

# Technical Standards for the Master of Genetic Counseling Program

*This policy was approved by the Executive Faculty of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and became effective on March 12, 2025.*

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to describe the technical standards for students in the Master of Genetic Counseling (M.G.C.) program.

## POLICY

### OVERVIEW

All candidates for the M.G.C. must possess the intellectual, physical, and emotional capabilities necessary to undertake the required curriculum in a reasonably independent manner, without having to rely on intermediaries, and all students must be able to achieve the levels of competence required by the faculty to complete graduate school and practice as a genetic counselor. Candidates for the M. G. C. must have necessary abilities and skills in the following areas, as detailed below: observational skills; communication skills; motor skills; intellectual-conceptual skills, cognitive, and quantitative skills; and behavioral, professional, and social skills. Technological compensation can be made for some limitations in certain of these areas, but candidates must be able to meet the necessary abilities and skills in a reasonably independent manner. The use of a trained intermediary is not allowable if it shifts the reliance on candidates' judgment from their own observation and prioritization to that of another.

Candidates must have sufficient sensory and motor ability to independently gather information from patients through physical examination and observation. All candidates should be able to perform the required clinical experiences (e.g., perform a dysmorphology exam) and interpret ancillary diagnostic data (e.g., genetic sequencing tests, biochemical tests, etc.). The tasks and actions of a genetic counselor require equilibrium, and the coordination of gross and fine muscular movements. Candidates should be able to meet competencies as required by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) and the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC).

These guidelines are reviewed annually. Any concerns about the content or application of these technical standards should be referred to the M.G.C. Program Director or the Associate Dean for Health Sciences Education.

## TECHNICAL STANDARDS

### *OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS*

Candidates must assimilate essential information as presented through demonstrations and experiences in the basic sciences. In addition, candidates must be able to:

- Observe a patient objectively and acquire relevant health and medical information, including written documents, images from the medical literature, slides and/or video.
- Interpret genetic testing and other graphic images, such as pedigrees, electronic medical records and test results.

The required observation and information acquisition and analysis necessitate the functional use of visual, auditory, and somatic sensation. In any case where a candidate's ability to observe or acquire information through these sensory modalities is compromised, the candidate must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to acquire essential observational information.

### *COMMUNICATION SKILLS*

Candidates must be able to demonstrate proficiency in the English language such that they can communicate effectively in oral and written form with all members of the health care team. Candidates must be able to communicate with patients to elicit information. They must have the capacity for comfortable verbal and non-verbal communication and interpersonal skills, to enable effective caregiving of patients and collaboration within a multidisciplinary team. In any case where a candidate's ability to communicate is compromised, the candidate must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to communicate with patients and teams.

### *MOTOR SKILLS*

It is required that candidates possess the motor skills necessary to complete and interpret the physical findings of patients. Such actions may require coordination of both gross and fine muscular movements, equilibrium, and functional use of the senses of touch. In any case where a candidate's ability to complete and interpret physical findings because of motor skills is compromised, the candidate must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to retrieve these physical findings.

### *INTELLECTUAL-CONCEPTUAL SKILLS*

Candidates must exhibit the requisite intellectual and conceptual skills to effectively interpret, assimilate, and understand the complex information required to function within our degree

program curriculum. Effective participation in learning modalities, such as individual, small group discussion, case-based learning, and lecture formats, in both the classroom and the clinical setting, will be required. Candidates must be able to effectively learn, participate, collaborate, and contribute as a part of a team. They will need to synthesize information effectively both in person and via remote technology. Candidates must be able to interpret causal connections and make accurate, fact-based conclusions based on available data and information. They must be able to formulate a hypothesis, investigate the potential answers and outcomes, and formulate appropriate and accurate conclusions.

### *COGNITIVE SKILLS*

Candidates must be able to measure, calculate, reason, analyze, integrate, and synthesize. In addition, the candidate must be able to comprehend three-dimensional relationships and to understand the spatial relationships of structures. Problem solving, a critical skill demanded of genetic counselors, requires all these intellectual abilities. Candidates must be able to perform these problem-solving skills in a timely fashion.

### *BEHAVIORAL ATTRIBUTES, SOCIAL SKILLS, AND PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS*

Candidates must be able to fully utilize their intellectual abilities, to exercise good judgment, to promptly complete all responsibilities attendant to the care of patients, and to develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients. Candidates must be able to effectively handle and manage heavy workloads and to function effectively under stress. They must be able to adapt to changing environments and to learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the clinical problems of patients. Candidates must provide equitable care for individuals in a respectful and effective manner regardless of sex, gender, age, race, color, sexual orientation, religion, or any other protected status identified in the university's Non-Discrimination Policy. Professionalism, compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interest, and motivation are all qualities that are required throughout the educational processes.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNICAL STANDARDS**

### *IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNICAL STANDARDS IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS*

All applicants for admission to the VUSM M.G.C. degree program will be evaluated according to the same standards and criteria outlined in these Technical Standards. Although these standards serve to delineate the necessary physical, mental, and emotional abilities of all candidates, they are not intended to deter the application and enrollment of any candidate for whom reasonable accommodation will allow the fulfillment of the complete curriculum.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNICAL STANDARDS DURING DEGREE CANDIDACY

Should a candidate have or develop a condition that would place patients, the candidate, or others at risk, or that may affect their need for accommodation, an evaluation with an appropriate medical provider followed by assessment through the Vanderbilt University Student Access Services Office (SAS) is required. The SAS would then provide recommended accommodations to the Program Director, the Associate Dean for Health Sciences Education, and if necessary, the Executive Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, who will review the student assessment and recommended accommodations. A complete and careful reconsideration of all the skills, attitudes, and attributes of each candidate is performed. This includes an assessment of their willingness, desire, and ability to complete the M.G.C. professional degree program curriculum and fulfill all requirements for board certification and potentially licensure. This will be informed with the knowledge that students requiring reasonable accommodations have the ability to become successful genetic counselors.

## REFERENCES

Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling. (2023). Standards of Accreditation for Graduate Programs in Genetic Counseling. Retrieved April 2024 from ACGC\_StandardsOfAccreditation\_2023.pdf (gceducation.org); [https://www.gceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ACGC\\_StandardsOfAccreditation\\_2023.pdf](https://www.gceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ACGC_StandardsOfAccreditation_2023.pdf)

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