



Genetic Counseling and Pre-Genetic Counseling Track Basics

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median income of genetic counselors in 2024 was over \$98,000 and there is a very positive outlook for the field: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/genetic-counselors.htm>. Licensure as a Certified Genetic Counselor (CGC) requires that applicants pass an examination administered by the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC). Eligibility to take this exam requires a Master's in Genetic Counseling from a program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC). More information about certification as a Genetic Counselor can be found at <https://www.nsgc.org/About/Becoming-a-Genetic-Counselor> and <https://www.gceducation.org/>.

Mercer University undergraduates who are thinking about a career in genetic counseling are considered to be on a "pre-genetic counseling" track. This designation is made to ensure that these students receive specific advising about the requirements and protocols for their respective career paths. Pre-professional tracks are not majors. Students on the pre-genetic counseling track ("pre-GC") must choose an academic major and minor offered by one of Mercer's colleges or schools and work towards those degree requirements as they also complete the prerequisites for admission to their preferred GC graduate programs.

Common Requirements for Admission. Most graduate programs in genetic counseling require a bachelor's degree of some kind. Most will not require a specific undergraduate degree, but require prerequisite coursework. Common prerequisites include two semesters of general biology with labs, two semesters of general chemistry with lab, one semester of upper level biochemistry (note that the prerequisite for biochemistry at Mercer's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences is the completion of organic chemistry II with a C or higher), one semester of genetics, one semester of cell or molecular biology, one semester of introductory psychology, and one semester of statistics. **It is also a common requirement for applicants to register for the match with [National Matching Services \(NMS\)](#) before applying to genetic counseling graduate programs (view matching trends here- [GC Admissions Match | Statistics](#))** Because the admission requirements for different schools vary, and because the admission requirements may change, students must investigate the different schools available and make themselves aware of the particular requirements for the programs in which they are interested.

The Ideal Genetic Counseling Graduate School Candidate. Students must plan ahead carefully in order to create a competitive application "portfolio" during their undergraduate years. This means taking the appropriate coursework, performing well academically, and participating in appropriate extracurricular activities that will develop the skills and characteristics required of a successful graduate school applicant. Students should bear in mind that graduate schools in this field are looking for individuals with the following characteristics:

- a strong academic background with a firm foundation in the sciences (high GPA's in rigorous coursework);
- good reasoning ability and strong critical thinking skills;
- strong interpersonal skills, able to connect well with people from various backgrounds;
- compassion and a commitment to service;
- excellent communication skills (both written and oral);
- strong leadership skills but with the ability to work well on a team;
- a good base of knowledge about speech pathology;

- integrity and high ethical standards;
- a positive attitude, able to function effectively under stress; and
- competitive Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores (if required).

Developing a Back-Up Plan. Because graduate schools are selective, students should develop an alternative plan to implement in the event that adequate progress is not made or acceptance to graduate school is not achieved.

An effective back-up plan is one that addresses any perceived “weak spots” in an applicant’s portfolio. For example, it would be appropriate for a student with GPA’s below 3.3 to take more classes (such as those on the prerequisite coursework list) and earn high grades before applying again to graduate schools, while a student with high grades and very little extracurricular experience should spend more time working or volunteering in a relevant setting before applying again. Students may investigate other options and consult with advisors in the Center for Career & Professional Development (Mercer-Macon).