

As a Student, Why Should I Become a Member of the Academy?

An Interview with Laura Kull, MS, RDN; President of MI Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics

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The road to becoming a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can be a daunting prospect. The journey not only requires a strong academic performance, but also involvement in several other capacities within the realm of dietetics. This journey continues once one has earned their RDN credentials and started practicing. One of the best decisions a dietetic student can make is to join the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and their respective state's Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. But why should I as a student become an Academy member? To investigate this important question further, student board members, Elizabeth and Emily, interviewed Laura Kull, the 2020-2021 president of the Michigan Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Laura's journey to becoming an Academy member began when she was a member of the now disbanded Ann Arbor Dietetic Association, and she had the opportunity to go to Washington D.C where she began working with legislation. We asked Laura several questions in hopes of providing further clarification as to why being an Academy member as a student is a beneficial decision.

We began our conversation with a brief discussion of the purpose of the Academy. Laura explained that the ultimate function of the Academy is "to advocate and advance our profession." If the Academy did not exist, there would be no professional organization to fight and advocate for the rights of the RD/RDN. Laura suggested thinking of being an Academy member as part of your job. This job begins as a dietetics student. When we asked Laura to tell us what she believed were the top 3 reasons for becoming a member of the Michigan Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MI AND) as a student, she responded with not 3, but 5 important reasons for students to become MI AND members now. In her own words, Laura stated the most important reason is the networking opportunities that become available through a student membership to MI AND. She went on to list other valuable reasons including Continuing Professional Education (CPE), various leadership opportunities, Dietetic Practice Groups (DPG) as well as Laura's personal favorite reason: the friendships. All these reasons for joining the Academy and MI AND as a student can ultimately lead students to future job opportunities and prospects.

Citing her point that networking is the most important reason for students to join the Academy, we asked Laura, "Why is it important for me to become a student member of MI AND, and how can that help me in my future career as a RDN?" Laura, once again, reiterated that networking through a student's participation in the various leadership opportunities that MI AND presents to its members is essential and at the core of how a MI AND membership will aid students in their prospective careers. "It is easy to network via the Michigan Academy through participating in leadership opportunities which will increase your network and provide opportunities," she stated. As a student Academy member, she stressed to explore the student area on the Academy website as it contains several great resources including job postings, access to the Nutrition Care Process (NCP) and the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (JAND) as well as to DPG and the Evidence Analysis Library (EAL). These material resources, Laura explains, are just some of the benefits to students for being Academy

members. In addition to the availability of the various student materials, in the short term, Laura stated that becoming a member of the Academy as a student does “look great on a resume,” and is something that she strongly encourages. In the long term, the benefits of being an Academy member as a student are items such as the available leadership opportunities as well as other benefits like Standards of Professional Practice (SOPP) materials and Scope of Practice. Laura, however, noted that these types of benefits and resource materials are dependent upon your state, place of employment, education level, and other such contingencies.

Continuing Education Credits (CDE) are one of the most popular aspects of membership. Information regarding upcoming class dates and opportunities for professional development are often shared with the members through member newsletters and meetings and this conveniently allows members to be informed about the opportunities. Student members can take advantage of these learning opportunities, too.

Another benefit, and one of Laura’s favorite aspects of being a member, is the ability to get to know the wonderful people that make up the organization. She said what makes MI Academy so great are “the people” that comprise the membership. There are a lot of opportunities to network and get to know the other members, as well, and this is encouraged at all meetings and conventions. Monthly district meetings provide additional opportunities for building relationships, and are a great way to get started as a new member. While meeting new people can be intimidating, especially as a student, Laura feels that there are a lot of opportunities to build networks if the effort is put into it. One piece of advice she shared is to make a point to meet and get to know at least one new person at every meeting you attend.

Importantly too, as students start applying to their dietetic programs and internships, it is possible that preceptors and directors will look for academy membership status. Being a member for at least a year is something that many prospective directors will want to see. The nice thing for students and dietetic interns on a budget is that there are student rates for membership fees, along with a tiered graduated rate for new dietitians as they start their career, making membership more affordable. Additionally, members of the Academy are getting two memberships for the price of one: they are members of the national academy, as well as their state academy, and this provides a wide range of resources and opportunities on the local and national level.

In closing, Laura said that the one thing that she wished all prospective student Mi Academy members would know is, “Membership is what you make of it. Get involved. Shape the future of your profession!” And so we will, and we hope you’ll join us!