



NSGC INTERNATIONAL SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

Updated: July 2026

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL APPLICANTS

1. Are there any specific tips on how to pick or rank a genetic counseling school?

All accredited programs in the US will meet the minimum requirements set by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC), and the curriculum is usually similar across programs in the fundamentals of genetic counseling. Programs may differ in how they balance psychosocial and genomic/genetic science topics, and you will have to assess that fit based on your personal interest and skillset. Another factor to consider is the timing and placement of clinic rotation. Some programs initiate clinical experiences in the first year, while others begin this experience in the summer, between year one and two of the program. In addition, you will need to consider the location of clinical sites and whether travel is required to these sites. You will also have to consider the prerequisites for acceptance into a program, which can be found on the program's website. Please refer to the [ACGC website](#) for a list of programs.

Other key factors for international applicants include the cost of the overall program, student visa considerations, the program's experience with international students, the existing diversity in the student population, and perhaps the academic focus of the program and how it fits with your philosophy of life. For international applicants, the main consideration is often the cost of the program, as you will have to show that you have the financial means to pay out-of-state tuition for the entire duration of the program, and there may be limited scholarship or job opportunities, if any. The location of the program (state/city) can have an impact on the cost of living and tuition fees. Other costs to consider include housing (on campus vs off campus options, rent, utilities), food, and commute to classes, as well as rotation sites (buying/renting a car, gas cost vs. public transportation).

2. What are my prospects of getting accepted into a university that offers genetic counseling in the US or Canada?

Overall, admission into a graduate program for genetic counseling is very competitive. For example, in the US, there are currently 61 accredited genetic counseling programs. Available seats at the programs vary from ~6 per year to ~30 per year, and programs receive an average of 100 – 250 applicants per year. The National Matching Services (NMS) publishes acceptance rates and statistics every year ([NMS Website](#)). In Canada, there are 5 programs across the country, and interviewing/admission opportunities may be more limited. For more information on the Canadian programs, you can watch the webinars hosted by the Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors (CAGC): <https://www.cagc-accg.ca/index.php?page=372&id=>

3. Are GC programs in other countries comparable to those in the US?

It is difficult to draw comparisons between programs in different countries, as there may be country-specific educational, regulatory, and healthcare infrastructure factors that influence the prerequisites, length of the program, type of degree offered, curriculum, language requirements, licensure and credentialing considerations, scope of practice, and employment opportunities. A list of programs in different countries can be found on the Transnational Alliance for Genetic Counseling (TAGC) website:

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/medicine/centers_and_institutes_new/transnational_alliance_for_genetic_counseling/index.php



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4. What are examples of internships/experiences that students can try to obtain before applying for graduate school?

Advocacy experience is an important part of the application process for most genetic counseling programs. Genetic counseling programs encourage obtaining some volunteer or paid experience in genetic counseling clinics or other types of community service. Some examples are to volunteer time at crisis hotlines, hospices, centers that provide pregnancy planning and support, genetic disease organizations, and/or rare disease support groups. Experience in tutoring related subjects or working in research labs can also be valuable. Some examples of international student profiles can be found here: <https://igcspotlight.wordpress.com/>

5. Will one year of work experience in medical genetics and/or genetic counseling in my home country prove to be advantageous in applying for a genetic counseling school in the US?

Experience in genetic counseling or medical genetics, regardless of where you obtained it, will most likely enrich your application, although it may depend on the type of experience (e.g. observation vs. participation, research project vs. patient interaction). It is important to know that every individual is assessed based on their entire portfolio.

6. What type of research is required as part of a genetic counseling training program?

In general, all the accredited programs based in the US and Canada require completion of a research thesis or capstone project for graduation. The program faculty guides and mentors you while you pick a topic to study for the duration of your graduate program. Your project can be quantitative or qualitative, and you are expected to present findings in your final semester before graduation. Many programs provide a summary of past projects, which you can find on their website.

7. Are students encouraged to take up jobs while studying?

Many students take up hourly jobs during their graduate training program. In general, you may be able to find and manage a job during your graduate training, but there are usually restrictions on the types of jobs and the number of hours you can work while on a student (F-1) visa. Your student visa also requires you to maintain a certain number of credit hours during each semester/quarter enrolled in the program, and your foremost priority is maintaining this requirement and completing your coursework, thesis/capstone project, as well as clinical rotations. For more information on working while on a student (F-1) visa, please refer to the USCIS website on 'Students and Employment':

<https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment>

We also recommend discussing this with your program and the school's international center.

8. Do Master's programs in Genetic Counseling qualify for OPT/ STEM OPT extensions?

Most genetic counseling programs will qualify for Optional Practical Training (OPT), which allows you to work for 12 months on a student visa. However, that doesn't guarantee that you will qualify for STEM OPT extension. Please check with the international office associated with your program/school, as OPT/OPT extension eligibility may depend on how the degree is 'coded' with the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Education. Additional information is available here:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/additional-resources/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension>

9. What are my prospects of getting a job after I finish my course?

The job market for genetic counseling graduates is decent overall. Burns et al. (2019) described the evolving job market, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected a 9% growth up to the year 2034 for the field of genetic counseling, which is much faster than the average growth rate for all occupations. However, there may be fewer job opportunities for international students when compared to US citizens, as not all employers are willing or able to sponsor a work visa. Your chances of finding a job are likely highest if you have some flexibility with the location and specialty. Make sure to check with a prospective employer about work visa sponsorship as early as possible.

10. Is there any supplemental reading that would help me learn more about the application process?

We don't have any specific recommendations for supplemental reading, but we do encourage you to try to learn as much as you can about the field before you apply. Some publicly available content on applications, as well as more general information, is linked below.

Applications:

1. My Gene Counsel website: blog post on advice for graduate school applications:
<https://www.mygenecounsel.com/advice-for-the-genetic-counseling-grad-school-application-process/>

General information:

1. Wikipedia post on Genetic Counseling (updated in 2026):
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetic_counseling
2. About Genetic Counselors, NSGC:
<https://www.aboutgeneticcounselors.org/Who-Are-Genetic-Counselors/Who-Are-Genetic-Counselors>
3. What to expect when meeting with a Genetic Counselor, Cancer.net:
<https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/genetics/what-expect-when-meeting-genetic-counselor>
4. Genetic Counseling Globally: where are we now? <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29575600/>
5. Exploring job search experiences of genetic counselors who matriculated as international students in the United States: A cross-sectional study. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jgc4.70012>
6. International students' perspectives on the genetic counseling application process.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jgc4.1893>
7. International genetic counseling: What do genetic counselors actually do?
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jgc4.1735>



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Tips:

1. Do as much as possible to learn about genetic counseling and how the field might be different in different countries! Consider speaking with GCs in various specialties and attending career events or local conferences.
2. If you have a medical degree from another country, please note that genetic counseling is not a pathway to medical school in the US and is a distinct profession with a certifying exam and licensure in many states.
3. Start your transcript conversion early! Many program directors have indicated that this step can hold up completing the assessment of a candidate's portfolio. One resource is 'World Education Services', (<https://www.wes.org/>), a credential evaluation service that offers free and paid options for converting your GPA to the 4-point system used in the US. Check with your programs of interest on whether they require a specific credentialing service before starting the process.
4. Make sure to do your research ahead of time, and if you have any specific questions during the application process, you can reach out to programs for additional information. Programs often have a contact person or an information request form listed on their website.
5. When selected for interviews, you can ask to connect with current/past international students who trained at that program.
6. Consider online courses to fulfill prerequisites for entry in a genetic counseling program. You can find relevant courses on Coursera, EdX, etc. You can also choose courses offered by universities; one example is the online coursework for Embryology through the University of Cincinnati, found here: <https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/education/clinical/student-grad/genetic-counseling/online-ceu-courses>.