

The Full Plate

The Newsletter for [Pace University's](#)
Coordinated MS in Nutrition and Dietetics Program



A Note From the Chair

Greetings Students, Alumni, Preceptors, and Colleagues,

As we come to the end of another terrific, bustling semester, I am excited to share the latest updates and achievements from our outstanding Nutrition and Dietetics Department. Our students and faculty continue to flourish in academics, experiential learning, and professional and community-based activities. In this newsletter, I am thrilled to highlight the amazing accomplishments, exciting events, and valuable learning experiences that showcase the passion and dedication of our department. We would like to thank everyone for their continued support and meaningful contributions as we strive to make a transformative impact in our field, the Pace community, and beyond.

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Welcome Cohort 8!



NYSAND AME 2026

The Nutrition and Dietetics Department is excited to announce that Pace University will be hosting the NYSAND Annual Meeting and Expo this year on April 26, 2026 at the Ann and Alfred Goldstein Health, Fitness, and Recreation Center. Registration and sponsorship is not yet open so save the date and check back for updates! Visit the [New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](https://www.nysand.org/) for more information.

SAVE THE DATE: April 24, 2026



New York State
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



Ann and Alfred Goldstein Health, Fitness & Recreation Center
Pace University | 861 Bedford Road, Pleasantville, NY 10570

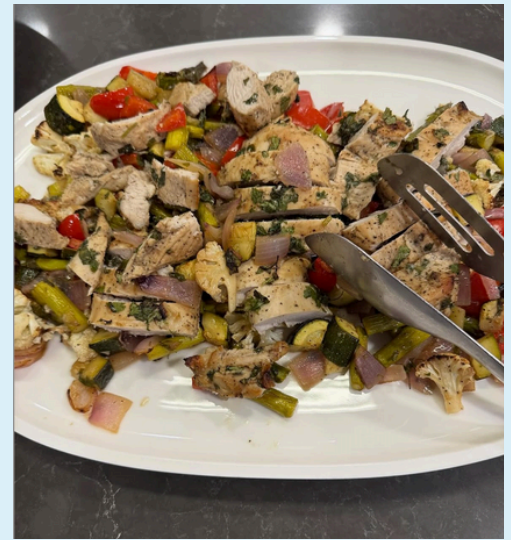
Cohort 7 & 8: A Taste of the Teaching Kitchen



Prepared as part of a Functional Foods course, this Mediterranean-inspired dish featuring chickpeas, beet hummus, and sweet potatoes provides fiber for gut health, plant-based protein, and antioxidants.



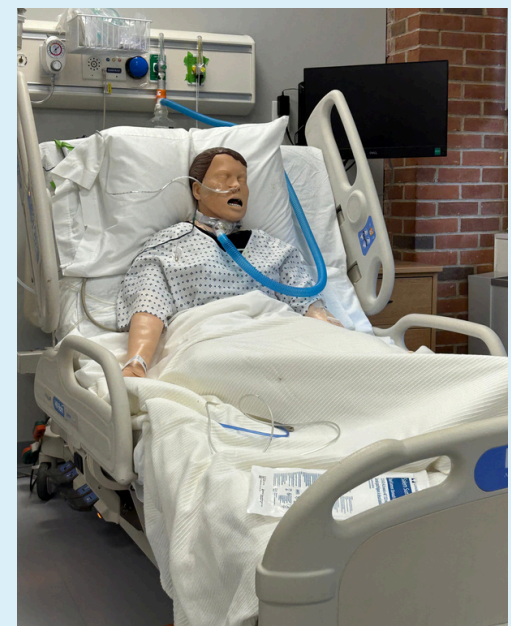
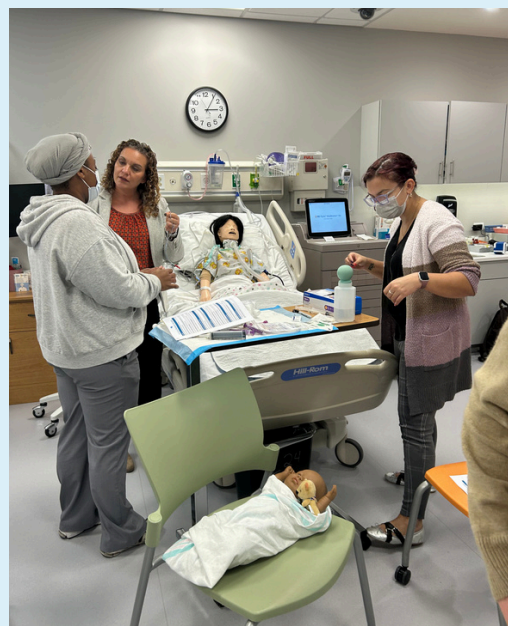
Created in the Nutrition Through the Lifecycle course, these applesauce oat muffins highlight nutrient-dense ingredients and are packed with fiber and complex carbohydrates for sustained energy.



Prepared during the Nutrition Through the Lifecycle course, this sheet pan meal highlights lean protein, healthy fats, and a variety of vitamins and minerals in a simple, balanced dish.

Nasogastric Tube Placement with Cohort 7

Cohort 7 students practiced nasogastric tube placement during their Supervised Practice II Clinical Seminar class in collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Healthcare Simulation, with a guest lecture by nursing professor Dr. Elizabeth Berro.



Student Happenings

Bringing Nutrition Education to Life at the Farmers Market

By Nisha Roy, Cohort 8

This semester, I had a wonderful time volunteering at the Pleasantville Farmers Market through the Pace University Nutrition and Dietetics Program. Our program partnered with the Pleasantville Farmers Market to showcase eight varieties of apples generously donated by Mead Orchards and Wright Farm. Alongside fellow graduate students and alumni, I engaged with shoppers and discussed each variety's flavor, ideal uses, and nutritional benefits. It was especially rewarding to talk with community members about how different textures and taste profiles influence cooking choices. The Farmers Market was hosting an upcoming pie contest, which gave us a great segue into discussing which apples are best for baking and which are naturally sweeter and require little added sugar. I had never tried five of the eight apples we featured, so it became a fun learning experience for me as well, complete with taste-testing and sharing my impressions. Overall, it was a meaningful opportunity to connect with the community, expand my own knowledge, and represent Pace's Nutrition and Dietetics Department.



Student Happenings

Student Mentorship Programming

An interview with Payton Snead, Cohort 8

Pace Nutrition and Dietetics students are paired together as mentors and mentees, fostering meaningful connections, academic support, and professional growth within the program. Reflecting on her experience as a mentee, Payton shared that the mentorship helped her as a first-year student, stating, “This mentorship helped me adjust to the program because it gave me insight that I would not have gotten from professors, admissions, and more.” She added that learning from her mentor’s firsthand experiences helped her feel more prepared for both current and future coursework.

The mentorship program also inspired Payton to look ahead to her own role as a mentor. She expressed excitement about giving back and becoming a mentor next year. Payton also emphasized how supported she feels within the program, noting, “One thing I love about this program is how much they want you to succeed. Resources like the mentor-mentee program are a perfect example, and I can’t wait to help future students.”

In addition, Payton highlighted how valuable it was to learn about internship experiences through her mentor. As she looks forward to starting her own internships, she reflected, “I really enjoyed learning about the sites my mentor went to for his internship. This is something I am very excited to start, so it was great hearing how much my mentor loved his placements and how he got them.”



Student Happenings

The Gut-Brain Connection: How Nutrition Can Ease Anxiety

By Teagan Mulvihill, Cohort 7

This semester, the Nutrition and Dietetics Department hosted an engaging wellness-focused event for Pace University staff focusing on the connection between gut health and anxiety. The session explored the gut-brain axis and how nutrition plays an important role in supporting both digestive and mental health. Staff members learned about key nutrients and foods that may help reduce anxiety and promote overall well-being.

A highlight of the event was a live cooking demonstration with simple, approachable recipes designed to support gut health and mood. Participants observed practical cooking techniques, discussed ingredient choices, and gained ideas for incorporating these foods into everyday meals. The event concluded with an opportunity to sample delicious, mood-boosting treats, allowing staff to experience firsthand how nutritious foods can also be enjoyable and satisfying.

Overall, this interactive event provided staff with evidence-based nutrition education and realistic strategies to support mental wellness, reinforcing the Nutrition and Dietetics Department's commitment to promoting health and well-being across the Pace community.



Notes From the Field

Medical Mission to Colombia: Expanding Nutrition Care

Professor Jessica Tosto, MS, RDN, CSP, CDN, FNAP, recently participated in a medical mission to Santa Marta, Colombia with Healing the Children Northeast, becoming the first Registered Dietitian Nutritionist to join their volunteer team. During the weeklong trip, Prof. Tosto worked alongside surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and speech and language pathologists to provide nutrition assessment, education, and support for pediatric patients undergoing cleft lip and palate repairs and their families.

Reflecting on the experience, Prof. Tosto shared, “It was incredibly meaningful to connect with the families and their children and to see firsthand the impact this care has on their lives. The support we received from the UNIMA volunteers, who coordinated the trip and recruited all of the patients on the Colombia side, was extraordinary. It was also truly inspiring to work alongside such a dedicated medical team—many of whom have participated in more than 30 medical missions throughout their careers.”

Her participation helped expand the scope of care provided by the team and highlighted the vital role of nutrition in healing and recovery. This experience reflects the College of Health Professions’ ongoing commitment to global health, interprofessional collaboration, and compassionate service.

Visit [Healing the Children Northeast, Inc.](#) to learn more about the services they provide.



Notes From the Field

Community Rotation

By Carly Martone, Cohort 7



This semester, I completed my community rotation at Monte Nido Clementine in Hudson Valley, NY, a residential eating disorder treatment center for adolescents. During this experience, I worked with a diverse patient population and a variety of eating disorder diagnoses, which strengthened my ability to adapt nutrition care to meet individual needs.

As an intern, I shadowed the Registered Dietitian during one-on-one counseling sessions, documented session notes, reviewed and supported individualized meal plans, analyzed growth charts to help determine target goal weights, and assisted with daily activities. I also participated in interprofessional team meetings and organized and presented educational material for nutrition groups. Additionally, I had the privilege of spending time with the adolescents, offering encouragement and support throughout their recovery journeys.

Throughout my time at Clementine, I gained valuable experience in nutrition therapy, Family-Based Treatment (FBT), motivational interviewing techniques, and meal planning, along with many other essential clinical and community nutrition skills. I also learned the vital role that holistic, team-based care plays in weight restoration, energy intake, recovery, and overall well-being, through collaboration with healthcare professionals including family therapists, individual therapists, psychiatrists, nurses, and recovery coaches. Additionally, I learned how to support adolescents during mealtimes and help them develop coping strategies, as well as the importance of modeling recovery-oriented, positive language to create a supportive environment.

One challenge I encountered during this rotation was learning how to tailor nutrition education to meet the needs of different age groups and use language that was accessible to all clients. With guidance and support from my preceptor, I developed the skills and confidence needed to effectively lead nutrition groups. Topics included digestion, the functions of macronutrients, debunking nutrition myths, menu planning, among other topics. We also emphasized the “all foods fit” approach, which promotes flexible eating without rigid rules and reinforces that no foods are inherently “good” or “bad.”

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to intern at Clementine and to support adolescents during such a challenging time in their lives. This experience strengthened my clinical and community nutrition skills and gave me the confidence to provide evidence-based, compassionate care as a future Registered Dietitian.

Notes From the Field

Following A Nutritious Diet Over the Holidays

With the holidays in full swing, maintaining balanced eating habits can become challenging. In the latest Pace Chronicles article, Professor Jessica Tosto shares practical guidance on maintaining healthy eating habits throughout the holiday season. Professor Tosto states, “Food means a lot more than just calories and protein—there are so many memories, emotions, family traditions, cultural practices, etc. intertwined with the foods we eat, especially around the holidays.” Enjoyment and balance can coexist. Professor Tosto warns us not to deprive ourselves, and, instead encourages us to enjoy our favorite holiday meals, “especially if you are only eating them once a year!”



Professor Jessica Tosto talks about healthy eating during the holidays. (Faculty Experts)



Portion awareness is one simple way to stay mindful. She explains using smaller plates can help limit serving sizes while still helping your plate feel full. Starting your meal with vegetables is another helpful strategy. Professor Tosto notes, “When serving yourself, start with vegetables first. Try to fill at least half your plate with veggies so there is less space available for higher calorie foods.” Slowing down during meals can also make a meaningful difference, as it gives you time to fully taste your food and notice when you’re starting to feel satisfied. Professor Tosto recommends checking in with yourself periodically to see if you are feeling full. You can always ask for a to-go container and bring your leftovers home to enjoy again the next day.”

Another key aspect of mindful eating is understanding why you’re reaching for food and importance of having regular mealtimes. Professor Tosto suggests, “Before having another portion or reaching for a snack, ask yourself if you are eating because you’re actually hungry. Oftentimes we eat with our eyes (e.g. because the food looks really good or because it is right in front of us and easy to grab) or with our heads (e.g. because we are bored, stressed, sad, happy/celebrating) rather than our stomachs really feeling hungry.”

Professor Tosto emphasizes the importance of eating fruits and vegetables daily, recommending at least five servings whether it’s Thanksgiving break or any time of year. She notes that frozen produce can be just as nutritious—sometimes even more so—because it is often picked and preserved at peak ripeness. For canned options, she suggests choosing low-sodium varieties and rinsing them to reduce excess salt. She also encourages selecting in-season produce such as oranges, pears, apples, squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, collard greens, and broccoli, which taste better and tend to be more affordable. In addition to fruits and vegetables, Professor Tosto recommends incorporating minimally processed lean proteins and healthy fats including fish, seafood, whole poultry, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu, avocado, olive oil, nuts, and seeds.

Visit [The Pace Chronicle](#) to view the article.

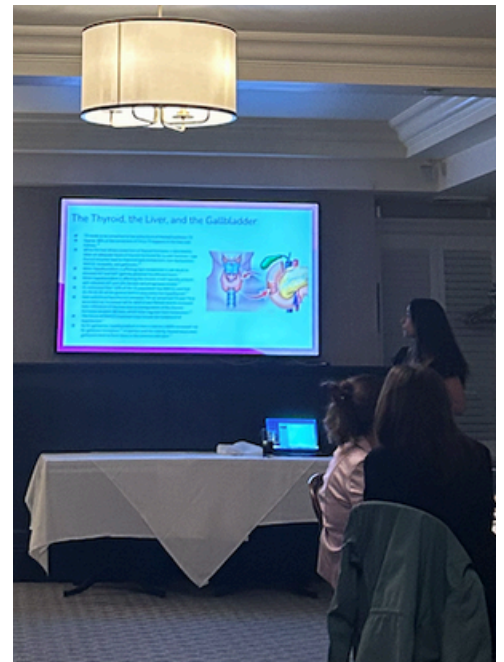
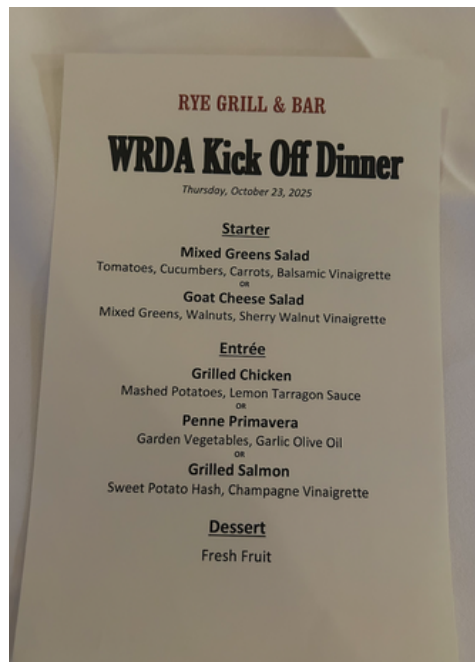
Notes From the Field

Westchester Rockland Dietetic (WRDA) Kickoff Dinner

The Westchester Rockland Dietetic Association (WRDA) hosted its annual Fall Kickoff Dinner at Rye Bar and Grill, bringing together members, students, and colleagues for an evening of learning, collaboration, and delicious food. In addition to dinner, attendees enjoyed an insightful presentation on Nutrition-Focused Lab Values led by WRDA's immediate past president and our very own inspiring professor, Sharon Puello, MA, RDN, CDN.

Reflecting on the event, Cohort 8 student Gracelyn Pensiero stated, “attending the WRDA Kick-Off Dinner as a student volunteer was a wonderful experience. The event brought together Registered Dietitians from across Westchester to discuss blood lab values—a fascinating and insightful topic that will be especially helpful as I prepare for my upcoming course on the subject. As a new student, I had the opportunity to connect with dietitians and strengthen relationships with other dietetic students—It was a rewarding experience that deepened my knowledge and appreciation for the profession!”

From a faculty perspective, Professor Deanna Ellison shared her reflections on the evening: “The Westchester Rockland Dietetic Association recently held a Clinical Update on interpreting nutrition-focused laboratory values. The program, hosted at Rye Bar and Grill, provided attendees with an opportunity to engage in both professional development and networking. Featured speaker Sharon Puello, MS, RD, CDN, CDCES, delivered an exceptional and highly informative presentation, offering valuable insights and practical applications relevant to clinical nutrition practice.”



Notes From the Field

Teaching Kitchen Events at Pace

The Pace Teaching Kitchen has been bustling with plenty of events this semester, including the student-athlete event, commuter student event, Nursing FIG programming, Feeding Westchester Mobile Market, staff cooking demonstration on gut health and anxiety, and more. Director of the Nutrition and Dietetics Teaching Kitchen, Professor Mary Opfer, reflects on her experience leading the program:

What do you enjoy most about leading Pace Teaching Kitchen programming?

I love it all! The creativity, the community building aspect and helping students, staff and faculty learn simple ways to create healthy meals. The kitchen is a place where students learn to translate evidence-based information using food to educate and improve health.

What did you enjoy most about working with the different student groups?

Working with all of the groups on campus is especially rewarding because of their unique needs. It allows the teaching kitchen to build practical and engaging ways to connect and build real world skills.

What skills or knowledge do you hope students (or staff) walked away with?

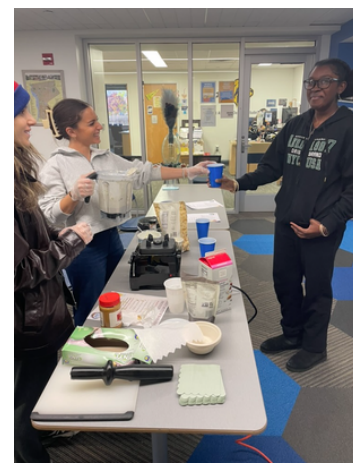
I hope they walk away with confidence to turn nutrition knowledge into action and continue well after the class is over

How do you feel these Teaching Kitchen sessions support student and staff wellbeing and success at Pace?

I hope the TK can provide support to all the participants and take away some of the stress around preparing food, meal planning . I hope those living on campus can create a sense of community and be engaged around preparing meals in their dorms. Sharing food and meals together alleviates stress and loneliness while they are away from home.

What do you hope to expand or focus on in future events?

In future events, I hope to expand programming that supports quick, affordable, and culturally inclusive meals while strengthening connections to clinical care, and stress management. I'm especially interested in growing interdisciplinary offerings that bring students and staff together and continue to position food as a practical tool for wellbeing, learning, and success at Pace.



Notes From the Field

Introducing Our New Preceptor Advisory Board

We are excited to announce the launch of our Clinical Preceptor Advisory Board, a new initiative designed to strengthen the partnership between our program and the dedicated professionals who mentor our students in the clinical setting. We are thrilled to welcome preceptors and CNMs from many of our clinical partner sites, including Westchester Medical Center, Northwell Health, Montefiore, and NYCHH. Beginning this year, the advisory board will meet once each semester to collaborate on best practices that support student success in supervised practice and beyond.

These meetings will focus on key priorities including how we can better prepare students for their clinical rotations, strategies to ensure strong performance on the RDN exam, approaches for providing clear and constructive feedback, and ways to optimize assignments so they are both competency-driven and meaningful for students and preceptors alike. While the board will begin with clinical preceptors, we hope to expand participation in the future to include community-based preceptors as well, further strengthening our training pipeline across diverse practice settings.

We are grateful to our preceptor community for their commitment to shaping the next generation of RDNs, and we look forward to the valuable guidance and collaboration this advisory board will bring.

Alumni Highlights



Vida Velasco-Popov
Cohort 5, Class of 2024

What have you been doing since you graduated?

Since graduating, I've been on quite a journey of professional growth and self-discovery. I started in outpatient work at a community health center, then transitioned to full-time inpatient work as a clinical dietitian for some time, managing a high patient caseload. After recently relocating back to California, I explored various opportunities before settling into my current position at El Camino Hospital, where I also do outpatient work on the side. While the path hasn't been linear, each experience has helped me better understand the type of dietitian I want to be and the populations I'm most passionate about serving.

What do you enjoy most about your job, and what challenges have you encountered?

I enjoy the pace of working in the inpatient setting and being able to provide support to enhance patient care. I value being part of patients' recovery journeys, particularly post-surgery. I also enjoy my work with Nourish patients, where I can focus on developing my motivational interviewing and counseling skills. My patients keep me learning. Recently, a patient introduced me to the concept of high intensity exercise-induced hyperglycemia, which sent me down a fascinating research rabbit hole!

The challenges have been good learning opportunities. Adapting to new electronic health systems and workflows takes time. I've also learned that state-specific regulations regarding RD scope of practice and privileges vary considerably, which requires flexibility. Learning to effectively advocate for patients during interdisciplinary rounds and communicate the value of nutrition interventions has been an important part of my growth. One of the challenges I've faced with working in an outpatient setting has been learning how to create flow within my sessions and adapt to different personality types and nutrition beliefs.

What advice would you offer to current students preparing for the RD exam or starting their careers?

Start preparing for the RD exam early. Even 30 minutes of daily practice makes a difference. Here's a strategy that worked well for me: During your first year, when you're taking courses that align with the MNT portion of the exam, work through your MNT textbook lectures and related practice questions simultaneously. When you begin your clinical rotations, use those experiences to reinforce and test your knowledge. For those entering the field, remember that your career vision may evolve once you gain real-world experience. What you think you want to do before graduating might be quite different from what ultimately works for you. Give yourself permission to explore and be patient with the process of finding your niche.

What has been your proudest professional accomplishment so far?

Publishing my capstone project as a literature review in a peer-reviewed journal. It was particularly meaningful to see this work later cited and featured as one of the top stories in Today's Dietitian Magazine. I have also recently had the honor of being asked to lead a webinar for World Bipolar Day 2026! It's rewarding to know that the research I conducted during my graduate studies continues to contribute to the dietetics community and that I have the chance to share new developments and insights with the broader dietetics community through speaking opportunities.

Follow us on Instagram!

