

FAQS

About the Program

When was the program established?

The Xavier University of Louisiana Genetic Counseling Program (XULA GCP) was recently established. The first cohort of students will begin in Fall 2025.

Is the program accredited?

Yes, the XULA GCP is accredited as a New Program by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC). Graduates will be eligible for board certification through the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC).

What is the cohort size, and will it ever expand?

The program will initially accept five students per cohort, with the possibility of expanding to six as it progresses.

What makes XULA's program unique?

XULA's program is the only genetic counseling program in Louisiana and one of only two programs at an HBCU, positioning it as a leader in diversifying the field. It partners with Ochsner Health, a large healthcare system in the area that employs many genetic counselors who serve as instructors and fieldwork rotation supervisors for the program. A major focus of the program is to address healthcare disparities and champion underrepresented voices in genetics by emphasizing the service of diverse and underserved communities in New Orleans and the surrounding Gulf Coast region.

How can I get in touch to learn more about the program?

We encourage prospective students to explore our website, as it contains detailed information about the application process, curriculum, and program structure. If you have additional questions or need clarification, please don't hesitate to reach out.

You can contact us by email at geneticcounseling@xula.edu or call us at 504-520-5182. If we're unavailable to answer your call, feel free to leave a message, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Additionally, you can fill out our [Genetic Counseling Inquiry Form](#) to connect with us directly.

Are there job opportunities upon graduation?

Given the limited number of genetic counselors in Louisiana and the exceptional opportunity for our students to collaborate closely with clinic sites throughout the city, we aspire for our graduates to be top candidates when looking for job opportunities within the state.

About the Curriculum & Experience

How long is the genetic counseling program, and what does it include?

The program spans 21 months, including five semesters (56 credits) that integrate coursework, fieldwork rotations, and a Capstone research project. Fall and Spring of Year 1 consist primarily of coursework. Fieldwork begins in the Summer of Year 1, continuing into Fall and Spring of Year 2, and includes core and elective rotations. Completion of a Capstone project is also a component of the program.

Are classes in person, virtual, or asynchronous?

Living a daily commutable distance to XULA and Ochsner Medical Center is mandatory for students in the XULA GCP, as clinical observations and fieldwork rotations must be attended in person. While coursework will be offered virtually and in person, students are required to be physically present for these essential components. This is not an asynchronous program.

What are fieldwork rotations like?

Fieldwork rotations consist of three 8-week core rotations in pediatric/general genetics, prenatal, and cancer genetics, as well as two 4-6 week elective rotations. Most rotations take place locally, often at Ochsner Medical Center sites. However, some elective rotations may be virtual or require travel.

What is the capstone research project?

Students complete a research project, including IRB approval, data collection, and manuscript construction. The project culminates in a presentation and potential publication.

What are the academic requirements for graduation?

Graduation requires:

- A 3.0 GPA or higher.
- Passing all fieldwork rotations and completing at least 50 participatory cases.
- Capstone project completion.
- Passing an oral exam.

Regular attendance at program activities.

Student Life

What is New Orleans like?

New Orleans offers a vibrant and culturally rich experience for students. The city is known for its unique blend of African, French, and Spanish influences, reflected in its food, music, and architecture. Students can enjoy world-renowned cuisine, including gumbo and beignets, as well as live jazz and blues music.

With an affordable cost of living compared to other major cities, New Orleans offers a variety of housing options and student-friendly amenities. The city also hosts exciting festivals like Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest, alongside outdoor spaces like Audubon and City Park for relaxation and recreation. New Orleans is a welcoming city with a warm climate and lively atmosphere, making it a great place for students to live, study, and explore.

What is the atmosphere of the campus?

Xavier University of Louisiana offers a supportive and inclusive campus atmosphere that fosters both academic and personal growth. The university is known for its strong sense of community, where students, faculty, and staff work together to create a welcoming and collaborative environment.

The campus is vibrant, with a rich history of academic excellence and social responsibility, particularly in serving underrepresented and minority populations. Students can engage in a variety of extracurricular activities, from cultural events to academic clubs and student organizations, which enrich their college experience.

Located in the heart of New Orleans, the campus is just minutes away from the city's dynamic cultural scene, offering students the chance to experience the unique energy and heritage of the area while maintaining a close-knit campus environment. Whether through student events, service opportunities, or community engagement, the atmosphere at Xavier encourages personal and professional development in a diverse and inclusive setting.

How are students supported during the program?

Each student in the Genetic Counseling Program at XULA is assigned a faculty advisor, typically the Program Director (PD) or Assistant Program Director (APD). Advisors meet with students at least once per semester (twice during the first semester) to plan their course of study and provide guidance. Students are encouraged to consult their advisors regularly throughout the program for academic and professional support.

What can I expect in terms of balancing school, work, and personal life as a genetic counseling student?

The program curriculum is rigorous, designed to provide a comprehensive education that integrates coursework, fieldwork rotations, and professional development activities. Courses and fieldwork schedules are structured to maximize learning opportunities, but the workload can be demanding. Balancing work commitments alongside academic and clinical responsibilities may be challenging and requires careful time management.

We encourage students to prioritize their health and well-being throughout the program. If the workload becomes overwhelming, we recommend taking advantage of resources like our [University Counseling Services](#) and mentorship opportunities. Faculty and staff are here to support you in maintaining a healthy balance and achieving success in the program.

Applying to the Program

What are the prerequisites for the program?

Applicants must have a bachelor's degree, ideally with a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and coursework in genetics, biology, and statistics or calculus, completed within the last 10 years. Biochemistry, chemistry, and psychology are strongly recommended. Students with a GPA of < 3.0 may apply but are asked to submit a short statement explaining why their GPA is below 3.0 and what steps they have taken to ensure a better academic performance in graduate school. Ideal applicants also have experience with genetic counseling through shadowing, volunteering, or related work, alongside skills such as advocacy, crisis counseling, and all candidates must have strong verbal and written communication skills.

What are the main components of the application?

Applicants must submit:

- National Match System (NMS) ID Number
 - Transcripts (unofficial for review, official for matriculation)
 - Personal Essay (600 words max)
 - Curriculum Vitae (CV)
 - Three Letters of Recommendation
 - Video Question (2-minute video)
 - GPA Statement for individuals with a GPA <3.0
 - Evidence of exposure and understanding of genetic counseling, volunteering, advocacy activity.
 - TOEFL/IELTS scores for international students
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What is the application deadline for the XULA Genetic Counseling Program?

The application deadline is **January 2, 2025**. Click [here](#) to find the application.

How much does it cost to apply to the XULA Genetic Counseling Program?

The application is free.

What is the National Matching Service (NMS) and how do I register?

The National Matching Service (NMS) is a centralized system used by accredited genetic counseling programs, including XULA, to match applicants with programs in a fair and efficient manner. Applicants rank their preferred programs, and programs rank applicants, with the NMS algorithm facilitating optimal matches. This process ensures a structured and equitable admissions process for both applicants and programs. To learn more and register, visit the Genetic Counseling Admissions Match website at <https://natmatch.com/gcadmissions>. There is a registration fee, and once you are registered, you will receive a unique Match ID number.

What is the next step after the application is submitted?

Applications will be reviewed holistically, and all personal information will be blinded to the application reviewers. Individuals selected to interview will be notified in late January.

What does the interview process entail?

Interviews are conducted in February virtually and consist of three separate meetings that include program leadership and genetic counselors from Ochsner Health. This allows for a comprehensive and well-rounded evaluation. The interview process typically takes around two hours, and we will strive to schedule all your interviews on the same day.

Can I reschedule my interview if I am unable to attend on the assigned date?

We will do our best to accommodate rescheduling requests, but please note that our interview dates are fixed, and availability may be limited.

Financial Assistance

What is the cost of tuition, and is financial aid available?

Tuition is approximately \$15,000 per term for five terms, totaling \$75,000. More details on financial aid can be found [here](#).

Are there scholarship opportunities?

Scholarships are available based on need, including a potential reduction in total tuition by \$6000 (\$3000/year). In order to be considered for this scholarship, students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by clicking [here](#).

More information can be found on XULA's financial aid page [here](#). Additional external scholarships may also be available for students.

Are there on-campus housing and work opportunities for graduate students?

Yes, graduate students can apply for assistantships through the Office of Student Affairs. One opportunity includes live-in positions as Resident Assistants in the on-campus residence halls. To be eligible, students must first be admitted to a graduate program. For more information on available positions and how to apply, please contact the Office of Graduate Programs at ogp@xula.edu. You can also visit the webpage [here](#).

About the Genetic Counseling Field

What is genetic counseling, and what do genetic counselors do?

Genetic counseling is a process in which trained professionals, called genetic counselors, work with individuals and families to understand and make decisions about genetic conditions. This includes assessing the risk of inherited diseases, interpreting genetic test results, and providing guidance on potential outcomes, preventive measures, and available management options. Genetic counselors help patients understand complex genetic information in a supportive and empathetic manner, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and family planning.

Genetic counselors work with patients to discuss family histories, review medical records, and explain the implications of genetic conditions. They also offer emotional support to individuals and families coping with a genetic diagnosis or the possibility of one. Additionally, genetic counselors are often involved in research, education, and advocacy within healthcare settings.

Where do genetic counselors work?

Genetic counselors work in a variety of healthcare and research environments, including:

1. **Hospitals and Medical Centers:** Genetic counselors often work in specialized clinics within hospitals, providing counseling in areas such as oncology, prenatal genetics, pediatrics, neurology, and cardiology. They may be part of interdisciplinary teams collaborating with doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers.
2. **Private Practice:** Some genetic counselors work in private practice, offering personalized counseling services in a more independent setting, which can include providing genetic testing and counseling to individuals and families.
3. **Academic and Research Institutions:** Genetic counselors may also work in academic settings, assisting with research projects, teaching, or advising students in genetic counseling programs. They may also contribute to clinical research studies to advance the understanding of genetic disorders.
4. **Public Health and Government Agencies:** Some genetic counselors work in public health settings, where they may develop educational programs, contribute to health policies, or work with underserved populations to increase awareness and access to genetic services.
5. **Laboratories and Biotechnology Companies:** Genetic counselors in labs or biotech companies may be involved in interpreting genetic test results, advising on the implementation of new testing technologies, and educating other professionals about genetic testing.
6. **Telehealth:** With the growth of telemedicine, some genetic counselors offer remote counseling services, making genetic counseling more accessible to patients in rural or underserved areas.

Overall, genetic counselors work in environments that allow them to support individuals and families through genetic testing, disease prevention, and management, improving patient care and outcomes in a variety of clinical and research settings.

Where can I learn more about genetic counseling and the role of genetic counselors?

You can explore the genetic counseling profession and pathways to becoming a genetic counselor through the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC). Visit their [About Genetic Counselors](#) page for detailed information. Additionally, you can use their “Find a Genetic Counselor” tool to connect with professionals for shadowing or informational interviews.