



The Student Handbook

University of South Carolina
School of Medicine
Genetic Counseling Program
2026-2027

Our Mission

Foster the development of knowledgeable and compassionate genetic counselors through interprofessional education and community engagement.

Our Vision

Advance the integration of genomic medicine into diverse healthcare systems and communities through leadership, advocacy and education.

Our Values

The USC Genetic Counseling Program values a collaborative culture steeped in a supportive and welcoming environment. We balance rigorous academic and patient-centered training, ensuring our graduates excel as genetic counselors and advocates for their patients, community and profession.

This handbook is a guide to assist the student in meeting the requirements of graduate school. The [Genetic Counseling Program Website](#) also contains helpful information. It remains the student's responsibility to read the [Graduate School Bulletin](#) and to meet all the requirements for graduation. The Faculty of the Graduate School, the School of Medicine, and in particular, the Genetic Counseling Program, is available for guidance.

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Program History and Primary Faculty

The Genetic Counselor

Genetic counselors are specialized healthcare professionals who counsel individuals and families about genetic conditions and birth defects. The counselor has initial contact with families and acts as case manager and liaison to the health care team throughout the evaluation process. Genetic counselors work with patients from varied socio-cultural-educational backgrounds to obtain family history, assess psychosocial status, explain the ramifications of disorders, and provide support to assist in adjustment to the physical and emotional response to genetic diagnosis. Additionally, genetic counselors provide education to practicing professionals, health care students, and lay groups. Program administration, the development of new services and research activities are often encompassed within the career.

The Program

The Genetic Counseling Program at the UofSC School of Medicine was founded in 1985 as a southeastern regional training program for genetic counselors. The Program is served by an outstanding faculty and network of clinical rotation facilities. The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education awarded the Program a rare "Commendation for Excellence" in 1991 and in 1998, citing program strengths as its enthusiastic faculty, thesis research, and students who have proven to be professionally active after graduation. The curriculum includes course work, clinical experience, and a Master of Science thesis toward the goal of graduating genetic counselors eligible for certification by the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC). The Program received full ABGC accreditation in 2000 and reaccreditation in 2006. Most recently, the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling re-accredited the Program for the maximum eight years, 2022-2030.

Genetic Counseling Program

Primary Faculty

University of South Carolina School of Medicine

Whitney Dobek, MS, CGC, Director

Jessica Fairey, MS, CGC, Assistant Director, Fieldwork

Amy Wardyn, MS, CGC, Assistant Director, Thesis Research

Crystal Hill-Chapman, PhD

Janice G. Edwards, MS, CGC

Debbie Zvejnieks, MS, CGC

Shandrea Foster, MS, CGC

Hayley Granger, MS, CGC

Jordan Miller, MS, CGC

Kaela Kraft, MS

Michelle Wehunt, Program Coordinator

Genetic Counseling Program of Study

- **701 -- Introduction to Genetic Counseling. (3)** (Prereq: admission to program) An overview of the history and development of genetic counseling. Introduction to the fundamental components of and skills utilized in prenatal, pediatric, and adult genetic counseling.
- **702 -- Psychosocial Aspects of Genetic Counseling. (3)** (Prereq: HGEN 701) Exploration of the impact of genetic conditions on the individual and family. Psychosocial skills will be strengthened through reading, role play, discussion and interactions with affected individuals and families.

- **703 -- Approaches to Ethical Challenges in Genetic Counseling. (1)** (Prereq: HGEN 701) Seminar in bioethical principles and their application to case management and genetic counseling. Includes lecture, case presentation, and discussion. (Pass-fail grading)
- **704 -- The Genetic Counseling Process. (3)** (Coreq: HGEN 701). Introduction to counseling skills utilized in genetic counseling via reading, discussion, clinical observation and role play.
- **705 -- Clinical Skills Seminar. (1)** Intensive skill development focused on practical aspects of patient care for clinical rotation preparation. (Pass-Fail grading)
- **710 -- Genetic Counseling Methods. (3)** (Prereq: HGEN 702) An integration of the student's theoretical background and clinical experiences with focus on the development of clinical skills. Format includes case presentation and discussion.
- **715 -- Contemporary Issues in Genetic Counseling. (1x4)** Discussion and presentation forum targeted at critical evaluation of medical genetics literature and examination of current issues affecting the genetic counseling profession. (Pass-Fail grading)
- **720 -- Medical Genetics. (4)** (Prereq: consent of instructor) A study of the clinical aspects of human genetics with focus on single gene, chromosomal, and multifactorial genetic disease; the underlying molecular and biochemical principles; and determination of genetic risk.
- **725 -- Human Developmental Biology I. (4)** The process of normal human development and description of the variety and range of deviation that can occur from fertilization through early childhood.
- **726 -- Human Developmental Biology II. (4)** (Prereq: HGEN 725) Systems covered include cardiac, vascular, and urogenital. Additional topics include clinical correlates, ultrasound, labor and delivery, infancy, childhood and adolescence.
- **730 -- Advanced Medical Genetics I. (3)** (Prereq: HGEN 720) A comprehensive seminar series taught by clinical geneticists, genetic counselors, and health care practitioners. Topics include a broad range of medical conditions with underlying genetic etiologies, genetic testing methodologies used to diagnose these conditions and therapies/treatments currently available for medical management of these conditions.
- **731 -- Advanced Medical Genetics II. (3)** Continuation of HGEN 730. A comprehensive seminar series taught by clinical geneticists, genetic counselors, and health care practitioners. Topics include a broad range of medical conditions with underlying genetic etiologies, genetic testing methodologies used to diagnose these conditions and therapies/treatments currently available for medical management of these conditions.
- **735 -- Cancer Genetics and Genetic Counseling. (3)** (Prereq: HGEN 720) Overview of medical oncology with an emphasis on familial and hereditary cancer. Includes didactic lectures, oral and written assignments.
- ***740 -- Transforming Health Care for the Future. (1)** Foundation for beginning health professions students to gain an understanding of the complexities of the health care system through experiential activities conducted in interprofessional teams and the importance of interprofessional collaboration in order to improve the system.
*LEND trainees exempt from HGEN 740 given other interprofessional coursework
- **750 -- Summer Clinical Rotation. (2)** (Prereq: HGEN 702) Clinical placement in a regional genetic center under direct supervision of geneticist/genetic counselor. Allows opportunity for development of genetic counseling skills as students begin transition from theory to practice.
- **760 -- Clinical Rotation I. (3)** (Prereq: HGEN 702) Clinical placement for 16 days under direct supervision of geneticist/genetic counselor for experience in prenatal, pediatric, cancer and disease-specific clinics.

- **761 -- Clinical Rotation II. (3)** (Prereq: HGEN 702) Clinical placement for 16 days under direct supervision of geneticist/genetic counselor for experience in prenatal, pediatric, cancer and disease-specific clinics.
- **799 -- Thesis preparation. (6)**

Case Conference

Case Conference provides a forum for practicing genetic counselors and rotating genetic counseling students to discuss interesting and difficult cases that they encounter. All genetic counseling students and genetic counselor faculty are expected to attend. Second year students on rotation are expected to share an equitable number of cases. Pedigrees and/or results should be shared where appropriate, with the case presented at the front of the class as a presentation with or without slides. We ask that first year students share interesting cases from their clinical fieldwork as warranted. Attending genetic counseling faculty will weekly host boards review either through sharing cases from their clinical experience and/or creating questions targeting the ABGC Content Outline.

Case Conference meets on Thursday mornings at 8:30-9:30 a.m. Attendance is mandatory and follows the Program's attendance policy as stated in this handbook and on your syllabi. Unexpected absences should be discussed with the Case Conference coordinator and at the coordinator's discretion, with the Program Director. See HGEN 710 Genetic Counseling syllabus for Learning Outcomes.

Educational Opportunities

Specific lectures required by the Program are listed below. Additional conferences, grand rounds, special lectures, etc. pertinent to the practice of genetic counseling are announced periodically. The Program Director may deem the opportunity a **required** activity or a **recommended** activity.

Carolina Genetics Conclave

The Conclave meets one to two times per year and includes presentations and a keynote address for the continuing education of genetics professionals. The Conclave is a part of the Genetic Counseling Program of study and students are required to attend. Second year students may be asked to make a presentation at a Conclave or equivalent forum during their second year of study.

Amelia Craver Special Lecture

Annually, the Program hosts a special event to enhance the education of genetic counselors in honor of Amelia Craver, MS, CGC. "Missy" Craver was a 1988 graduate of the Program and created the initial Genetic Counseling Endowment, permanently invested funds that create interest income which now and, in the future, will continue to enhance genetic counselor education. Students and faculty will attend with alumni and friends of the Program who are invited to this special Program event.

James Clyburn Health Disparities Lecture

US Congressman Clyburn established this health disparities lecture via the Arnold School of Public Health to bring focus to the needs of underserved communities in our state. The Genetic Counseling Program participates in the Clyburn lecture when able.

National Professional Conferences

All students are expected to attend at least one national conference as a second year student, such as the annual education conferences of the NSGC, ACMG, ASHG or regional genetics conferences. Students

with financial hardship should speak with the Program Director to consider possible virtual options. Benefits of attending conference in person make it preferable; and therefore, students should consider building cost of travel into their budget of extra expenses. First year students are encouraged to attend if the location/student financial situation allows. The Program often provides funds for registration fees from UofSC Educational Foundation to support the student's attendance.

Genetics Laboratory Curriculum

Increasingly, genetic counselors interact with genetic laboratories and often are employed in such settings. Students receive curriculum on laboratory genetics from the Greenwood Genetic Center and various other genetic testing laboratories. This occurs throughout the first year in didactic lectures and hands-on activities, with focus on this curriculum within HGEN705 Clinical Skills Seminar during May session. Students, especially those interested in laboratory genetic counseling as a career, can consider an optional rotation in a laboratory setting during the winterim mini-rotation in their second academic year or applying for one of the summer rotation experiences offered by several genetic testing laboratories. When offered, second year students are encouraged to enroll in GeneDx's optional webinar series in the fall of their second year.

Karen A. Brooks Cancer Genetics Scholarship

Karen Brooks (1961-2023) was a genetic counselor who invested over 25 years with the USC Genetic Counseling Program where she served as clinical supervisor, faculty, advisory board member, and where she developed the cancer genetic counseling service from its inception. Karen's dedication to providing the best care and education for her patients and students included her commitment to lifelong learning. To honor her legacy, the Karen Albiez Brooks Cancer Genetics Scholarship was established in 2023.

Each year, one enrolled, rising second year genetic counseling student will be selected to further their cancer genetics education, research, or clinical preparation with monetary support. Applications are invited during the first year, spring semester and are due by May 1st. The Genetic Counseling Program leadership will review and award a deserving candidate up to \$500 toward building excellence in cancer genetic counseling through additional cancer rotation or mini rotation, attendance at a cancer-focused conference, cancer-dedicated thesis research, or online course. Additional information will be provided at start of first year spring semester and is available upon request earlier.

Preparing Future Faculty

Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) is a national program for select graduate students interested in becoming faculty in higher education during their careers. PFF activities complement the genetic counseling curriculum and advance the development of the academic mission: teaching skills, scholarly research and service. The student that matched to the PFF track is automatically enrolled and will receive the Graduate Assistantship to work directly with the Program and fulfil that portion of the PFF requirements.

However, all other students are welcome to apply for and complete the PFF certificate during their time in the Program. Details can be found here:

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/cte/graduate_teaching_assistants/preparing_future_faculty/index.php

Service Learning and Community Engagement

Appreciation of the perspective of our clients is broadened through serving in the community. Several service-learning opportunities are offered throughout the academic year. First year students are required to participate in at least one activity per month as part of enrollment in HGEN 701 and 702. Second year students and faculty are encouraged to participate as often as their schedule allows.

The faculty Community Engagement Coordinator will work with first year students who are assigned one “awareness month” in fall and spring semesters and asked to create a blog article raising awareness for the genetic aspects of that awareness month. For example, rare disease, breast cancer, congenital heart disease, etc. may be highlighted. Students may also be asked to accompany a genetic counselor and/or provide their own outreach education event bringing further awareness to our community and the service of genetic counseling, in outreach to diverse communities to raise awareness of the profession.

Community Engagement Coordinators and the ZFSC Genetic Counseling Student Award

This award is an endowed grant from the Zvejnieks Foundation to support leadership development among second year genetic counseling students. Following an annual application process, two second year students are selected to be our Community Engagement Coordinators and serve to connect students and faculty as we raise awareness for genetic counseling and our Program. Our Community Engagement Coordinators are responsible for outreach to Columbia area non-profit organizations that support individuals and families with genetic conditions and birth differences, outreach to South Carolina educational institutions, and broader education and awareness to a wider audience through social media outreach. The UofSC Genetic Counseling Program has always been committed to service learning and person to person engagement, and we are grateful to the Zvejnieks Foundation for creating this leadership and professional development opportunity.

Electronic Portfolio

The Genetic Counseling Program includes coursework, fieldwork, thesis research, additional educational opportunities, and service learning. In HGEN 701 syllabus, students will receive guidelines for developing their individual learning portfolio to reflect the myriad of activities that sum the education of the genetic counselor. These portfolios are reviewed at the completion of each semester and become part of the student’s permanent file upon graduation. Completion of the portfolio fulfills a piece of the comprehensive exam graduation requirement.

Fieldwork Experience

First year fieldwork includes observations that allow for increasing participation in prenatal, cancer, and medical genetics throughout the academic year. The first-year experience includes complete counseling of a cancer case and a prenatal case toward the end of the spring semester/in Maymester. Additional experiences in telemedicine and/or specialty clinics may also occur during first year fieldwork.

Students will have the opportunity to rotate with multiple sites throughout their second year. Beginning with a full-time 6-week summer rotation which is planned during the fall semester of the first

year. For summer rotation experience, several sites within the Program clinical rotation network are available, and sites may occasionally be available in other areas of the United States and internationally.

For the summer rotation, placements at sites without current agreements with the Program can be considered after discussion and approval of a general plan with the Program Director. Typically, the student makes initial contact with the desired site and works with the Program Director to make the necessary arrangements. If the site is associated with another genetic counseling education program, the Program Director will make the initial contact. However, areas of the country housing other training programs are often unable to take outside students. Please note that centers often require an affiliation agreement, background checks, drug testing, etc.; the student may be responsible for costs associated with these additional items. The legwork can be time-consuming and may impact the start date for a rotation.

Fieldwork experience for the second year are assigned by the Program. Students will be asked for input on preferences for rotation sites (specialty area, location, family situation, etc.). Preferences will be taken into consideration, but all requests cannot be guaranteed, as the Program must make the schedule mutually beneficial for each class member and the clinical supervisors. Students will be assigned four rotations, each focused in prenatal, medical, or cancer genetics. Students will be assigned one, two week “mini rotation”, which will take place during the “Winterim” at the start of the Spring semester and will include fieldwork experience outside of the three main specialty areas or provide additional experience in an area of interest/need for the student’s ongoing development.

Anticipated Expenses

Students are responsible for arranging transportation and lodging for rotations and are responsible for costs incurred at remote sites. Currently, second year students receive a \$500 stipend each semester to assist with these costs.

Most sites require liability insurance for students on rotation. As such, liability insurance must be purchased by June 1st following the student’s first year of graduate training. Drug testing, vaccinations, and additional background checks may also be a requirement. These can incur expenses not covered by Program or tuition. Please refer to the requirements for clinical rotations which are outlined in the HGEN 750/760/761 syllabus and serve as a handbook for ongoing reference.

Documentation

Electronic documentation of all fieldwork experience is required by the Program. Student cases will be logged in Typhon, an online program for tracking cases and submitting evaluations. Midpoint and final evaluations will be conducted on rotation. Please refer to the Fieldwork Experience Syllabus for evaluation details and case requirements as outlined by the ACGC Standards of Accreditation for Graduate Programs in Genetic Counseling.

Master of Science Thesis

The thesis requirement for the Genetic Counseling Master’s Program is an ongoing, twenty-month endeavor. The purpose is to expose students to the research process through the initiation, implementation, and completion of an original research project. Additional goals include developing expertise in a specific area, gaining experience with giving professional presentations, and creating a manuscript for publication.

The Assistant Director of Thesis Research will meet with first year students in the first semester to discuss possible thesis topics, brainstorm ideas etc. The Thesis Manual, designed to direct you throughout the thesis project, will be distributed by the Assistant Director of Thesis Research during the first year of study. Included will be a timeline detailing a suggested course of progression and Program-specific deadlines. Please refer to these guidelines as the primary source of information about what is expected at each stage in the thesis process. Additional questions may be directed to your Thesis Advisor, the Assistant Director of Thesis Research, or the Program Director.

Thesis Expenses

The thesis advisor or the student should discuss any possible cost with the Director and/or Assistant Director of Thesis Research *prior* to incurring any expenses. Grants may be applied for to help cover costs.

Thesis Presentations

All first-year students are required to attend the Thesis Presentations given by the graduating second year class. The presentations are typically held during the week of graduation. Under extenuating circumstances, a student may submit a written request for an excused absence to the Director.

UofSC School of Medicine Graduate Hooding

Graduating genetic counselors are honored with other School of Medicine clinical graduate students in a special ceremony where they receive their hoods, representing the master's degree. Held the day before commencement, the Genetic Counseling Program requires graduating counselors to attend the Graduate Hooding Ceremony and only under extenuating circumstances accepts excused absences. The student may request exemption by written petition submitted to the Director.

UofSC School of Medicine Commencement

Graduating genetic counselors receive the Master of Science degree, in a ceremony held specifically for the School of Medicine at the Koger Center. The Genetic Counseling Program requires graduating counselors to attend Commencement and only under extenuating circumstances accepts excused absences. The student may request exemption by written petition submitted to the Director.

American Board of Genetic Counseling Certification

The Certified Genetic Counselor (CGC) credential is granted by the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC) to counselors who meet established standards for professional practice through specialized training, clinical experience, and successful completion of the ABGC Certification Examination. The comprehensive exam is offered twice annually, typically during August and February. Certification is contingent upon successfully passing the exam. Examinees must achieve "Active Candidate Status" by graduating an accredited program prior to scheduling the exam. Students and graduates of the Program are responsible for obtaining current information from ABGC pertaining to their individual certification process. The Program makes an effort to inform/update students and recent graduates of ABGC policy updates. However, it remains the students' responsibility to be aware of current requirements available at www.abgc.net

Access, Opportunity, and Related Initiatives

The field of genetic counseling, like scientific research more broadly, benefits profoundly when individuals from varied backgrounds, experiences, and communities are included in its workforce. Historically, genetics has not been immune to misuse and exclusion—eugenics movements and early genetic studies often reflected biased assumptions that caused real harm, particularly to marginalized groups. These past missteps highlight the importance of ensuring that the genetic counselor workforce of the present and future can offer perspectives shaped by different lived realities, cultural knowledge, and understandings of health. When the profession includes voices that reflect the full spectrum of human experience, it becomes better equipped to serve all patients equitably, ask more nuanced research questions, and build trust with communities who have historically been overlooked or misrepresented in medical genetics. The future of genetic counseling depends on who is invited to shape it.

Our Program values our role in shaping this future. Ongoing efforts encompass engagement with prospective, first year, and second year genetic counseling students as well as faculty and alumni.

- The summer internship strives to connect individuals with less access and opportunity to the profession. This experience promotes professional interaction with Program faculty and educational foundation within genetic counseling.
- Incoming students with a background of challenges or overcoming hardship can apply for the Access and Opportunity Award (formally the Cultural and Social Resiliency Award) and/or the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) fellowship track (1 of 3 slots reserved for an A&O candidate) to assist with the financial aspects of graduate school.
- The curriculum includes an educational outreach program to schools and institutions that serve students from a wide range of communities and backgrounds. The goal is to raise awareness about the role of genetic counseling—whether as a potential career path or as a service these students may engage with in their personal or professional lives.
- Required reading and discussion materials that have been infused with literature and other media exploring cultural insights.
- Our Contemporary Issues course encourages students and faculty to critically examine the presence—or absence—of varied perspectives in the literature. Discussions explore how existing data apply to the full range of patients we serve and identify gaps that future research must address to reflect the broader population more completely.
- A first and a second-year students, including the Access and Opportunity award recipient, hold a student-run curriculum review annually to assess the Program for bias, highlight strengths in cultural training, and provide feedback for improvement.
- Reduced registration fees available for our online course, Genetic Counseling: Career for the Future, for prospective students who demonstrate a desire for access, citing that financial assistance can provide opportunity.
- Annual workshops are provided as continuing education for USC Genetic Counseling Program faculty and clinical supervisors, with a focus on fostering inclusive, equitable, and reflective practices in education and clinical supervision.

Awards and Recognition

Distinguished Genetic Counseling Alumni Award

Each year, the School of Medicine Alumni Association seeks nominations for and names the Distinguished Genetic Counseling Alumni Award. The honoree is invited to attend a special event where the Dean presents the award. Honorees may also be asked to present to the Genetic Counseling Program in a guest lecture as schedules permit. Criteria for nomination include alumna or alumnus who has exhibited significant leadership and accomplishments as a genetic counselor.

May be demonstrated by meeting **at least two** of the following criteria:

- Is a well-recognized leader in the field of genetic counseling
- Has led or been an integral part of building a genetic counseling program
- Has led or been an integral part of an initiative that advances genetic services or improves care for a patient population
- Serves as a strong advocate in her/his community for the genetic counseling profession
- Continued commitment to volunteerism through involvement in professional organizations or continued service to patient populations
- Has earned previous recognition or awards as a genetics/genetic counseling professional

Richard R. Ferrante Friend of the Genetic Counseling Program Award

In the spring semester, the Genetic Counseling Program Graduate Committee selects the annual honoree for the Friend of the Genetic Counseling Program Award. Named for a founding partner in the Program, the honoree is presented an award and their his/her contribution to the continued success of the Program is highlighted at the award's presentation and on the Program website.

S. Robert Young Outstanding Genetic Counselor Award

During the Thesis Presentations, the S. Robert Young Ph.D. Outstanding Genetic Counselor award is presented. Named for the Founding Director of the Program and voted by the Program faculty, this award is presented to the graduating genetic counselor that has excelled in academic and clinical performance, is committed to participation in research and community outreach, and has demonstrated exemplary qualities as a genetic counselor with promise for future contributions to the profession.

Victoria A. Vincent Counselor Supervision Award

Named in honor of Vicki Vincent, MS, CGC, who graduated in the inaugural class of the Genetic Counseling Program and has served on faculty as a teacher, mentor, and counselor supervisor for over 30 years. This award will honor a genetic counselor that serves as an exemplary clinical rotation supervisor. The honoree is nominated by the graduating genetic counselors annually to an individual who exhibits the qualities of an ideal supervisor: "providing balanced feedback, cultivating the critical thinking process, building confidence, allowing autonomy with respect for student opinion and fostering a collegial relationship." The honoree goes on to be recognized by the GCEA (Genetic Counselor Educators Association) nationally as an Outstanding Supervisor.

USC School of Medicine, Graduate School, and Genetic Counseling Program Policies and Information

All students enrolled in Master's degree programs, including the Genetic Counseling Program, must follow the academic policies of the Graduate School. Graduate students are subject to the academic policies, regulations, and academic standards of the School of Medicine, The Graduate School, and those listed below that belong specifically to the Genetic Counseling Program. Additional guidance, resources, and regulation can be found:

<https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/graduate/policies-regulations/graduate-academic-regulations/> and https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/medicine/somc_student_resources/index.php

Genetic Counseling Graduate Committee establishes policies and procedures for the Graduate Genetic Counseling Program consistent with UofSC and SOM guidelines. Ensures that program requirements are met and that the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling Practice Based Competencies guide the education, assessment, and progress toward the master's degree. The chair of the committee is the Genetic Counseling Graduate Program Director, all faculty members are ex-officio, and meeting frequency is as required. The two appointed faculty members currently include the Program's two Assistant Directors.

Academic Status and Progression Policies:

Degree Requirements

Specific requirements for graduation can be found in the Graduate Academic Bulletin at <https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/graduate/degree-requirements/masters-degree-requirements/> and <https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/graduate/medicine/genetic-counseling-ms/#text>. Graduate students in the Master of Science Genetic Counseling Program must submit and follow a Master's Program of Study. Degree is also contingent on the development of the ACGC practice-based competencies as demonstrated through the completion of the electronic portfolio showcasing the student's work throughout the Program, clinical fieldwork as designated by the Program and required by ACGC, and the Master's thesis.

Academic Standard for Progression

Graduate courses may be passed for degree credit with a grade as low as C, but a degree-seeking student must maintain at least a B (3.00 on a 4.00 scale) cumulative grade point average. Additional details in [Academic Bulletin](#).

Student Evaluation/Exit Interviews

Progress toward the Master's degree in genetic counseling is embedded in the attainment of ACGC Practice Based Competencies. Students are required to individually meet with the Program Director at least once per semester during each year of their training. These meetings serve to review student performance and progress toward their degree. Student progress and any identified educational needs will be documented in writing in the Student Progress Report.

Meetings for first year students will be held at the end of the first semester and at the completion of the first year of training, before beginning HGEN 750 Summer Clinical Rotation. At each of these interviews, the director checks student progress toward the Master of Science degree and elicits input on the first-year experience as part of the continuous Program assessment process.

Second year students are required to meet with the Program Director at least three times. These meetings serve to verify the student is progressing in attainment of Practice Based Competencies and is on track to graduate and subsequently enter the genetic counseling profession. In January-February of the second year, a 360 assessment of student progress is obtained. This includes the Program leadership reviewing each second year's transcripts, clinical rotation assessments, and thesis research progress. The second years self-assesses their progress on attaining the Practice Based Competencies, as goals for final fieldwork assignments are formulated. The second year student meets with the Program Director to review the 360 data at which time graduation readiness is assessed and any remediation plans are finalized in the progress report. A final exit interview is administered prior to commencement in which the Director confirms the student record for approval of the degree award and elicits input on the Program experience as part of the continuous Program assessment process.

Students will complete an ABGC boards-style comprehensive exam in May/June after completion of their first year and again in February of their second year. After each of the two fall rotations and the first spring rotation in the second year, students will participate in an oral case-based exam. This evaluates rotation experience and ability to critically think about a case in the specialty. Student's individual progress will be evaluated for expected performance and improvement with remediation provided if needed.

Remediation

Some students will require some degree of remediation in their didactic work, the clinical environment and/or within their thesis research. Individual plans for remediation will be put in place when needed as noted by poor evaluations, grades/scores, exams, or instructor/supervisor concerns. Academic remediation plans will be made with cooperation of student, course instructor(s), and Program Director. Fieldwork remediation plans will be made with cooperation of student, Program Director/Assistant Director of Fieldwork, and clinical supervisor(s) if needed. Thesis remediation plans will be made with cooperation of student, thesis advisor, and Program Director/Assistant Director of Thesis. Remediation meetings to discuss concerns with performance will be called as needed and will include a written plan including objectives, assessment and a timeline toward rectifying issues with performance. The student will participate in the development of the plan in order to individualize the approach so that it is best suited to the student's learning style.

Student Grievance, Petition, and Appeals

Appeals seeking to reverse or modify decisions made at a lower level of authority should be filed according to the established procedures with the student's academic unit. Students should file appeals with the Dean of The Graduate School only after the internal processes for appeals and grievances within the academic program, school and/or college have been exhausted.

(1) Whenever possible, resolution begins with a discussion between the student and instructor of record, unless that would be inappropriate due to student concerns. (2) If unresolved, the issue should go before the Program Director where a decision is rendered, or the case is presented to the Genetic Counseling Graduate Committee, consulting SOM Assistant Dean for Clinical Graduate Programs as needed.

The Graduate School will accept appeals on academic matters only. Disagreement with a grade assigned in a course is not a basis for appeal to The Graduate School but should be directed to the course instructor.

Appeals to the dean of The Graduate School must be submitted in writing and must include the name, student number, the signature of the appellant, and a full description of the circumstances of the appeal. Student appeals for reversal of departmental decisions are only accepted for consideration when questions such as inequitable application of regulations, bias, conflict with regulations, or extenuating circumstances are cited as grounds for appeal.

The dean of The Graduate School will attempt to resolve appeals filed with The Graduate School and will refer unresolved issues to the Graduate Council, whose decision will be the final action taken within The Graduate School. Any further appeal must be directed to the Office of the Provost. Graduate student appeals of disciplinary decisions reached under the Rule of Academic Responsibility procedures of the University must be made to the University Committee on Academic Responsibility

Dropping a Course/Course Withdraw, including Extenuating Circumstances

Students should consult the Program Director for advisement before withdrawing from coursework. Genetic counseling coursework is all required and only offered once a year. Therefore, a withdraw could delay graduation by a full academic year.

Courses dropped during the second through the tenth week of a regular semester (see date on the USC Academic Calendar) are recorded with an academic non penalty grade of W. After the first ten weeks of the semester, any courses dropped will appear on the permanent record with a grade of WF. A WF is treated as an F in the evaluation of the student's eligibility to continue and is computed into the student's graduate cumulative grade point average.

A student who wishes to drop a course for medical reasons or other acceptable cause after the session penalty date specified on the Academic Calendar for that term (last day to receive a **W**), may petition for assignment of **W** by submitting a Request for Assignment of **W** for Extenuating Circumstances form (AS-122A) available from the [Office of the University Registrar](#) with the appropriate documentation of circumstances, (e.g., a letter from a physician or health care provider). Additional information can be found in the [Academic Bulletin](#).

Academic Suspension/Probation

Graduate degree-seeking students whose cumulative grade point average (GPA) drops below 3.00 (**B**) will be placed on academic probation by The Graduate School and allowed one calendar year in which to raise the cumulative GPA to at least 3.00. Students who do not reach a cumulative 3.00 grade point average during the probationary period will be suspended from graduate study and will not be permitted to enroll for further graduate course work as a degree or a nondegree student. Additional detail in the [Academic Bulletin](#), including detail on Incomplete courses.

Reinstatement/Dismissal After Suspension

The Graduate School's Policy on Academic Probation and Suspension stipulates that when a degree-seeking graduate student's cumulative graduate grade point average (GPA) falls below 3.0 the student is placed on academic probation. The student has one calendar year, or in the case of an Incomplete conversion one major term, from the academic probation term to increase his/her cumulative graduate GPA to at least 3.0. Failing to meet this condition will result in academic suspension from all graduate study at the University of South Carolina.

A student must contact the Genetic Counseling Program and ask for support for reinstatement to graduate study. The department must recommend reinstatement for an appeal to go forward. After suspension, reinstatement to graduate study or nondegree enrollment status cannot be granted for one calendar year following the term of suspension. Specific Requirements can be found in the Academic Bulletin.

Application for Degree

All students enrolled in a Master's degree program must file the application for degree/graduation available on the website of the Office of the University Registrar with The Graduate School within the first 15 class days of the fall or spring semester in which the degree is to be awarded. Deadlines are posted for each term on the official academic calendar of the University found on the website of the Office of the University Registrar.

In my.sc.edu, students should view their Graduation Degree Application to confirm the accuracy of the information submitted and to correct any errors so the diploma is printed correctly. It is also important to inspect the graduation degree application information to determine if there are any holds that will prevent issue of an official transcript or mailing of the diploma.

At the end of the semester, the degree program (as described in the student evaluation and exit interview process) and The Graduate School both assess for degree, audit whether all requirements have been completed, and then forward a recommendation to the Registrar to approve or disapprove award of the degree. At the time of graduation, the student's cumulative grade point average (GPA) must be at least 3.00.

Classroom Policies:

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all class meetings in person, to participate in class, and to complete all assigned work. Remote class days will be denoted on course syllabi, or by notification of the instructor. Requests to attend an otherwise in-person class remotely will only be considered for unavoidable circumstances that fall under excused absences. All other requests to attend remotely will be considered an unexcused absence and apply to the policy below. Excused absences include illness, legal obligation, death in family, religious holiday, participation in professional events. Students with special attendance requests should meet with the instructor early in the semester to make arrangements for coursework. Unexcused absences (wedding, travel) will affect course grade at the discretion of the instructor and, if needed, the Program Director.

Dress Code

Genetic counseling graduate students are considered professionals and are expected to present themselves as such in dress and behavior. Students are expected to dress appropriately when entering the Genetic Counseling Program office, Two Medical Park, Prisma Health hospitals, any other professional environment or situation where a student is representing the Program. Jeans, tennis shoes, flip flops, tee-shirts, short skirts, low cut or midriff shirts, spaghetti straps, tank tops, etc. are not permissible. Hair/beards and nails should be clean, dry and well-groomed at all times. Students on clinical rotation are advised to seek out and comply with dress code requirements of the rotation site, as these will vary by setting.

FERPA

Personal student information is maintained and made available in accordance with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The University of South Carolina complies with FERPA affording students certain rights with respect to their educational records, including the right to inspect and review their records. For more detailed information and an outline of these rights, please visit University policy ACAF 3.03 “Handling of Student Records” at <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/acaf303.html>

Grades

Students are graded on a scale including A, B+, B, C+, C, D and F for graded courses and S and U for pass/fail courses. Students are required to maintain their Grade Point Average above 3.0 as described above. See the [Academic Bulletin](#) for specific policy related to grading.

Honor Code and Professional Code of Conduct

All students of the UofSC SOMC pledge to conduct themselves professionally and respectfully in all aspects of education and professional practice. Under the Academic and Professional Honor System, a student affirms they will adhere to the values outlined in the tenets of the Carolinian Creed. To that end, UofSC SOMC instituted an Honor System comprised of an Honor Code and Professional Code of Conduct. This Program operates under the jurisdiction of this system.

Honor Code: It is the responsibility of UofSC SOMC students consistently to adhere to trustfulness and the highest standards of honesty and personal, professional, and academic integrity.

Professional Code of Conduct: It is the responsibility of USC SOMC students to commit to upholding professional, academic, and legal standards of behavior.

See SOM website for further information. It is a student’s responsibility to know and uphold the standards in these documents. Violations/alleged violations are reported to the committee for review. https://www.sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/medicine/somc_student_resources/honor_code/index.php

<https://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf626.pdf>

Expectations for Behavior while Representing USC GCP

Professionalism is always expected. Because the university classroom is a space designed for the free exchange of ideas, we must show respect for one another in all interactions. We will show respect for one another by exhibiting patience and courtesy in our exchanges. Appropriate language and restraint from verbal attacks upon those whose perspectives differ from your own is a minimum requirement. Students should interact with faculty, clinicians, and lecturers with respect and appreciation for their commitment to the education of future genetic counselors. That respect encompasses timely arrival to all obligations as well as thorough, kind, and complete communication. Professional behavior standards also include reliability, ethical practice, and accountability in clinical, academic, and interpersonal contexts. Failure to comply with professionalism standards may result in disciplinary action including but not limited to effects on grades, reporting honor code violation, and/or remediation with a corrective action plan. A corrective action plan will be implemented when a student exhibits persistent academic or professionalism issues. The plan will outline specific expectations, timelines, and criteria for resolution.

Email and Phone Etiquette

We have general recommendations for graduate students regarding email and phone use while in the Program. Email is useful not only for convenience, but it can also serve as record of a conversation.

However, it is important to note that these do not establish relationships the way face to face or phone conversations may. Additionally, sometimes speaking in person or via phone is a much more efficient way to handle a problem or address a request. When a student is in need of a meeting with a supervisor, faculty member, or other individual, we suggest emailing to set up a time to chat. Short and courteous is the name of the game for emails. Remember to be respectful of that person's time and conduct yourself as respectfully via email as you would in person.

We have telephones in locations where students may be present, and sometimes it might be appropriate for a student to answer the phone, such as while on rotation. We expect that no one would attempt to answer a question unless they were certain of the answer; and therefore, messages may need to be utilized. Students should take efficient but complete messages include the person calling, the call back number, the reason (so the message can be directed appropriately), the name of who took the message (so any questions can be directed to that person). Again, courteous conduct is expected.

HIPAA training

The nature of the Genetic Counseling Program requires a great deal of student/patient contact; therefore, it is the responsibility of the student to exhibit professional behavior and to protect the confidentiality of the patient at all times. Students are required to complete annual HIPAA training and follow all policies outlined in that training.

Student Support Policies and Information:

Student Disability Resource Center

Every student deserves equal access to all aspects of the USC experience. A disability is any type of physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities and lasts at least six months. On the SDRC webpage, students can apply for accommodations, refer other students, or seek additional information about programs offered. Your Program leadership is always available to discuss concerns and access to resources further.

https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_disability_resource_center/index.php

Graduate Student Resources Hub

The primary mission of the [Graduate Student Resources Hub](#) is to provide a more integrated graduate student experience that holistically encompasses academic training and professional development for students at UofSC. Resources include trainings, workshops, one-on-one advisement appointments, and professional development opportunities that students can take advantage of while in their graduate program.

Harassment, Discrimination, and Title IX

UofSC is committed to creating an environment where all people are treated with dignity and respect and have an equal opportunity to learn and work free from discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, and related retaliation. UofSC encourages reporting of any discrimination and harassment observed or experienced within education programs, services, or activities provided by the university. For more information on [policies](#) or to report an incident visit the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX (803-777-3854, 901 Sumter Street James F Byrnes Building Suite 401, civilrights@mailbox.sc.edu) https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/equal_opportunities_programs/policies/index.php

All University of South Carolina employees are **required** to report incidents of prohibited conduct (i.e., discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking, sexual

exploitation/harassment, retaliation) to the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX, which is the office with the authority to institute corrective measures on behalf of the university.

Student Affairs & Academic Support, Student Wellness, and Success

For assistance with academics, career preparation, community connection, leadership, and well-being, we encourage you to explore the resources available from UofSC and School of Medicine linked to below. The Student Success Center provides additional academic support as well as services around graduate writing, finances, accountability. The Center for Well Being and Academic Support at School of Medicine assists students in meeting academic expectations while maintaining a healthy life balance. Their staff meets with students for academic counseling, test prep, independent learning strategies and also maintain a calendar of wellness events around campus. Students facing academic or personal challenges are encouraged to seek support from the Office of Student Advocacy. Of course, your Program faculty are always available to discuss any of these matters as well.

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_affairs/student-services/index.php

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student-health-well-being/index.php

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/medicine/somc_student_resources/student_success_wellness/index.php

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_success_center/index.php

Professional Issues

Graduate students interfacing in professional health care education environments may experience interactions that raise questions or concerns worthy of discussion. Students are encouraged to bring their question to the primary faculty responsible for the learning activity, for example the course instructor within a didactic experience, who will assist in managing the issue at hand. If the student does not feel comfortable speaking directly to the primary faculty, the Program Director may be consulted. The Graduate Committee, consulting SOM Assistant Dean for Clinical Graduate Programs as needed, may become involved to assist in decisions, discussion, and resolution.

Student Health Services

UofSC provides an extensive array of student health services for both physical and mental health wellness and concerns. Appointments can be made online. Students can call 833-663-2854 for 24/7, year-around access to mental health support services. If stress is affecting your ability to complete schoolwork, maintain relationships, eat, sleep, or enjoy life, please reach out to any of USC's mental health resources. Telehealth and off-campus face-to-face counseling sessions are also now available to students regardless of their location or insurance. Students are encouraged to explore and access Student Health services. For more information, see

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_health_services/

School of Medicine Counseling Services

The School of Medicine offers [counseling services/consultations](#) to students free of cost. Therapy is provided by licensed counselors who can provide therapy or additional resources for enrolled students.

Cocky's Cupboard

Cocky's Cupboard provides emergency food and toiletry supplies to support the basic needs of USC School of Medicine students, staff, and faculty. The pantry addresses food insecurity within the SOMC community in a free and anonymous location. On the SOM campus, it can be found in Room 345 in Building #3, and we have a smaller, but convenient supply in the cabinets in the student room in Two Med Park, Suite 208.

Additional Policies, listed alphabetically:

Alumni Listserv

Students can take advantage of our extensive alumni network while a part of our program. We have developed a listserv which provides access to over 50 of our alumni volunteers. This can be used for summer rotation ideas, job assistance like CV or cover letter review, questions about job openings, advice, requesting connections, and more! You can access this resource by emailing gcalumni@listserv.sc.edu

Announcements

Most Program announcements will be delivered electronically to students by email or announced during class time. You are responsible for information given in either format. Individual instructors may communicate through email or Blackboard for course information. Students should also check their mailboxes and Suite 103 for posted announcements periodically for interesting articles, announcements, etc. Students should feel free to contribute to announcements at any time.

Calendar

The Program publishes an academic year calendar with important dates noted. Students are expected to be available in person through the end of final examination week as noted on the UofSC calendar each semester to complete their requirements.

Copying and Printing

Students have access to limited copying and printing pertaining to the Program. The onsite USC computers can be used for some printing. However, we encourage students to utilize the SOM Library for better quality options.

International Travel Policy

Students planning to travel internationally for clinical rotation must adhere to the University of South Carolina's International Travel Policy. Please review the policy here: <https://sc.edu/policies/ppm/acaf209.pdf>

Job Postings

The Program emails announcements regarding new job openings. Students are encouraged build LinkedIn profiles, utilize our alumni listserv, and join NSGC SIGs to connect with possible employment opportunities.

Liability Insurance

Many external clinical rotation sites require that student interns carry liability insurance and often request greater coverage than what the university provides. As such, students are required to purchase supplementary student liability insurance no later than June 1st following their first year of graduate training. The Graduate Program Coordinator will provide guidance on this step.

Library

The Genetic Counseling Program holds a library of genetic counseling literature in Suite 103 which can be borrowed for short-term loans. Reference books are not allowed to leave the office. Students also have access to the School of Medicine library which provides access to journal articles and librarians to aid in academic endeavors.

Mailboxes

Students have their own office mailbox located in the student workroom in Suite 208 and should check it regularly.

Office Hours

The Genetic Counseling Program office hours are from 8:00am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. Students will be given the code to the genetic counseling suite but are encouraged to be in the building only during business hours and take proper safety precautions at all times.

Parking

Students can receive a decal for student parking at the VA Medical School campus. Students will receive a hang tag to park in the employee parking area at Two Medical Park free of charge.

Supplies

Students do not have free access to office supplies. Those supplies required for clinical fieldwork assignments must be requested through the student's supervisor.

Technology Requirements and Resources

The Program has access to computerized databases through the [SOM Medical Library](#) such as electronic journals and texts, etc. and encourages students to utilize computer and library resources in seeking genetic information for case preparation and thesis research. Students must have access to a working computer with reliable internet access and a browser compatible with Blackboard website. Access to Microsoft Word and Powerpoint is also required. Microsoft Office 365 is available free to all students. It includes access to the latest versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, and much more. The Program will use your USCmed email address to share communications. Suite 103 houses two desktop computers available for student use and Suite 208 has a student desktop available in the student workroom. Wireless internet access is available throughout Two Medical Park. Additional information and resources can be found here:

https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/division_of_information_technology/end_user_services/available_technology_resources/information_for_students/index.php

Telephone

Students are permitted to make phone calls from the Genetic Counseling Program office. The student desks in suite 103 and the student office in Suite 208 have phones.

USC Policies and Procedures

All students enrolled in the School of Medicine are members of the student body of the University of South Carolina and are, therefore, subject to the regulations outlined by the university. See list of [additional policies](#) on the Office of the Provost page.