

Nutrition and Dietetics Directors' Workload and Compensation Related to Program Accreditation Activities

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Abstract: Nutrition and dietetics program directors were surveyed to quantify the amount of time they spend meeting accreditation-related requirements, and to determine the type of compensation they receive for their director workload. The survey was sent electronically in August 2011 to all nutrition and dietetics directors (N=572).

A total of 312 usable surveys were received for a 54.5% response rate. The distribution of respondents almost mirrored the general distribution of nutrition and dietetics programs: 138 (44%) from Dietetic Internship (DI) programs, 122 (39%) from Didactic Programs in Dietetics (DPD), 29 (9%) from Coordinated Programs (CP) and 23 (7%) from Dietetic Technician (DT) programs. The majority of respondents (83%) were faculty based at a college or university, of whom, 49% had annual teaching loads between 18 and 24 credits. The average number of hours spent on director-type activities was approximately 22 hours/week with 15.6 of these hours dedicated to meeting accreditation specific requirements. Of the 248 directors who responded to the compensation questions, the majority (n=198, 80%) reported receiving some form of time relief or compensation for their responsibilities as program directors, commonly a 3-credit or 6-credit annual load reduction. On the other hand, 55 directors (22%) received no time relief or compensation for any of their work as program directors.

Overall, the reported compensation did not match the level of effort stated by directors. Future evaluations should examine the possible association between the amount of time program directors spend on accreditation-related activities and the quality of their programs, and whether these accreditation activities are affecting the quality of the work for the directors' other job responsibilities.

Keywords: Accreditation, compensation, Program directors, workload.

BACKGROUND

Nutrition and dietetics programs in the United States are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND), an agency of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics [1]. ACEND establishes standards for four types of nutrition and dietetics programs: Dietetic Technician (DT) programs, Didactic Programs in Dietetics (DPD), Coordinated Programs (CP), and Dietetic Internship (DI) programs [2]. Accreditation standards are typically updated every five years to reflect the changing educational requirements that a student needs to be prepared for entry-level practice [3]. ACEND requires every program to appoint a director whose role is to ensure the program is meeting all established educational standards [4]. The director's position must be full-time, of which, an unspecified portion is spent administering the program and responding to ACEND requirements. Beginning with the 2008 standards, ACEND required a separate director for

each program to ensure that directors have sufficient time to run quality programs.

ACEND does not provide guidelines for the allotted time that an individual is expected to spend administering a nutrition and dietetics program; the amount of "release time" is determined by the program director's administrators. As a result, the variability among programs in the time allocated to allow directors to fulfill accreditation-related requirements is significant. Faced with an ever-growing workload, directors are increasingly being challenged to run quality dietetics programs while simultaneously maintaining clear documentation to meet accreditation requirements.

In spring 2006, the amount of administrative time a nutrition and dietetics program director devoted to program management was examined using a survey that was distributed through the Nutrition and Dietetics Educators and Preceptors (NDEP) Academy group's electronic mailing list [5]. Response rate was poor (n=28; 5% of 542 directors) and limited the generalizability of results. Nevertheless, of the 28 directors who responded, 6 (27%) did not receive release time or load hours to oversee their program, and 12 (44%) indicated having no administrative help. DPD directors

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(n=15) estimated they needed approximately 30% release time to effectively manage their program, while DI (n=5) and CP (n=2) directors believed they needed approximately 50% of release time. Many directors stated they used their personal time by working longer hours or during the summer in order to ensure the success of their program [5].

In March 2011, members of NDEP requested information about the workload of program directors, and discussed the need to quantify the amount of time directors spend meeting accreditation-related requirements. Such data will provide insights regarding the actual time needed to oversee quality dietetics programs; in addition, it will facilitate the conversation with administrators to discuss the time needed to provide high quality work in all job responsibilities assigned to the director. In order to increase the response rate, the current study was designed to reach all nutrition and dietetics directors, instead of only those subscribed to the electronic mailing list. In addition, the survey attempted to quantify the number of hours program directors devoted to meeting the accreditation standards for their respective programs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

About the Survey

The survey was drafted by a DI program director and a DPD director and was comprised of a total of 49 questions organized into four major sections that addressed: 1) program director position characteristics, 2) load reduction and compensation, 3) a section completed solely by DI directors where they reported on the characteristics of their program (e.g., settings, size), and 4) a final section where directors reported the hours spent on various nutrition and dietetics related activities derived from the 2008 ACEND standards [6,7]. The survey was then posted on the NDEP electronic mailing list for review and feedback. A total of 23 e-mails were received that included 70 comments and/or suggestions: 11 DPD directors made 43 comments/

suggestions, 9 DI directors provided 16 comments/suggestions, 2 CP directors made 6 comments/suggestions, and 1 DT director had 5 comments/suggestions. Based on the feedback received the survey was revised then pilot tested with 2 DPD and 2 DI directors and finalized. The final survey was distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey® (SurveyMonkey Inc., Palo Alto, CA) to all ACEND program directors (N=572): 244 DI (43%), 230 DPD (40%), 52 CP (9%), and 46 DT (8%). Two reminder e-mails were sent between August 2011 and October 2011.

Data analyses included basic demographic descriptions of respondents and comparisons across program types. These analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows (version 20.0, 2011, SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL).

The study protocol was approved by XXXXX Colleges' Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee. Responding to the survey was acknowledged as providing consent to participate in the study.

RESULTS

A total of 312 usable surveys were received for a 54.5% response rate. Fig. (1) presents the distribution of the final sample of respondents which almost mirrored the general distribution of nutrition and dietetics programs.

Characteristics of Nutrition and Dietetics Program Directors Who Responded to the Survey

The majority of respondents (n=258, 83%) were faculty based at a college or university. Eleven faculty directors had a staff-administrative appointment, and the rest were divided equally between tenured/tenure-track (n=124) and non-tenure track (n=123) positions. Approximately half of faculty directors were on a 9-month contract (n=136, 53%), 85 (33%) were on a 12-month contract, and 31 (12%) were on a 10-month contract. Most DI program directors (61%; 84 of 137) were affiliated with a college or university, 39 worked

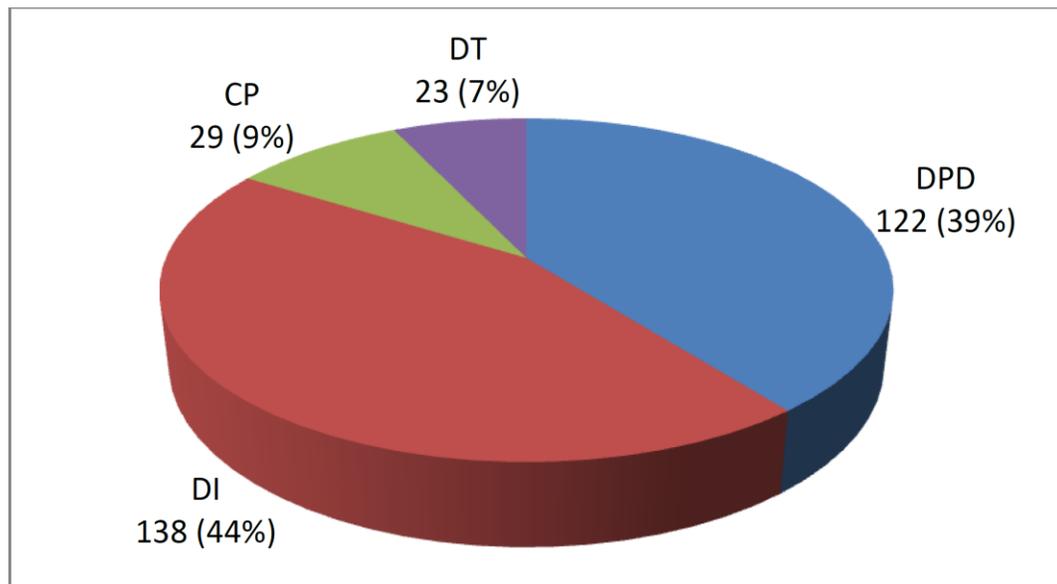


Fig. (1). Sample distribution based on type of dietetics program director (n=312).

Table 1. Characteristics of positions of dietetics program directors used in a college/university setting by program director type.

Type of dietetics program directors	Appointment Type			Contract Length			
	Tenured/ tenure track	Non-tenured track	Staff-administrative position	12-months	10-months	9-months	Other
	%			%			
Didactic Program in Dietetics (n=113)	53	45	2	26	11	72	0
Dietetic Internship (n=84)	34	61	5	44	15	36	5
Coordinated Program (n=29)	45	55	0	41	3	52	3
Dietetic Technician (n=23)	61	17	22	30	22	43	4

at a hospital, and 15 worked in community settings. Table 1 provides the characteristics of the nutrition and dietetics program directors based at a college or university by program type.

A small number of faculty were on a quarter system (n=21) or a trimester system (n=3) and reported annual teaching loads as high as 38 credits. An additional 8 faculty reported their teaching loads in units other than credit hours. Due to the small number of faculty who were not on a semester system, and the inability to accurately convert the reported units into comparable credit hours, these data were removed from analysis. The annual teaching load of faculty based on a semester system ranged from less than 2 credits to as many as 36 credits per year: 110 (49%) reported an annual teaching load between 18 and 24 credits and 78 (34%) reported a teaching load between 9 and 15 credits. Nine faculty directors reported an annual teaching load of 30 credits or more. The annual teaching load did not significantly differ by tenure status or by program director type; many DI directors were expected to teach courses as part of the internship curriculum.

Workload of Nutrition and Dietetics Program Directors

More than one-third (39%) of all respondents reported spending between 10 and 19 hours per week on director-type activities (Fig. 2). The average number of hours spent on these activities was approximately 22 hours/week. DI directors reported the highest number of hours with an average of 25 hours/week. Table 2 presents the reported number of hours spent on ACEND-specific requirements, as well as other related activities that are magnified as a result of the director’s responsibility. For instance, a DPD director is likely to spend more time than other faculty within the department advising students who did not match to a DI during the first round, or reviewing transfer students’ transcripts for DPD-course equivalency. Directors indicated that they spent on average 15.6 ± 10.7 hours/week (39% of a 40-hour week) on ACEND-specific requirements, such as maintaining the student handbook, updating the content of the program’s website, issuing verification statements, and completing the annual ACEND report. Finally, 48% of all directors indicated spending close to two full weeks (71-80

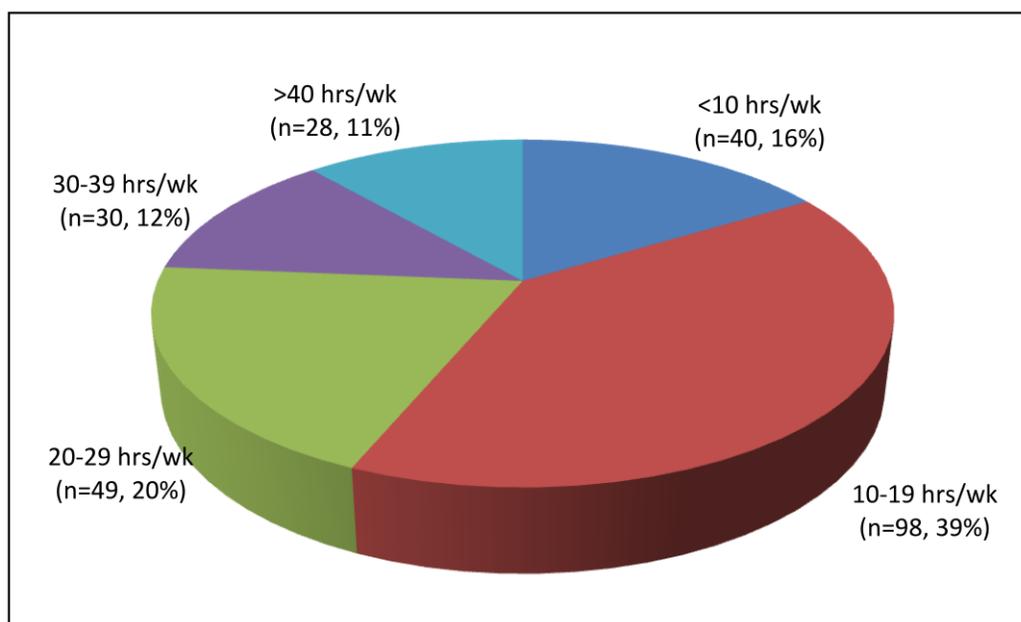


Fig. (2). Frequency of the total number of hours spent weekly on workload as program director as reported by dietetics directors (n=245).

Table 2. Number of hours per week reported by nutrition and dietetics program directors (n=245) on ACEND requirements and other related activities.

	n	Mean \pm SD (hrs)	Mode (hrs)
Average number of hours spent by nutrition and dietetics directors overseeing their program	245	21.6 \pm 12.7	15
DPD Directors	96	18.2 \pm 10.7	13
DI Directors	95	25.2 \pm 13.9	18
CP Directors	26	19.7 \pm 14.6	14
DT Directors	18	20.0 \pm 10.7	17
ACEND-required activities			
Assessing students' prior learning	158	1.1 \pm 1.1	0.7
Submitting Declarations of Intent	109	0.5 \pm 0.8	0.1
Issuing verification statements	238	0.3 \pm 0.5	0.1
Reviewing applications for 1st match (DPD and DI)	130	1.5 \pm 2.1	0.1
Reviewing applications for 2nd match (DPD and DI)	69	0.4 \pm 0.7	0.1
Preparing and conducting DI orientation (CP and DI)	103	1.3 \pm 1.2	1.7
Preparing and conducting DI application workshops (CP, DI and DPD)	103	0.4 \pm 0.9	0.1
Holding program specific faculty/staff/RDs meetings	169	1.0 \pm 1.4	0.3
Communicating and coordinating with faculty/staff/RDs and other program constituents	224	2.3 \pm 2.6	3.0
Maintaining the student handbook that contains program policies and procedures	231	0.6 \pm 1.0	0.1
Updating/maintaining dietetics program section of the website and college catalog pages (ensure they meet ACEND standards)	232	0.5 \pm 0.9	0.1
Maintaining student records, including advising plans, remediation plans, and verification statements	235	2.1 \pm 2.5	3.0
Maintaining supervised facilities' necessary documentation (e.g., contracts) (CP and DI)	124	1.3 \pm 1.8	0.7
Graduation specific to dietetics program (e.g., Verification conferral graduation, dietetic intern graduation, etc.)	210	0.4 \pm 0.6	0.2
Assessing learning outcomes (includes assessing student progress, reviewing courses, analyzing data, completing/updating learning assessment matrix/table)	241	1.7 \pm 2.0	0.7
Assessing program outcomes (includes updating and collecting survey data, analyzing data, updating the planning matrix/table)	241	1.1 \pm 1.3	0.7
Keeping up-to-date with ACEND policies and standards	242	0.8 \pm 1.6	0.1
Adjusting the curriculum to meet ACEND's new learning outcomes	224	0.9 \pm 1.2	0.7
Maintaining contact with Advisory Board members, seeking feedback electronically and through the annual DPD/DI/DT/CP Advisory Board meeting	225	0.5 \pm 0.7	0.2
Attending the Nutrition and Dietetic Educators and Preceptors (NDEP) area meeting	188	0.5 \pm 0.6	0.3
Completing the ACEND annual report	231	0.2 \pm 0.2	0.1
Writing letters of recommendations for programs requiring a letter from the DPD director (DPD)	100	1.2 \pm 1.5	0.3
General faculty activities, related to or augmented by director responsibility			
Recruiting students/interns into the program (Reviewing transferred courses, etc.)	235	2.3 \pm 2.2	3.0
Retaining students/interns	185	2.9 \pm 3.4	3.0
Reviewing student applications to internships or to graduate schools	140	\pm 1.5	0.2

Table 2 Contd.....

	n	Mean ± SD (hrs)	Mode (hrs)
Facilitating student applications to dietetic internships (includes reviewing students' personal statements, if needed)	156	1.5 ± 2.0	0.7
Counseling students who do not secure a DI placement during 1st match and helping them during 2nd round match (CP, DI and DPD)	139	0.4 ± 0.9	0.1

Table 3. Average number of hours spent writing the ACEND-required 5-year PAR report, 10-year self-study report and preparing for the accompanying self-study visit.

ACEND-required activity	Total n	≤ 20 hours	21-40 hours	41-70 hours	71-80 hours	Not applicable
	n					
Writing the 5-year PAR	262	20	34	37	84	87
Writing the self-study	248	2	10	13	118	105
Preparing for program reviewers' site visit	255	23	40	20	108	64

hours) writing the ACEND 5-year report (Program Assessment Review or PAR), 82% spent close to two full weeks writing the 10-year self-study report, and 56% spent two weeks preparing for the 10-year site visit that follows submission of the self-study report (Table 3).

Compensation and Support for Nutrition and Dietetics Directors' Workload

Program directors were asked if they received course release/load reduction or summer compensation for their workload as program directors, and to report the amount of compensation (e.g., load reduction in credit hours) received on an annual basis. The majority of the 248 directors who responded to the compensation questions (n=198, 80%) reported receiving some form of time relief or compensation for their administrative responsibilities. Directors were compensated in various forms: 1) load reduction in course credits; 2) reduction as percent time of a 100% load; 3) sabbatical leaves to complete ACEND reports; 4) elimination of the research requirement; 5) increase in the length of the appointment (e.g., moving from a 9-month to a 10-month appointment); or 6) monetary compensation.

Approximately two-thirds of the directors who responded to the compensation questions (n=169, 68%) received time or monetary compensation for their day-to-day administrative workload during the academic school year. Of the 147 directors who reported their compensation in credit hours, 71 (48%) indicated receiving 3 credits or less of load reduction, 49 (33%) received a load reduction between 4 and 6 credits per year, 13 (9%) received between 7 and 11 credits in reductions, and 14 (9%) reported a reduction of 12 credits or more. Detailed depictions of compensation for DPD directors and for DI directors are presented in Figs. (3 and 4), respectively. The number of CP directors (n=28) and DT directors (n=23) who responded to the survey was limited and did not allow for a meaningful depiction of compensation.

Approximately one-fourth (n=60, 24%) of the 248 directors received summer compensation. Summer compensation was either monetary compensation ranging from as little as \$200 to over \$10,000, or an additional monthly salary: for example, a faculty on a 9-month contract might be compensated an additional 10th-month's salary for summer workload. Finally, less than one-third of the 248 directors (n=76, 31%) received compensation or time relief for writing the ACEND 10-year self-study report.

To summarize, only 13 (5%) of the 248 directors reported receiving all three forms of compensation: annual time relief or compensation for their day-to-day work as dietetics program directors, summer compensation, as well as a load reduction or help when writing the self-study report. On the other hand, 55 directors (22%) received no time relief or compensation for any of their work as program directors.

A large number of respondents (49.6%) indicated they received no personnel support in the form of administrative assistance. Of the 130 directors who received personnel support, 47.1% reported between 10% and 25% of the administrative assistant's time was allocated to supporting the program director responsibilities, and another 39.5% revealed they were allotted less than 10% time of administrative assistance support.

Potential Survey Limitations

When interpreting the results of this survey, several limitations should be noted: 1) the survey was self-administered and answers are subject to respondent's interpretation bias [8]; 2) the number of hours spent on specific tasks was estimated by respondents. Program directors were not asked to record the time spent on each of the listed activities before responding to the survey. In addition, no time study was conducted to assess validity of responses [9]; 3) the survey was conducted and analyzed by

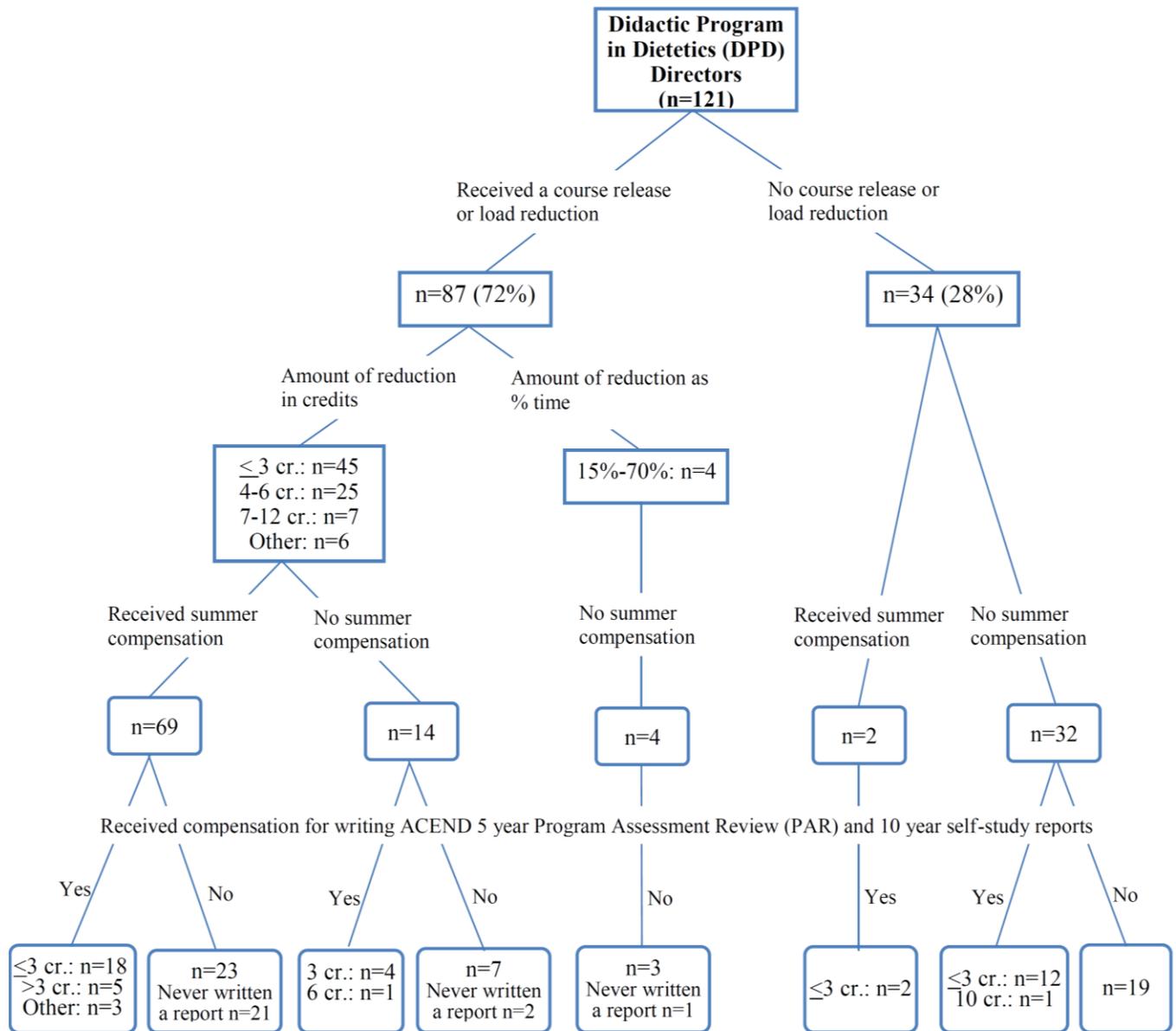


Fig. (3). Release time and compensation received by Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) (n=121) directors for managing the program and completing accreditation requirements.

NDEP members who are themselves program directors. No independent research firm was contracted to conduct the survey in order to reduce bias [10]; 4) the list of activities may not be complete, especially for DTs, and may have underestimated the actual workload of program directors; 5) as mentioned earlier, all four program types are different and comparison across program types may not be applicable; and 6) the translation of credits into hours and time release may vary across institutions and may have impacted the accuracy of the calculations of course load and load reductions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current survey constitutes the first study to formally assess and quantify the reported workload and compensation of nutrition and dietetics program directors since the 2008 accreditation standards have been implemented. Findings

confirm what nutrition and dietetics program directors have been asserting for some time: accreditation-related activities are time-consuming. The reported time spent to complete these activities corresponds with what directors have estimated in 2006 [5] and averages to more than 50% of the time spent for a full-time work-week (22 hours of a 40-hour work week); yet, most nutrition and dietetics program directors have teaching loads that are at least, if not more than a “full-time” academic work load. Considering that this work is required in order to maintain accreditation eligibility, it is likely that most directors are completing a number of tasks outside of the defined “40-hour” work week, which may potentially compromise the quality of their programs or the quality of their work to meet other required job responsibilities.

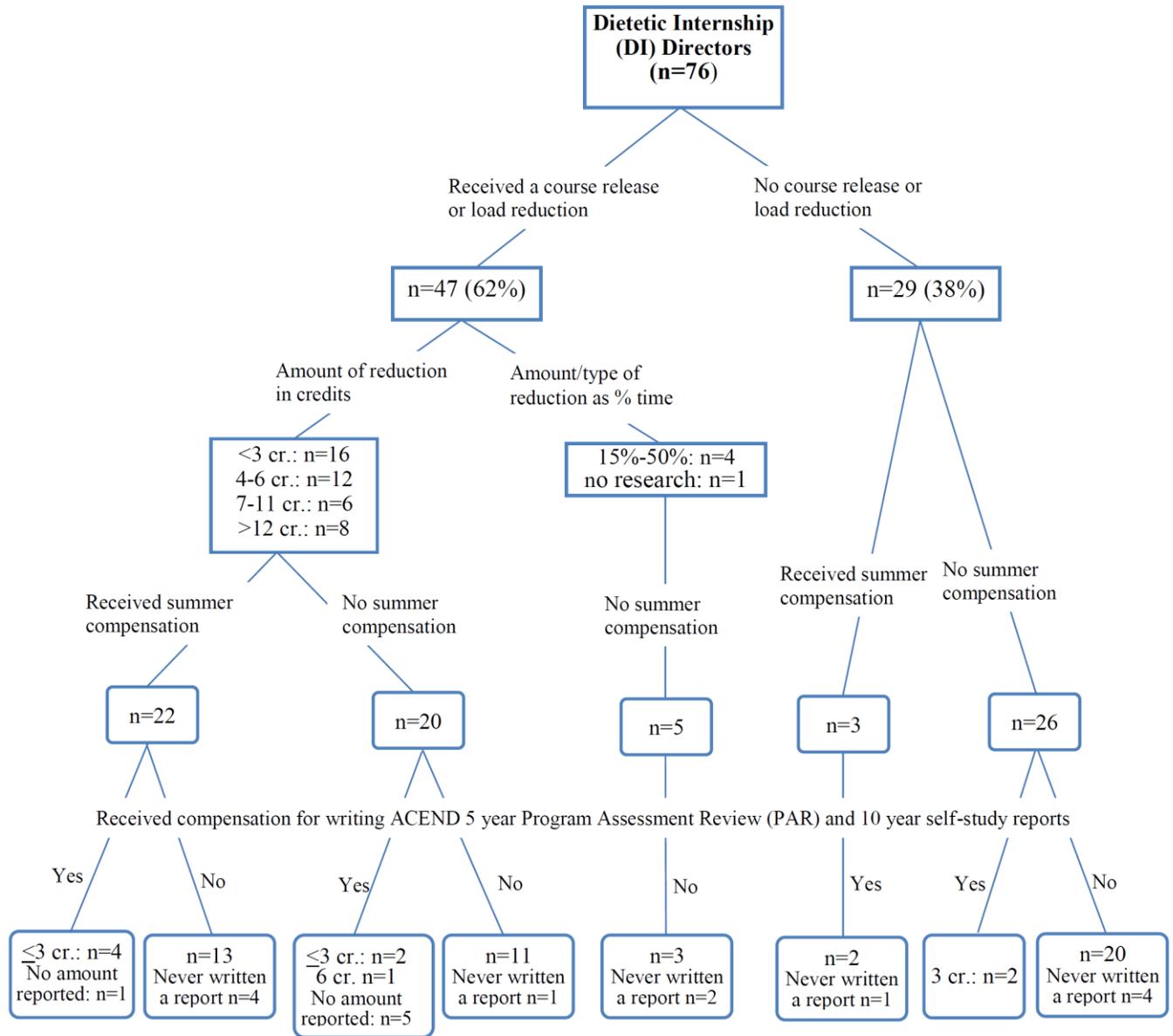


Fig. (4). Release time and compensation received by Dietetic Internship (DI) directors (n=76) for managing the program and completing accreditation requirements.

Of interest is the short amount of time many directors reported spending on writing the 5-year and 10-year accreditation reports. Assessing the relationship between the total number of hours spent on writing the accreditation report and its overall completeness and quality, and for the self-study assessing the level of success of the site visit, may provide directors with helpful information to better prepare for these major one-time accreditation requirements.

Many directors indicated they received some form of compensation or time relief to perform their accreditation responsibilities, typically a 3-credit or 6-credit annual load reduction, with some having added compensation for summer work or for preparing the 5-year or 10-year ACEND reports. The reported compensation does not match the level of effort stated by directors and is similar to the amount

reported by the 28 directors in 2006 [5]. Of concern is the large number of directors (22%) who indicated receiving no type of relief or compensation. It is possible that many DI directors are recruited with the sole purpose to administer internship programs and their director activities are assumed as part of their role and job responsibilities. This, however, does not explain the 19 DPD directors, and possibly the 3 CP and 3 DT directors, who typically add the director responsibilities to their full-time faculty load.

A major lesson learned from this pilot study is the necessity to conduct separate surveys for each group of directors. For example, DI Directors are based in several types of facilities (e.g., hospital, public health, college, university) which affect their job description, workload, release time, teaching load, and expectations by their

supervisors. In this survey, we were not able to fully characterize the settings in which many DI directors work and we were unable to present a completely accurate picture of workload.

Future time or observational studies need to be conducted to minimize bias related to self-reporting [9] and should include survey questions to determine when program directors are completing the ACEND related tasks (e.g., at night after their work day, during the weekend, etc.), and whether these accreditation activities are affecting the quality of their other job responsibilities. Interviewing administrators and supervisors of nutrition and dietetics program directors may help better understand their decision making process for assigning workload reductions or extra compensation to complete accreditation related tasks. Future evaluations should also examine the possible association between the amount of time program directors spend on accreditation-related activities and the quality of programs. Program quality may be measured using ACEND required program outcomes including national examination pass rates and dietetic internship placement rates. Additional measures could include quality of accreditation reports and satisfaction of stakeholders. Looking beyond nutrition and dietetics it would be of interest to explore and compare the accreditation requirements and resulting workload of program directors from other accreditation programs, especially those in the health professions such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and nursing. Such comparisons would add valuable knowledge to the field of accreditation and aid in streamlining the work of program directors through inter-professional collaborations.

In conclusion, most nutrition and dietetics program directors spend a large portion of their work week fulfilling ACEND required administrative duties. Results of this survey can help shape future ACEND recommendations for program directors, they may be used as a starting point to discuss workload compensation with administrators, and they could serve as a baseline for future accreditation workload surveys.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

ACEND	=	Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, the accrediting agency of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
DT	=	Dietetic Technician, the two-year college program preparing students for sitting on the national Dietetic Technician exam to secure the Dietetic Technician Registered credential.
DPD	=	Didactic Programs in Dietetics, the undergraduate program in nutrition and dietetics preparing students for the dietetic internship program.
DI	=	Dietetic Internship, the practicum program that prepares students for sitting on the

national Registered Dietitian exam to secure the Registered Dietitian credential.

CP = Coordinated Programs, the seamless program that combines DPD and DI programs.

NDEP = Nutrition and Dietetics Educators and Preceptors, the education group of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Both authors have personal conflict that could potentially have biased the authors' decisions, work, or interpretation of the results: The first author is a Dietetic Internship Director and the second author is a Didactic Program in Dietetics Director. It is possible that if the results of this manuscript help improve the time release, load reduction, or monetary compensation provided to program directors, the authors would potentially benefit.

Please note, however, that as of June 2014, the primary author will no longer serve as a dietetic internship director. She will be in charge of the Department's MS program and will not manage any ACEND accredited programs. Thus, there is no possible gain, financial or otherwise, to the primary author from the potential impact of this study. The primary author wrote this manuscript with the knowledge that her contract as a DI director was temporary and that she will not benefit from its results.

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Declared none.

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