

a Prospective Student Task Force publication

Prospectives in Genetic Counseling

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Transitioning into the role of genetic counseling student



So you're done interviewing... now what?

To all of the recent applicants to genetic counseling graduate programs this year, we hope that this newsletter serves you well. The goal of this newsletter is to provide helpful information and resources for all applicants in the 2017-2018 genetic counseling application cycle, whether you are starting school in the fall or gearing up to apply again next year. In this issue, you'll find some tips for transitioning into graduate school, an editorial from a genetic counseling student who went through the re-application process, and some ways to get involved in the National Society of Genetic Counselors.

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Transitioning into genetic counseling graduate school

Congratulations on being accepted into a genetic counseling program! You are incredibly excited about starting your program in the fall and taking those first steps towards becoming a genetic counselor. But what will graduate school actually be like? What can you do now to prepare for the next two years? Starting graduate school is a time of transitions. In addition to the more obvious transition from your undergraduate program, job, or volunteering to graduate school, you may be moving to a new city. You will definitely be meeting new people and developing personal and professional relationships. The first few months may be extra stressful while you figure out your commute, class locations, organizational style, peer relationships, and learn the genetic counseling lingo. There is a flood of new information during the first few months and it can be overwhelming. Here are some tips, reflections, and advice from our own experiences that we hope are helpful.

Each program has a slightly different structure and overall plan for how to fulfill the requirements for your degree, but in general all programs include coursework, time in clinic, and research. Graduate school is different from undergraduate school. In undergrad, you may have been able to show up to class in a hoodie and flip-flops, but you need to dress more professionally in graduate school (especially when you are seeing patients!). In graduate school you will be balancing more responsibilities and the courses are more rigorous. But, your study habits and favorite ways to learn are fresh and this will help you. If you have been out in the workforce before coming back to school, the professional and practical life skills will help you develop professional relationships and function in a work environment, though getting used to studying again may be challenging.

Regardless of what you were doing before grad school starts, it will be very important to have a plan to organize your classes, assignments, meetings, and clinics so that you can keep on top of deadlines and be successful. Some people like to use calendars or planners. Check with those in your program and each person you work with to see if they have a preferred method of communication (e.g., e-mail, calendar appointments, telephone, text messaging, etc.). I used a paper monthly calendar to keep track of assignments and other deadlines and my Outlook calendar to keep track of classes and other meetings.

It is important to remember that your classmates are going through this transition with you, and you each have your own skills to bring to the table. Your classmates are a wonderful resource of support and guidance. It is OK to be confused or feel lost; if you knew everything already there would be no reason to go to school! It is also very important to take care of yourself; eat well, exercise, and take time to enjoy life. Do not feel guilty about making time for yourself.

Good luck with your new adventure!

Best,



Sarah Chadwell, MS, LGC



Chloe Reuter, MS, LCGC

Guest's corner - Reflections from a re-applicant



By: Stacey Aldrich

I've learned during my first year as a genetic counseling student that there are many ways to conduct a session with a patient. There are no prescribed requirements for when to use empathy, summarization or

reflection. The decision to employ any one of these psychosocial techniques is valid as long as they help make the patient feel heard and comfortable in opening up. Yet, there is one thing every student must do on the road to becoming a genetic counselor: Getting accepted into one of the highly competitive Master's degree programs.

Similar to psychosocial counseling, the road to acceptance into a program can take many twists and turns. Strong GPA and GRE scores, shadowing experience, and a background in volunteering and advocacy are universal recommendations for boosting an applicant's resume. But what if you apply and don't receive an acceptance offer on your first attempt? Does this hurt your chances of getting accepted in the future? As a re-applicant myself, I can assure you this is not the case.

"Reapplying shows a level of dedication, determination and conviction that the applicant feels [genetic counseling] is the correct path for him/herself, and that they don't quit when faced with obstacles," said Melanie Myers, director of the University of Cincinnati's genetic counseling program.

When I applied to genetic counseling programs the first time, I was limited in the number of programs I could submit my application to. Application deadlines for programs range from December to mid-March. Since I took the GRE in early January, I could only apply to programs with later deadlines so they could receive the scores on time. I was ecstatic when I was invited to interview by some of the programs. Even though I was

restricted with the programs I could apply to, I adopted an "I'll love any program that takes me" attitude.

When I did not receive an acceptance offer that first time around, I was devastated. The experience forced me to examine if genetic counseling was really what I wanted to commit myself to. Having to wait another year to apply, with no guarantee of being accepted, seemed like a daunting task. Every genetic counselor has their own reasons for entering the profession. The rejection helped me affirm why I could not give up.

"If an applicant reapplies, I look to see how/what they have done to strengthen their application," Myers said. "If the re-applicant has taken steps to strengthen his/her application, it generally demonstrates they have readied and prepared themselves for graduate school."

Over the next year, I continued to work at my job as a science journalist, and I earned more money to put toward my graduate education. Course prerequisite requirements vary among the programs, so I enrolled in a statistics class to increase the number I was eligible to apply to the next time around. I volunteered at a suicide hotline, chemotherapy infusion center and a summer camp for kids with sickle cell disease to connect with people coping with medical issues. I shadowed more than a dozen genetic counselors during the ensuing months.

I wish I could tell you having experience with interviews gave me more confidence the second time around, but it did not. For me, it is a terrifying and intimidating process, no matter what. However, I found myself having more insightful responses to the questions that second time around. I had learned a lot more about myself and the genetic counseling profession following that initial rejection. My perseverance and commitment to genetic counseling were on display as I shared my journey with programs.

Looking back, not getting accepted into a program on my first try was a fortuitous twist on my path to becoming a genetic counselor. It ultimately allowed me to choose a program that was the best fit for me. The failure was never a "wrong turn" or "dead end." It was just a small bump in the road.

Get to know the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC)

The National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) promotes the professional interests of genetic counselors and provides a network for professional communications. Access to continuing education opportunities, professional resources, advocacy and the discussion of all issues relevant to human genetics and the genetic counseling profession are an integral part of belonging to the NSGC. How to join NSGC: <http://www.nsgc.org/p/cm/ld/fid=180>

There are many ways to get involved with NSGC as a student and NSGC is a great resource for grant funding. The Jane Engleberg Memorial Fellowship (JEMF) provides funding for genetic counseling student research proposals in any practice area (<http://www.nsgc.org/page/jemfstudentaward>). There are usually other funding opportunities for research and attending the Annual Conference (AC). More information can be found at the NSGC Student Corner: <http://www.nsgc.org/page/student-corner>.

Speaking of the AC, be sure to register as a first time attendee for a special orientation event! The 2017 NSGC AC Welcome Event for new attendees will take place immediately prior to the start of the AC on Wednesday, September 13th at 1:45pm. This event will help prepare new attendees to make the most of their NSGC AC experience and will include the Special Interest Group (SIG) fair and a networking event with the NSGC Mentorship program. If you are a prospective student attending the Annual Conference, check out the special half-day event on Saturday, September 16th. Information below:



Come and learn about the field of Genetic Counseling!

FREE!

Prospective Genetic Counselors Symposium
36th Annual Conference
Greater Columbus Convention Center
Columbus, Ohio

Saturday, September 16th
(½ day session from 8:00am-11:30am)



You will have access to guest speakers, graduate school program directors, genetic counselors practicing in multiple specialties, research presentations, and much more...!

Registration for this event is also now **OPEN!** Space is limited!
To register, please fill out the registration form:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ThxFII5jNWBtVweBiFY-Sweng9yL92DnL_t8XGJc4io/edit
For more information, please contact: resources.snmsig@gmail.com

Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/y8mzdaq>

NSGC Special Interest Groups - It's never too early to get involved!

NSGC's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are a great way to get involved with NSGC and network with GCs who share your interests. SIGs are open to any active member of NSGC (including student members!). There is often a fee to join a SIG (typically less than \$100). Fees are used for SIG activities and programming as well as funding for research or special projects. You can find more information about each SIG and their leadership at <http://www.nsgc.org/joinsigs>. Current SIGs include:

Assisted Reproductive Technologies / Infertility
Cancer
Cardiovascular Genetics
Cystic Fibrosis
Education
Genomic Technologies
Health IT
Industry
International
Late Career (New!)

Leadership and Management (New!)
Metabolism / Lysosomal Storage Diseases
Neurogenetics
Pediatric & Clinical Genetics
Precision Medicine
Prenatal Counseling / Ultrasound Anomalies
Psychiatric Disorders
Public Health
Research
Student/New Member

Helpful Resources

American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC)

The credentialing organization for the genetic counseling profession in the United States and Canada. The ABGC certifies and recertifies qualified genetic counseling professionals.
www.abgc.net

Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC)

The specialized program accreditation board for educational training programs granting master's degrees or higher in genetic counseling.
www.qceducation.org

Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors (CAGC)

Professional membership organization that promotes high standards of practice, encourage professional growth and increase public awareness of the genetic counselling profession in Canada.
<https://www.cagc-accg.ca/>

American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG)

The primary professional membership organization for human genetics specialists worldwide.
<http://www.ashg.org/>

American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG)

An interdisciplinary professional membership organization that represents the interests of the entire medical genetics team including clinical geneticists, clinical laboratory geneticists, and genetic counselors.
www.acmg.net

Human interest books/movies

Genetics Rounds
Lorenzo's oil
Riding the Bus with My Sister
GATTACA
The Spirit Catches you and you Fall Down
Daring Greatly

Blogs/Social Media

The DNA Exchange <https://thednaexchange.com/>
Twitter @GeneticCouns #gcchat
Maps and Genes
<https://mapsandgenes.wordpress.com/>

Prospective Students

<http://www.becomeageneticcounselor.org/>