

Exploring Health Professions: Genetic Counselor

“Genetic counselors assess clients' risk for a variety of inherited conditions, such as birth defects. They review genetic test results with individuals and families and support them in making decisions based on those results. They also offer information to other healthcare providers” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

[Overview, including median pay and other important information.](#)

Academic Programs

To become a genetic counselor, you will need to earn a master's degree from an accredited program. This usually takes about two years, although programs vary in length. After you complete your degree, you will probably need to seek certification through the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC; see website below). Many employers require ABGC certification.

Course and GPA Requirements

To apply to graduate programs in genetic counseling, you will first need to earn an undergraduate degree. There is no required major to become a genetic counselor, but you will need to complete the prerequisite courses required by the school(s) to which you are applying. Required prerequisite courses vary from program to program but may include courses in biology, chemistry, genetics, and statistics, among others.

Minimum and average GPAs for people who apply and people who enroll in genetic counseling graduate programs also vary. The Genetic Counseling graduate program at UMN, for example, specifies that applicants should have, “Strong academics with a GPA above a 3.0 overall and a B- or better in required prerequisites” (University of Minnesota, n.d.).

Standardized Testing

Some programs may require or accept the [Graduate Record Exam \(GRE\)](#). Others do not. Check the requirements of the programs in which you are interested.

Other Requirements

Other requirements may include shadowing, informational interviewing, or other experiences that will help you show that you understand the field of genetic counseling.

It may also be helpful for you to demonstrate that you understand and possess some of the skills that genetic counselors are supposed to have. The UMN Genetic Counseling program includes a list of these skills [on its admissions page](#).

Genetic Counseling Graduate Programs in Minnesota:

[University of Minnesota Graduate Program in Genetic Counseling](#)

Accredited Genetic Counseling Programs (All Locations):

[List of Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling \(ACGC\) Accredited Schools](#)

Accrediting Body for Genetic Counselors:

[American Board of Genetic Counseling](#)

Other Useful Genetic Counseling Websites:

[Master Genetic Counselor Series](#)

Includes digital recordings of simulated genetic counseling session from three different specialty areas (prenatal, cancer and pediatric)

[Genomics Health Care Simulations](#)

Presents a collection of interactive cases that demonstrate how genetics and genomics link to health and illness.

Career Exploration Websites:

[The Strommen Center for Meaningful Work](#)

[Explore Health Careers](#)

[O*NET Online](#)

[U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)

References

University of Minnesota. (n.d.). *Admissions: College of biological sciences*. Admissions | College of Biological Sciences.

<https://cbs.umn.edu/genetic-counseling-program/admissions#:~:text=Strong%20academic%20with%20a%20GPA,ways%20to%20develop%20these%20skills>.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, September 6). *Genetic counselors : Occupational outlook handbook*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/genetic-counselors.htm#:~:text=upon%20test%20results-,Genetic%20counselors%20assess%20clients%27%20risk%20for%20a%20variety%20of%20inherited,information%20to%20other%20healthcare%20providers>.