



ABGC Executive Summary: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Certification Assessment Report

February 28, 2022

ABGC Board of Directors

*Catherine A. Fine, MS, CGC[®], President
Sarah Noblin, MS, CGC[®], President-Elect
Kate Wilson, MS, CGC[®], Secretary/Treasurer
Greg Ruf, Public Advisor
Priyanka Ahimaz, MS, CGC[®], Director
Barbara W. Harrison MS, CGC[®], Director
Bronson D. Riley, MS, CGC[®], Director
Angela Trepanier, MS, CGC[®], Director*



Overview:

ABGC's mission is to "establish standards of competence for certified genetic counselors and to advance their value as leaders in precision health to safeguard and serve the public." The core purpose of ABGC is to promote high standards of practice, and the core values that guide our work include integrity, responsiveness, excellence, and inclusivity. Operating with our mission and purpose in mind, and guided by our core values, ABGC is committed to fair and objective decisions, transparency in interactions, and accountable stewardship, and we continually strive to develop assessments without bias, respect all voices, and seek out diverse perspectives.

The ABGC certification examination is one point of entry into the genetic counseling profession. As such, it is critically important for ABGC to administer an exam free of any bias that disadvantages some candidates from achieving a passing score. ABGC's DEIJ Certification Assessment Report marks the beginning of a continual improvement process we will undertake together with our Diplomates to incorporate evolving data regarding the needs for marginalized individuals and groups.

Promises Kept:

In response to Diplomate feedback following the 2020 #ABGCListens initiative, ABGC committed to hiring an independent third party to review processes, procedures, and content regarding certification examination development and administration. The purpose was to include a critical and objective review of all aspects of the certification and exam development processes for bias and other factors that might lead to inequities for exam candidates. Following a competitive request for proposals, in June 2021 ABGC selected Nonprofit HR, a consulting firm with experience in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice issues.

Nonprofit HR is the country's leading and oldest firm focused exclusively on the talent management needs of the social sector, including nonprofits, associations, social enterprises, and other mission-driven organizations. Over the course of six months, Nonprofit HR:

- Reviewed the processes for developing and administering the certification exam
- Completed an environmental scan of comparable authorities and professional associations
- Surveyed individuals who have sat for the certification exam within the last five years
- Reviewed 607 questions currently used in the certification exam

Findings and Recommendations (Pages 6-8 of Full Report)

The full DEIJ Certification Assessment report concludes that ABGC's certification exam development and corresponding processes *"are in good shape where information is available, but that there are opportunities for further investigation and consideration to address potential DEIJ concerns."*

ABGC is already taking steps to further DEIJ efforts with respect to the exam. Nonprofit HR has recommended ABGC continue to:

- Offer live remote proctoring to mitigate instances of low proximity to test sites
- Align with collaborative organizations on ongoing and complementary DEIJ efforts

As part of our strategic plan, the ABGC Board is researching:

- Ways to provide scholarships to help offset the cost of the exam
- Alternative methodologies for initial certification
- Methods to recruit more demographically diverse item writers and allow for voluntary identification of those who are from underrepresented communities.

The Practice Analysis Advisory Committee is investigating the feasibility of a shorter exam on Nonprofit HR's recommendation. Of the exam items reviewed by Nonprofit HR:

- 09 / 607 (1.5 %) were identified as needing adjustment or removal from the exam
- 38 / 607 (6.3 %) were flagged for further review; it was unclear to Nonprofit HR if the information in the item was necessary for the correct answer

The Certification Exam Committee (CEC) is addressing these recommendations, in addition to:

- Continuing its review of exam items for bias.
- Incorporating a list of words, phrases, and scenarios to avoid when writing new exam questions into item writer training.

Next Steps:

This is only the beginning of a continual process of assessment and improvement for ABGC. We recognize there are areas of opportunity and improvement identified by Nonprofit HR that we have not yet initiated:

- Offering the exam more than twice per year
- Reviewing item databanks for demographic oversampling
- Evaluating the need and practicalities of translating the certification exam into other languages
- Reviewing the process of considering requests for accommodation to ensure it is just
- Identifying strategies to improve communication with candidates during the application process
- Investigating options for voluntary collection of demographic information, in an informative and responsible manner, for the purpose of further investigating the potential of bias

Thus, a new ABGC DEIJ committee will be formed dedicated exclusively to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice as they relate to the certification exam and the organization as a whole. This committee will also be responsible for evaluating and prioritizing the Nonprofit HR recommendations we have not yet begun to address. ABGC will also be setting opportunities to continue the ongoing DEIJ conversation as it relates to ABGC Diplomates and candidates.

In Summary:

ABGC is committed to the process of research, implementation, and evaluation that is required to meet the high standards we set for ourselves and our Diplomates. We express our sincere appreciation to all who participated in the survey hosted by Nonprofit HR; these groups provided invaluable feedback and directly led to the final recommendations put forth in this report. We invite and encourage you to read the [ABGC FAQ](#) and the Nonprofit HR [full report](#). Please email questions or comments to info@abgc.net.