

A graduate program

Courses of Study:
Master of Science

Genetic Counseling

Objectives

Graduate Program in Genetic Counseling

The master's degree program in genetic counseling is a two-year course of study integrating course work with clinical experience in an environment that encourages close student/faculty interaction. The program places a strong emphasis on human molecular genetics, while providing in-depth course work in counseling theory and technique as well as extensive clinical training. Graduates of the program are expected to have a clear understanding of human and medical genetics, recombinant DNA technology, gene mapping, and developmental biology; a familiarity with many genetic diseases and birth defects and the various techniques used to detect and/or treat them; a familiarity with a variety of counseling theory and techniques that work in short-term counseling settings; an understanding of how genetic counselors function in a variety of work settings and their roles and responsibilities within a medical team; the ability to present relevant genetic information to individuals and families from diverse cultural backgrounds in an informed, compassionate manner and to help families obtain the medical and social services they may need; a sensitivity to the needs and options of children and adults (including parents and potential parents) with mental retardation, developmental disabilities, and other genetic disorders; an awareness of the legal, ethical, and public policy issues raised as a result of new DNA and reproductive technologies and the Human Genome Project; an understanding of research methodology, experience in the design and execution of research projects and in the preparation of completed projects for professional publication and presentation; and, finally, a familiarity with the relevant scientific literature and computer-based tools.

Ordinarily the program is completed in two academic years and the intervening summer. The program is accredited by the American Board of Genetic Counseling and prepares graduates for the certification examination in genetic counseling and employment as genetic counselors.

How to Be Admitted to the Graduate Program

The general requirements for admission to the Graduate School, given in an earlier section of this *Bulletin*, apply to candidates for admission to this area of study. The specific requirements for admission to this program are: one year of general chemistry, one year of biology, and one semester each of genetics (course should include Mendelian and molecular genetics), organic chemistry, biochemistry, psychology, and statistics. Applicants lacking one or more of these courses are invited to consult the program's director on how to fulfill these requirements. Volunteer or work experience in an area related to counseling, developmental disabilities, or genetics is recommended.

Applications should include three letters of reference, the results of the General Graduate Record Examination, and a personal statement describing your interest in the field of genetic counseling. After initial review of applications, potential candidates will be invited to Brandeis for a personal interview.

Partial scholarship assistance is available for a limited number of exceptional applicants.

Faculty Advisory Committee

Judith Tsipis, Chair and Graduate Advising Head
(Biology)

Joseph Cunningham
(Psychology)

James Haber (on leave 2008–2009)
(Biology)

Elaine Hiller
(Biology)

Judith Jackson
(Genetic Counseling)

Melissa Kosinski-Collins
(Biology)

David Rintell
(Biology)

Beth Rosen Sheidley
(Genetic Counseling)

Gretchen Schneider
(Biology)

Joan Stoler
(Genetic Counseling)

Lawrence Wanhg (on leave 2008–2009)
(Biology)

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

Program of Study

The academic component of the curriculum consists of the following: graduate-level courses in molecular biology, human genetics, medical genetics, human reproductive biology, counseling skills, research methodology, and biomedical law and ethics; two seminars in genetic counseling; and one or two electives chosen from the biological sciences, medical sociology, psychology, and health policy. Student participation in a proseminar and journal club are required as well.

Fieldwork and clinical internships are an important, integral part of the program. First-year students carry out rotations in genetics clinics, with genetic research teams, and in clinical genetics laboratories. Students also participate in community-based education and health care programs and meet periodically with a family raising a child with a genetic disorder. Starting in the summer following the first year and continuing through the second year, students participate in three intensive clinical internships at prenatal, pediatric, general, cancer, or specialty genetic clinics. Satisfactory completion of the three clinical internships is required for graduation from the program. Attendance at two professional meetings is also required in the second year. Funds are available to defray costs.

Residence Requirement

The residence requirement for this program is two years of full-time study.

Language Requirement

There is no foreign language requirement for the master's degree.

Project

A master's thesis is required. Students may work with a genetic counselor to design and evaluate an innovative educational tool or counseling strategy relevant to their clinical work. Or, should their interest lean toward basic research, they may pursue either a laboratory-based project or a qualitative or quantitative study in the field.

Courses of Instruction

BIOL 101a Molecular Biotechnology

[sn]

Prerequisite: BIOL 22a.

A study of the molecular basis of DNA replication, RNA transcription focusing on molecular biology techniques such as PCR, DNA sequencing, genomics, cloning, microarrays, and siRNA and their relation to human disease research applications. Usually offered every year.

Ms. Kosinski-Collins

BIOL 128a Human Genetics

[sn]

Prerequisites: BIOL 22a and b.

Survey of topics, including: mutation and polymorphism; molecular methodology; single-gene inheritance and complexities thereof; multifactorial conditions, risk assessment, and Bayesian analysis; cytogenetics; hemoglobinopathies; population genetics; gene mapping; cancer genetics; ethical considerations in genetics; immunogenetics; pharmacogenetics; genetics of development; biochemistry of selected genetic diseases; gene therapy, genomics, proteomics, and bioinformatics. Usually offered every year.

Ms. Hiller

BIOL 160b Human Reproductive and Developmental Biology

[sn]

Prerequisites: BIOL 22a and b.

Course deals with hormonal, cellular, and molecular aspects of gametogenesis, fertilization, pregnancy, and birth. Pathological and abnormal variations that occur and the available medical technologies for intervention, correction, and facilitation of these processes are discussed. Usually offered every year.

Ms. Jackson

BIOL 202d Introduction to Genetic Counseling

A two-semester sequence that provides the historical and theoretical foundations for the practice of genetic counseling and the role of genetic services within the health care delivery system. Introduces students to some of the practical aspects of genetic counseling, including case preparation, pedigree construction/interpretation, and medical documentation. Usually offered every year.

Ms. Schneider

BIOL 203a Proseminar: The Molecular Basis of Genetic Diseases

Covers the molecular basis of muscular dystrophy, fragile X syndrome, cystic fibrosis, Huntington's disease, and several inherited cancer syndromes. A historical perspective is used for each topic; molecular diagnostics and genetic counseling issues are addressed as well. Usually offered every year.

Ms. Tsipis

BIOL 204b Clinical Genetics I

Introduction to basic concepts of biochemical genetics, cytogenetics, and clinical molecular genetics. Makes use of clinical cases ranging from single-gene disorders to multifactorially determined conditions and includes problems in dysmorphology, inborn errors of metabolism, and cancer genetics. A problem-solving approach is emphasized. Usually offered every year.

Ms. Schneider and Ms. Stoler

BIOL 205b Counseling Theory and Technique

A comprehensive overview of counseling theory and practice. Topics include listening, observation, and interview skills and strategies; family dynamics and development; coping and adaptation processes; referral and consultation procedures; and ethical principles. Students are provided an opportunity to integrate clinical experiences with the coverage of topics. Usually offered every year.

Mr. Rintell

BIOL 206d Genetic Counseling Journal Club

Noncredit.

Informal biweekly meeting of students and faculty at which recent papers are discussed. Usually offered every year.

Staff

BIOL 207a Genetic Counseling: Case Conferences and Family Counseling

Taught by a team of health care professionals. Case studies provide the basis for discussion of a variety of genetic disorders and the application of counseling modalities. Students have an opportunity to share experiences gained during clinical internships. Discussions emphasize the interplay of medical, psychological, ethical, legal, social, and cultural factors in genetic counseling. Usually offered every year.
Mr. Rintell

BIOL 211a Genetic Counseling Fieldwork Placement: Part I

Students work one day per week in a community-based health service organization, school, clinic, or public health agency to develop awareness of disability-related issues and the variety of community-based services for individuals with special needs. Students also observe in a genetics clinic twenty to thirty hours over the course of the semester to gain exposure to concepts learned in BIOL 202d (Introduction to Genetic Counseling). Periodic course discussions supplement the fieldwork experience. Usually offered every year.
Ms. Rosen-Sheidley

BIOL 211b Genetic Counseling Fieldwork Placement: Part II

To begin preparing for clinical genetics internships, students participate in a variety of experiences that serve to foster and integrate the concepts introduced in courses and presentations. Students are exposed to procedures in clinical labs through lectures, site visits, and/or lab work. In addition, students continue observations in a genetics clinic and meet several times with a family with a child with a disability. Periodic course discussions supplement the fieldwork experience.
Ms. Rosen-Sheidley

BIOL 212a Genetic Counseling Internship I

Students complete a 25–30 contact day clinical genetic internship under the supervision of a genetic counselor or other qualified clinician. Students increase their knowledge of clinical genetics and master genetic counseling skills by offering genetic counseling services in a prenatal, pediatric, cancer, general, adult, or specialty clinic setting. Usually offered every summer.
Ms. Schneider

BIOL 212b Genetic Counseling Internship II

Students complete a 25–30 contact day clinical genetic internship under the supervision of a genetic counselor or other qualified clinician. Students increase their knowledge of clinical genetics and master genetic counseling skills by offering genetic counseling services in a prenatal, pediatric, cancer, general, adult, or specialty clinic setting. Usually offered every fall and spring.
Ms. Schneider

BIOL 213a Genetic Counseling Research I

In the summer semester students chose a research project, do a review of the literature and summarize key findings, and write a research proposal for a thesis project (to be done in the following fall/spring semesters). Usually offered in the summer.
Ms. Rosen-Sheidley

BIOL 213b Genetic Counseling Research II

Prerequisite: BIOL 213a.
Students are introduced to the principles and basic techniques of social science research in a series of seminars while they implement their thesis research projects. Usually offered fall and spring.
Ms. Rosen-Sheidley

BIOL 214c Genetic Counseling Process Group

In this small group setting, students can share and learn from their collective experiences in their field placements, courses, and individual lives and have the opportunity to process and integrate the experience of becoming a genetic counselor. Usually offered every semester.
Mr. Cunningham

BIOL 215b Readings in Molecular Biology

A combination of readings and clinical laboratory work to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the molecular biology of several human genetic diseases and the techniques used for their diagnosis. Usually offered every year.
Ms. Tsipis

BIOL 216b Internship Seminar Series

This is a noncredit seminar required for all genetic counseling students.
Students meet once a week for a series of lectures, presentations and mock sessions that explore issues related to advanced practice in genetic counseling. Topics include advanced genetic counseling case management, Bayesian analysis, and the use of the NSGC code of ethics. Usually offered every year.
Staff

BIOL 220a Clinical Genetics II

Prerequisite: BIOL 204b or permission of the instructor.
Continuation of BIOL 204b with emphasis on the genetic and developmental disorders of most major organ systems. A case-based, problem-solving approach is emphasized. Usually offered every year.
Ms. Schneider and Ms. Stoler

BIOL 236b Genetics, Law, and Social Policy

Explores advances in human genetics, the clinical and economic benefits promised by new tests, and problems generated by our new ability to manipulate our biological future. Analyzes the role of government in regulating technological development and the legal doctrines of privacy, informed consent, and professional liability. Usually offered every second year.
Ms. Roche