



The University of Texas at Austin
Department of Nutritional Sciences

**GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK
2026 - 2027**



ONLINE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN NUTRITIONAL SCIENCES PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The University of Texas at Austin's Master of Science in Nutritional Science (MSNS) degree program is designed for a variety of candidates, including students and working professionals in nutrition, wellness, and other health-related fields who want to expand their knowledge base to include the specialization. ***Human nutrition and public health impact are woven into every aspect of this program.***

We offer the program in two tracks. The 1-year track offers the opportunity for students preparing for medical school, pharmacy school, dental school or physician assistant programs to build a strong knowledge base in nutritional science. The 2-year track allows working professionals the flexibility to successfully complete the program while continuing to meet job responsibilities. Additionally, the program offers two specialty tracks:

1. Biochemical and Functional Nutrition – The goal is to understand the cellular and molecular reaction to inflammation, genetics, food, and disease.
2. Health Promotion and Disease Prevention – The goal is to understand the treatment and prevention of obesity and chronic disease through current professional guidelines and behavior-based intervention.

Our program is science-based and human-focused and addresses the cutting-edge nutrition issues of today, including:

- The impact of food preparation and processing on the nutrient quality of food
- The role of diet on the gut microbiome
- The interaction between what we eat and how our genes function
- How to motivate nutritional behavior change
- The nutritional and environmental underpinnings of energy balance and weight gain

The Master of Science in Nutritional Sciences (MSNS) offers advanced training in nutritional science to current and future medical, health, and wellness professionals. It also prepares individuals for teaching in community colleges; administration in public health programs; and technical positions at food, pharmaceutical, and chemical laboratories.

This **100% online** degree offers the rigor and excellence of the on-campus graduate program to a wider audience. Graduate students will benefit from the strong support network of fellow students that comes from cohort-based learning and readily accessible faculty. Further, professional students can immediately apply industry-aligned and challenge-based learning strategies to the workplace, whether in a clinical, community, food service, wellness, or private setting.

The online MSNS program from UT Austin fulfills part of the current academic requirements for the Certified Nutrition Specialist (CNS) certification. The CNS certification requires a graduate degree in the field of nutrition from a regionally accredited university, specific coursework, and 1,000 hours of supervised practice experience. CNS reviews each candidate individually, including current course descriptions, transcripts, and experience to determine eligibility. The MSNS program does **not** satisfy the educational or practice requirements to become a Registered Dietitian.

This is an Option III Program (non-formula funded graduate program), which is a graduate program that can serve a greater number of students than state resources will support. Option III programs offer graduate curriculum tailored to special needs in modes of delivery, student clientele, course design, and class meeting times and locations. Courses for Option III programs may be 1) delivered in a face-to-face format on the UT Austin campus; 2) offered through an alternative mode of delivery such as online or hybrid instruction; 3) scheduled alternatively during evenings or weekends; and/or, 4) offered in alternative locations (off campus). Option III students are not eligible for university financial aid, graduate student academic appointments, and departmental fellowships.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND FACULTY

- Nutrition Department Chair: Molly Bray, PhD
- Online MSNS Director: Laura Lashinger, PhD, RN
- Online MSNS Assistant Director: Loren Schrieffer MEd
- Administrative Associate/Graduate Coordinator: Liliana Diaz

GRADUATE NUTRITION CURRICULUM

The MSNS (Option III) program requires completion of 30 semester credit hours of online coursework: 15 credit hours of core coursework and 15 credit hours of concentration coursework. With the approval of the MSNS Program Director, students may choose to complete a thesis as a part of their degree program. Students approved for the thesis option are required to complete 30 total credit hours consisting of 15 credit hours of core coursework, 9 credit hours of Concentration coursework, and 6 credit hours of thesis (See Table 2).

Table 2. Course Requirements for Proposed MSNS

Category	Semester Credit Hours
Required Core Courses	15
Prescribed Elective Courses	9-15
Thesis (optional)	6
Total Hours	30

Below is a list of primary course offerings with two Concentration options:

Core:

1. Advances in Nutritional Sciences I Macronutrient Metabolism– NTR 390.1
2. Advances in Nutritional Sciences II Micronutrient Metabolism – NTR 390.7
3. Experimental Design and Statistics NTR 380K.3
4. Advanced Experimental Design and Statistics – NTR 380K.4
5. Study Design and Research Methods – NTR 394.6

Health Promotion Disease Prevention Track:

1. Theories of Nutrition Behavior – NTR 390.14
2. Energy Balance and Obesity – NTR 392.11
3. Nutrition Through the Lifecycle – NTR 394.5
4. Nutrition and Disease Prevention – NTR 392.13
5. Community Nutrition – NTR 390.16

Biochemical and Functional Nutrition:

1. Nutrition and Cancer – NTR 392.3
2. Nutrition as Medicine – NTR 392.12
3. Nutrition and Immunology – NTR 392.4
4. Nutrigenomics – NTR 390.13
5. Molecular Nutritional Sciences – NTR 390.6

ADMISSIONS INFORMATION

Admission is based on undergraduate and graduate (if applicable) grades, letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with the applicant's academic potential and/or professional experience, and a personal statement of goals from the applicant. Applicants who wish to turn in GRE results are welcome to do so, but the test is not required**. The Admissions Committee also examines the fit between the applicant's goals and the goals of the program.

Applicants to the MSNS degree program must meet the minimum requirements for graduate study at the University of Texas at Austin. Admission requirements to the Graduate School and the graduate program in Nutritional Sciences are as follows:

1. A bachelor's degree from an accredited United States institution of higher learning **OR** proof of equivalent training at an institution outside the United

States, as determined by the [Graduate and International Admissions Center](#) (OGA).

2. A grade point average of at least 3.00 in **upper-division course work** (junior- and senior-level courses) and in any graduate work already completed.
3. Successful completion of a biochemistry course from an accredited institution prior to enrollment (conditional admission can be given, pending completion of this course). If an applicant does not have a bachelor's degree in a biological science field, success in the program will be enhanced by completion of the following additional courses:
 - Human Physiology
 - Introductory Nutrition
4. International applicants must have a satisfactory score on the TOEFL exam (a minimum of 79 on the internet-based exam) or the IELTS exam (an overall band of 6.5 on the Academic Examination). For more information, please see: [Graduate School Admissions for International Students](#)
5. **Three** letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with the applicant's academic and professional performance, including an assessment of their potential for success in graduate school. Personal recommendations are not acceptable.
6. A personal statement regarding research and professional experience, goals, and how completion of the program will further those goals.
7. Personal resume or CV, including relevant work and experience.
8. No standardized test (GRE, MCAT, etc.) required with exception of TOEFL or IELTS for international students.

All applications are reviewed on a rolling basis until the final deadline.

	Fall Admissions	Spring Admissions
Application Opens	December 1st	August 1st
Priority Deadline	June 1st	October 1st
Final Deadline	July 15th	November 1 st

****** No GRE or MCAT is required for admission to this program. These are optional uploads.

STUDENT REQUESTS

Q Drops

A student can drop a class after the 12th class day but will need to start a Q-drop request before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester ([Blank Add/Drop Form](#)). See the [academic calendar](#) for exact dates.

Graduate students may drop a course after the Q-drop deadline but a different form must be used [505 Update of Student Record](#) for a retroactive change of 1 course or [Blank 505 2 Course/Switch Template](#) for multiple courses. The instructor determines whether the symbol Q or a grade of F will be recorded. Instructor signature is needed.

Withdrawals

Students can withdraw from the program using the Withdrawal Form, which needs the student's signature to confirm they understand any implications. Withdrawals only give a refund during specific periods of time at the beginning of the semester. No petition is needed. If it's the student's first semester they can withdraw and reapply for admissions.

[Blank Withdrawal Form](#)

Petition for Continuation of Academic Probation

A student will be placed on academic probation if they do not maintain an overall 3.0 GPA. If a student does not achieve a 3.0 during their academic probation, a petition for the student to continue with the university can be created but must be approved by the department and Office of Graduate Admission.

[Blank Word Doc Template](#)

Leave of Absence

All graduate students are entitled to long two semesters (consecutive or non-consecutive) of leave. This is automatically granted, but the student must submit the necessary [form](#) with both the student's signature and the Graduate Advisor's signature by the day before classes start in the semester for which the student is taking leave. The student does not have to re-apply to return back to school once the semester(s) of leave has finished, but will be re-admitted. As such, an official leave of absence holds the student's spot in the program. However, if the student leaves UT without obtaining a leave of absence, re-admission is at the discretion of the GSC.

Deferral Request

Students can defer admission once admitted but must request this deferral from the OGA via email before the deferral deadline. The request should be submitted no later than 4 weeks from the semester the student was originally admitted.

Transfer Requests

A student may request graduate transfer credit, but approval must be voted on by the GSC. No more than 6 credits may be granted.

AI WRITING USE

As of fall 2023, the program's stance on AI writing is as follows and appears in each course's syllabus. Faculty individually select one of the three stances provided.

AI Writing Tools Policy

The creation of artificial intelligence tools for widespread use is an exciting innovation. These tools have both appropriate and inappropriate uses in classwork. The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class:

1. *...is strictly prohibited. This includes using AI to generate ideas, outline an approach, answer questions, solve problems, or create original language. All work in this course must be your own or created in group work, where allowed.*
2. *...shall be permitted on a limited basis. You will be informed as to the assignments for which AI may be utilized. You are also welcome to seek my prior – approval to use AI writing tools on any assignment. In either instance, AI writing tools should be used with caution and proper citation, as the use of AI should be properly attributed. Using AI writing tools without my permission or authorization, or failing to properly cite AI even where permitted, shall constitute a violation of UT Austin's Institutional Rules on academic integrity. If AI software is used to create work for an assignment, it needs to be referenced according to citation guidance provided by the instructor.*
3. *...is permitted for students who wish to use them, provided the content generated by AI is properly cited. If AI software is used to create work for an assignment, it needs to be referenced according to citation guidance provided by the instructor.*

STUDENT RESOURCES

Program Orientation

Students who have been accepted into the online MSNS (Option III) program receive orientation to the program prior to the start of their first classes to ensure a successful experience. The orientation program consists of a welcome video from the Director, Assistant Director and program faculty as well as an online overview of the MSNS (Option III) Graduate Handbook with descriptions of course format, tuition payment, registration, University and Program resources, as well as useful contact information for any necessary assistance. The Director and Assistant Director will be in regular contact with students from the admissions process through the beginning of the first classes to offer guidance.

Career Services

The College of Natural Sciences Career Services office offers graduate students a wide array of services from preparing resumes, networking and interviews to offering recruiting opportunities and job postings. As matriculated students, the online MSNS (Option III) students are able to utilize the many resources that are available at the College of Natural Sciences Career Services office. As part of student advising, the Program Director facilitates student's awareness of the resources that are available. Costs of Career Support Services from CNS will be included in the College Administrative Fee under negotiation with the Dean's Office.

Additional Resources

The following resources are available to all students of the UT-Austin:

- Campus Safety and Security: <http://operations.utexas.edu/units/csas/>
- Counseling and Mental Health Center: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>
- <https://uthealthaustin.org/clinics/services/hebpharmacy>
- University Health Services: <https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/>
- University of Texas Police Department: <http://police.utexas.edu>
- UT Recreational Sports: <https://www.utrecsports.org/>
- Creating an Individual Development Plan: <https://www.science.org/content/article/myidp>
- Information for International Students: <https://global.utexas.edu/>