And this is something that has a long-term effect on you whether or not you realize it, because over a long period of time, microaggressions can have a great, great effect.”

Charles-Collins recommends asking the person what they meant by the negative question or statement because they might have said it out of ignorance, not malice. Durazo said to use responses focused on how you feel to keep the conversation from feeling accusatory.

“Use it as a way to educate,” Charles-Collins said. “Say, ‘This is how it makes me feel, this is how I interpret what you're doing.’ One of the things that we have to learn to do is to engage in these dialogues instead of trying to get into a fight about it.”

However, if you believe the hurtful comment was intentional, Durazo suggests contacting a manager or human resources department to tackle the situation.

Also, Charles-Collins recommends asking yourself what you want to achieve from interactions with a co-worker who has said something offensive.

“You always have to think about what is the intention, what is my purpose in having this conversation, what is going to be my purpose in responding and when I respond, what do I hope to get out of that,” Charles-Collins said. “It will depend on what is happening, who you are and what's happening in your life that day.”

## **Creating a More Diverse Workplace**

Charles-Collins said lack of diversity and inclusion in workplaces is a symptom of our unconscious biases. So using the above methods to handle those biases will open managers to hire more diversely.

Freeman said diversity and inclusion should come from the top down, so she and Durazo suggested managers create a company culture that values these qualities.

“Right now, a lot of companies for the past two years [have been] bringing in consultants, talking about implicit bias and even training for that,” Durazo said. “But in reality, this is work that has to be an embedded part of the culture of the organization.”

“I think if the leaders at the top will take the time to create an inclusive environment, it will result in the environment being more open to having those kinds of conversations,” Freeman added.

Charles-Collins said practicing more inclusive hiring includes diverse hiring teams, doing blind resume reviews and being more receptive to the diverse voices already in your organization.

“Make sure that you don't just have people there as a number, but you really want to hear what they have to say and include them in conversation,” Charles-Collins said. “It's about making sure that when you bring people into an organization they are valued and they're heard.”

Durazo said improving communication is also vital. She said though companies might have unconscious bias training, they often don't receive training about tough conversations. She recommends companies provide more education on communication and conflict-management skills.

Freeman said that just being open to diverse hiring will help your organization thrive.

“Once you include diversity within the organization, it's kind of like a domino effect,” Freeman said. “If you have several diverse people with several diverse ideas, then the whole climate changes. Everyone's bringing something to the table that's different and that's going to be good for the company because everyone's unique. And when you have different ideas, you can't help but to flourish.”

## Top takeaways

### What to know about unconscious bias

- Unconscious biases are snap judgments we make about a group of people with a certain characteristic.
- Unconscious biases can take the form of microaggressions in the workplace.
- Look inward and slow down your thoughts to recognize the biases in your thought patterns.
- If a co-worker makes an unintentionally insensitive comment to you, have a conversation with them.
- Diversity is a strength, and our hiring processes should reflect that.

## TEST YOURSELF FOR HIDDEN BIAS

Psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia and the University of Washington created "Project Implicit" to develop Hidden Bias Tests—called Implicit Association Tests, or IATs, in the academic world—to measure unconscious bias.

### ABOUT STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES

Hidden Bias Tests measure unconscious, or automatic, biases. Your willingness to examine your own possible biases is an important step in understanding the roots of stereotypes and prejudice in our society.

The ability to distinguish friend from foe helped early humans survive, and the ability to quickly and automatically categorize people is a fundamental quality of the human mind. Categories give order to life, and every day, we group other people into categories based on social and other characteristics.

This is the foundation of stereotypes, prejudice and, ultimately, discrimination.

#### **Definition of Terms**

A *stereotype* is an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group—a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

A *prejudice* is an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive, but in our usage refers to a negative attitude.

Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred. Prejudices are formed by a complex psychological process that begins with attachment to a close circle of acquaintances or an "in-group" such as a family. Prejudice is often aimed at "out-groups."

*Discrimination* is behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

### **How do we learn prejudice?**

Social scientists believe children begin to acquire prejudices and stereotypes as toddlers. Many studies have shown that as early as age 3, children pick up terms of racial prejudice without really understanding their significance.

Soon, they begin to form attachments to their own group and develop negative attitudes about other racial or ethnic groups, or the "out-group". Early in life, most children acquire a full set of biases that can be observed in verbal slurs, ethnic jokes and acts of discrimination.

### **How are our biases reinforced?**

Once learned, stereotypes and prejudices resist change, even when evidence fails to support them or points to the contrary.

People will embrace anecdotes that reinforce their biases, but disregard experience that contradicts them. The statement "Some of my best friends are \_\_\_\_" captures this tendency to allow some exceptions without changing our bias.

### **How do we perpetuate bias?**

Bias is perpetuated by conformity with in-group attitudes and socialization by the culture at large. The fact that white culture is dominant in America may explain why people of color often do not show a strong bias favoring their own ethnic group.

Mass media routinely take advantage of stereotypes as shorthand to paint a mood, scene or character. The elderly, for example, are routinely portrayed as being frail and forgetful, while younger people are often shown as vibrant and able.

Stereotypes can also be conveyed by omission in popular culture, as when TV shows present an all-white world. Psychologists theorize bias conveyed by the media helps to explain why children can adopt hidden prejudices even when their family environments explicitly oppose them.

## **ABOUT HIDDEN BIAS**

Scientific research has demonstrated that biases thought to be absent or extinguished remain as "mental residue" in most of us. Studies show people can be consciously committed to egalitarianism, and deliberately work to behave without prejudice, yet still possess hidden negative prejudices or stereotypes.

"Implicit Association Tests" (IATs) can tap those hidden, or automatic, stereotypes and prejudices that circumvent conscious control. [Project Implicit](#)—a collaborative research effort between researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and University of Washington—offers dozens of such tests.

We believe the IAT procedure may be useful beyond the research purposes for which it was originally developed. It may be a tool that can jumpstart our thinking about hidden biases: Where do they come from? How do they influence our actions? What can we do about them?

### **Biases and behavior**

A growing number of studies show a link between hidden biases and actual behavior. In other words, hidden biases can reveal themselves in action, especially when a person's efforts to control behavior consciously flags under stress, distraction, relaxation or competition.

Unconscious beliefs and attitudes have been found to be associated with language and certain behaviors such as eye contact, blinking rates and smiles.

Studies have found, for example, that school teachers clearly telegraph prejudices, so much so that some researchers believe children of color and white children in the same classroom effectively receive different educations.

A now classic experiment showed that white interviewers sat farther away from Black applicants than from white applicants, made more speech errors and ended the interviews 25% sooner. Such discrimination has been shown to diminish the performance of anyone treated that way, whether Black or white.

Experiments are being conducted to determine whether a strong hidden bias in someone results in more discriminatory behavior. But we can learn something from even the first studies:

Those who showed greater levels of implicit prejudice toward, or stereotypes of, Black or gay people were more unfriendly toward them.

Subjects who had a stronger hidden race bias had more activity in a part of the brain known to be responsible for emotional learning when shown Black faces than when shown white faces.

### **Leading to discrimination?**

Whether laboratory studies adequately reflect real-life situations is not firmly established. But there is growing evidence, according to social scientists, that hidden biases are related to discriminatory behavior in a wide range of human interactions, from hiring and promotions to choices of housing and schools.

In the case of police, bias may affect split-second, life-or-death decisions. Shootings of Black men incorrectly thought to be holding guns—an immigrant in New York, a cop in Rhode Island—brought this issue into the public debate.

It is possible unconscious prejudices and stereotypes may also affect court jury deliberations and other daily tasks requiring judgments of human character.

People who argue that prejudice is not a big problem today are, ironically, demonstrating the problem of unconscious prejudice. Because these prejudices are outside our awareness, they can indeed be denied.

## **THE EFFECTS OF PREJUDICE AND STEREOTYPES**

Hidden bias has emerged as an important clue to the disparity between public opinion, as expressed by America's creed and social goals, and the amount of discrimination that still exists.

Despite 30 years of equal-rights legislation, levels of poverty, education and success vary widely across races. Discrimination continues in housing and real estate sales, and racial profiling is a common practice, even among ordinary citizens.

Members of minorities continue to report humiliating treatment by store clerks, co-workers and police. While an African American man may dine in a fine restaurant anywhere in America, it can be embarrassing for him to attempt to flag down a taxi after that dinner.

A person who carries the stigma of group membership must be prepared for its debilitating effects.

Studies indicate that African American teenagers are aware they are stigmatized as being intellectually inferior and that they go to school bearing what psychologist Claude Steele has called a "burden of suspicion." Such a burden can affect their attitudes and achievement.

Similarly, studies found that when college women are reminded their group is considered bad at math, their performance may fulfill this prophecy.

These shadows hang over stigmatized people no matter their status or accomplishments. They must remain on guard and bear an additional burden that may affect their self-confidence, performance and aspirations. These stigmas have the potential to rob them of their individuality and debilitate their attempts to break out of stereotypical roles.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT UNCONSCIOUS STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES**

Conscious attitudes and beliefs can change.

The negative stereotypes associated with many immigrant groups, for example, have largely disappeared over time. For African-Americans, civil rights laws forced integration and nondiscrimination, which, in turn, helped to change public opinion.

But psychologists have no ready roadmap for undoing such overt and especially hidden stereotypes and prejudices.

### **Learned at an early age**

The first step may be to admit biases are learned early and are counter to our commitment to just treatment. Parents, teachers, faith leaders and other community leaders can help children question their values and beliefs and point out subtle stereotypes used by peers and in the media. Children should also be surrounded by cues that equality matters.

In his classic book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, the psychologist Gordon Allport observed children are more likely to grow up tolerant if they live in a home that is supportive and loving. "They feel welcome, accepted, loved, no matter what they do."

In such an environment, different views are welcomed, punishment is not harsh or capricious, and these children generally think of people positively and carry a sense of goodwill and even affection.

### **Community matters**

Integration, by itself, has not been shown to produce dramatic changes in attitudes and behavior. But many studies show when people work together in a structured environment to solve shared problems through community service, their attitudes about diversity can change dramatically.

By including members of other groups in a task, children begin to think of themselves as part of a larger community in which everyone has skills and can contribute. Such experiences have been shown to improve attitudes across racial lines and between people old and young.

There also is preliminary evidence that unconscious attitudes, contrary to initial expectations, may be malleable. For example, imagining strong women leaders or seeing positive role models of African Americans has been shown to, at least temporarily, change unconscious biases.

### **'Feeling' unconscious bias**

But there is another aspect of the very experience of taking a test of hidden bias that may be helpful. Many test takers can "feel" their hidden prejudices as they perform the tests.

They can feel themselves unable to respond as rapidly to (for example) old + good concepts than young + good concepts. The very act of taking the tests can force hidden biases into the conscious part of the mind.

We would like to believe that when a person has a conscious commitment to change, the very act of discovering one's hidden biases can propel one to act to correct for it. It may not be possible to avoid the automatic stereotype or prejudice, but it is certainly possible to consciously rectify it.

### **Committing to change**

If people are aware of their hidden biases, they can monitor and attempt to ameliorate hidden attitudes before they are expressed through behavior. This compensation can include attention to language, body language and to the stigmatization felt by target groups.

Common sense and research evidence also suggest that a change in behavior can modify beliefs and attitudes. It would seem logical that a conscious decision to be egalitarian might lead one to widen one's circle of friends and knowledge of other groups. Such efforts may, over time, reduce the strength of unconscious biases.

It can be easy to reject the results of the tests as "not me" when you first encounter them. But that's the easy path. To ask where these biases come from, what they mean, and what we can do about them is the harder task.

Recognizing that the problem is in many others—as well as in ourselves—should motivate us all to try both to understand and to act.