

Exam Performance Taskforce Report

Integrity. Responsiveness. Excellence. Inclusivity.

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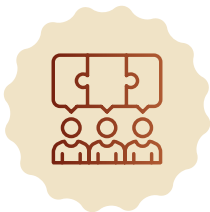
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Overview

The ABGC Board of Directors convened the Exam Performance Taskforce with the goal of comprehensively assessing the factors influencing performance on the ABGC Certification Examination.

To address its charges, the Taskforce conducted a detailed review of historical pass rate data from August 2018 through February 2025, analyzing year-over-year trends, differences across exam forms and cohorts and variations in performance between first-time and repeat test takers.

To achieve its goal, the Taskforce adopted a systems thinking approach. Systems thinking is an approach to problem solving, which considers the overall systems and their individual parts. As part of this, a systems framework provides a structured approach to identify and analyze components of a complex system.

The Taskforce applied a four-level systems framework originally adapted for the genetic counseling education and credentialing ecosystem by Claire Davis (see acknowledgment) to organize information and its deliberations. The levels were Societal Context, Professional Organizations, Programs, and Students. The Taskforce used this systems framework approach because it can promote collaborative change — an essential feature given the various stakeholders involved in genetic counselor training and credentialing.

The Taskforce had input from diverse stakeholders, including newly certified professionals, educators and organizational partners (see roster at end of report) to review, discuss and analyze the data. Between June 2024 and June 2025, the Taskforce met regularly to identify key focus areas, define specific data needs and engage stakeholders throughout the process. The Taskforce members were responsible for evaluating trends, uncovering potential correlations, and identifying contributing factors affecting exam outcomes.

The Taskforce conducted a comprehensive review of data, including quantitative metrics, stakeholder feedback and benchmark comparisons, with each element assessed for its relevance to the Taskforce's objectives. They additionally considered feedback from organizational partners to help provide a broader perspective on the factors influencing exam performance:

1. The Taskforce identified factors at every level of the systems framework with direct or circumstantial evidence to support their association in exam performance.
2. The Taskforce identified factors at every level of the systems framework for which action and/or research is needed to address their (potential) involvement in exam performance.

The Taskforce's findings are presented in this final report, which outlines conclusions and recommendations and identifies areas for further investigation to support continued improvement in exam outcomes.

Sincerely,

The ABGC Board of Directors

Acknowledgements

We thank Claire Davis, EdD, MS, CGC, for the inspiration to use a systems framework to organize our thinking and for allowing us to use and apply a framework she previously presented at the 2024 GCEA meeting.



Priority Recommendations

Priority Recommendations

The taskforce identified priority areas that may benefit from further exploration and action to better understand factors influencing exam performance.

Re-evaluate the exam window to expand opportunities for test taking.

ABGC should expand opportunities for taking the exam to provide more agency for the test taker. Examples include a longer window to take the exam, e.g., August 1 – September 30 or on-demand testing.

Evaluate yearly exam performance based off of computer based testing vs. live remote proctored exams.

ABGC should conduct an analysis on 2025 exam year performance data to see if there continues to be an association between computer based testing and live remote proctoring exam pass rates.

Re-evaluate constitution of Practice Analysis Advisory Committee (PAAC) to prioritize entry-level experience.

ABGC should prioritize entry-level experience in foundational aspects of certification exam construction by constituting a Practice Analysis Advisory Committee (PAAC) with greater than 50% of its members having five or fewer years in practice.

Re-evaluate analysis of Practice Analysis (PA) responses to prioritize entry-level experience in patient-facing and non-patient-facing settings.

ABGC should work with a statistician to consider statistically overweighting responses from PA survey respondents with five or fewer years of experience in order to more closely capture entry-level practice experience.

ABGC should work with a statistician to consider weighting responses to the PA survey to reflect recent PSS patient-facing and non-patient-facing percentages. While training emphasis is on clinical competencies, many non-patient-facing roles require certification. An entry-level genetic counselor can practice in either setting, and the genetic counseling certification demonstrates accountability to the public through advanced training in medical genetics and counseling to guide and support patients.

Re-evaluate composition of the Item Writing Committee to prioritize entry-level experience.

ABGC should prioritize entry-level experience by ensuring that greater than 50% of the Item Writing Committee is composed of members with five years or fewer of practice experience

Re-evaluate communication about CGC exam subdomains to stakeholders (e.g., training programs, test takers).

ABGC should provide more granular understanding of what all subdomains entail.

Re-evaluate the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) accreditation standard pertaining to program-level pass rate threshold to align with other accrediting bodies.

ACGC should consider updating Standard C2.1 to an overall pass rate instead of first-time pass rate. This update would be more aligned with the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)'s member programs. ACGC and ABGC should coordinate so that any changes to the exam window made by ABGC can be addressed in an update to ACGC Standard C2.1.

A detailed breakdown of the data analyses is included in the systems framework that follow, supporting the Taskforce's charges, the report's findings and recommendations, and promoting transparency.

*ABGC's mission is to **establish standards of competence** for certified genetic counselors and **advance their value** as leaders in precision health to safeguard and serve the public.*



Systems Framework Analyses

Systems Framework Analyses

Topics discussed within the systems framework included a range of factors that may influence exam performance at multiple levels. The framework was used to guide the Taskforce’s analysis and recommendations. The four levels used in the systems framework were:

- A. Societal Context
- B. Professional Organizations
- C. Programs
- D. Students

Each of the above contexts will be broken down across a range of factors with a summary list of the questions the task force sought to address. The Taskforce acknowledges that there may be other topics and/or factors that were not addressed.

Recommendation: ABGC/GCEA could consider collecting employment data on test takers to assess for association between employment and pass rate.

Recommendation: Independent Researchers could conduct studies to assess for associations between pass rate and TT study habits or employment, job market or job availability.

COVID-19

Did the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown/remote instruction affect the pass rate?

ABGC provided data on exam pass rates from February 2018 - February 2025. Figure 1 illustrates first-time test taker pass rates over this period and contextualizes the data in terms of COVID-19 timeline and class cohort.

A: Societal Context

Is there a relationship between job availability and pass rate or study habits? Do employed test takers do better on the exam than nonemployed test takers?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Figure 1: First-time test taker pass rates (February 2018-February 2025) shown by exam month and graduating cohort, with timeline annotations for key COVID-19 impacts and certification exam updates.

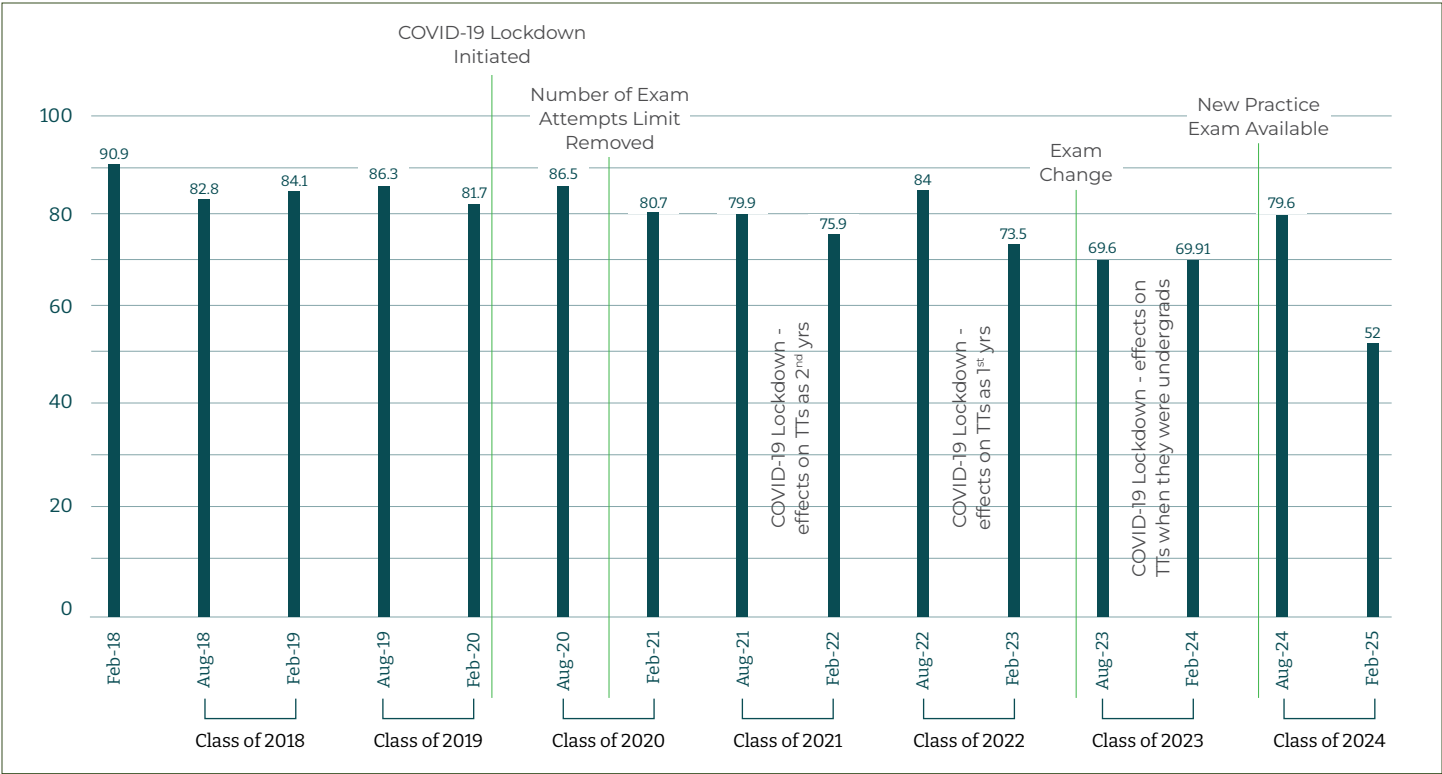
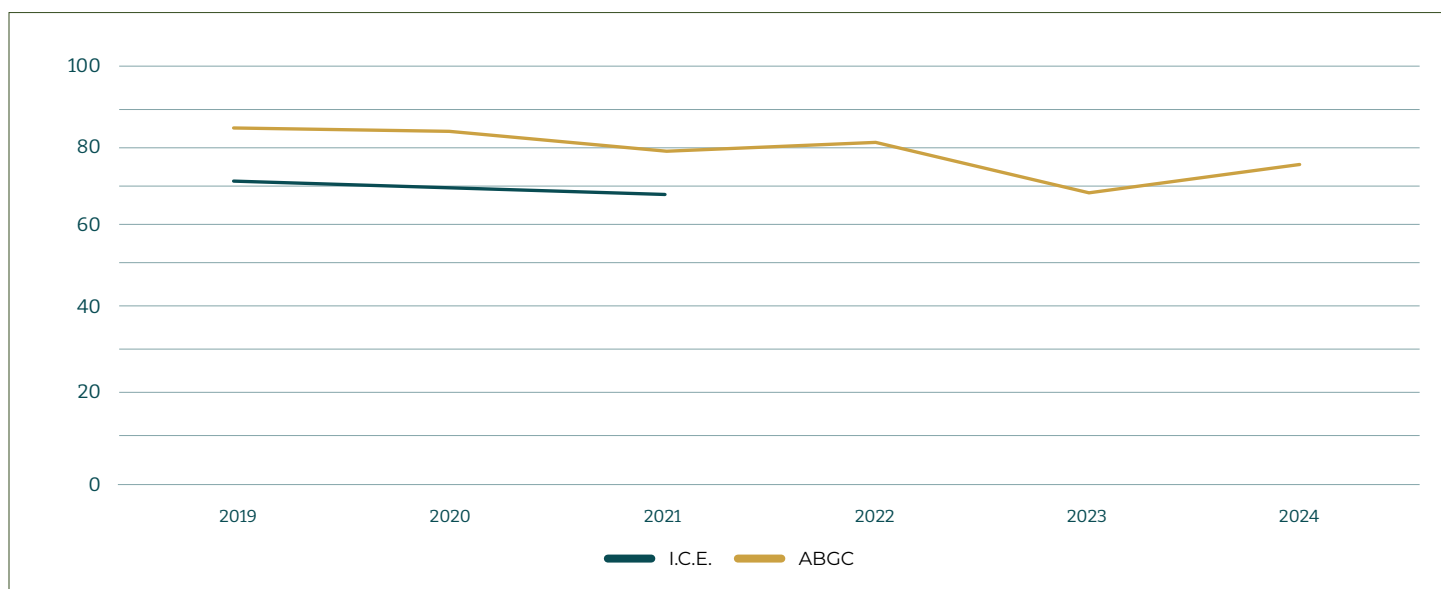


Figure 2: Comparison of pass rates from the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.) Pass Rate Report (2019-2021) and ABGC first-time test taker pass rates (2019-2024).



As shown, the class of 2019 did not experience any pandemic disruption, and the class of 2020 experienced very little pandemic disruption. The class of 2020's exam performance (August 2020, 86.5%; February 2021, 80.7%) is similar to the class of 2019's performance (August 2019, 86.3%; February 2020, 81.7%).

The class of 2021 experienced pandemic disruption when TTs were in their second year (fieldwork rotations). The class of 2021's exam performance (August 2021, 79.9%; February 2022, 75.9%) had ~5% point decrease from the class of 2020 (August 2020, 86.5%; February 2021, 80.7%).

The class of 2022 experienced pandemic disruption when TTs were in their first year (didactic coursework). The class of 2022's exam performance (August 2022, 84%; February 2023, 73.5%) had ~2.5-7% decrease from the class of 2020 (August 2020, 86.5%; February 2021, 80.7%).

Conclusion: Pass rates for TTs who experienced pandemic disruption during the graduate program were lower than for earlier cohorts, suggesting that COVID-19 restrictions affected learning and ultimately pass rates to some extent. A similar conclusion was drawn by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence in their 2023 report, which demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in pass rates of professional certification programs from 2020 to 2021 (see Figure 2).

Have other accrediting bodies noticed a change in exam performance over the past few years?

The Institute for Credentialing Excellence Pass Rate Evaluation Study (April 2023) used data from 2019-2021 to assess potential changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. ABGC shared a copy of this report with the Taskforce and the pass rates data are shown in Figure 2.

ACGC collected information on exam pass rate Standards from other accrediting bodies that belong to the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). Synthesis of 20 responses suggests that very few accrediting bodies have noticed a change in ability for programs to meet their exam threshold standard over the past few years. This finding suggests that there may be something unique to the genetic counselor education and credentialing ecosystem at play and potential factors are addressed through this document.

Recommendation: ACGC and ABGC could regularly monitor certification exam score trends in other fields (e.g., Institute for Credentialing Excellence publications) to better contextualize ABGC exam scores.


Recommendation: ACGC and GCEA should be mindful that the effects of pandemic disruption on learners will likely continue for at least a generation and may warrant further consideration for exam preparation.

B: Professional Organizations

State Licensure

Is there an association between state licensure and exam pass rate?

Wang et al (2023) investigated this question via survey of genetic counselors who graduated 2017-2021. In a sample of 246 usable responses, they found that genetic counselors in states with licensure took the exam earlier than those in states without licensure and were 2.4 times more likely to fail the first attempt. This survey suggests that state level licensure is associated with pass rates. Additional research is warranted to fully investigate this association.

**Priority Recommendation:** ABGC could expand opportunities for taking the exam to provide more agency for the test taker. Examples include a longer window to take the exam, e.g., August 1-September 30 or on-demand testing.

ABGC

Did the ABGC updated exam (exam form) affect the pass rate?

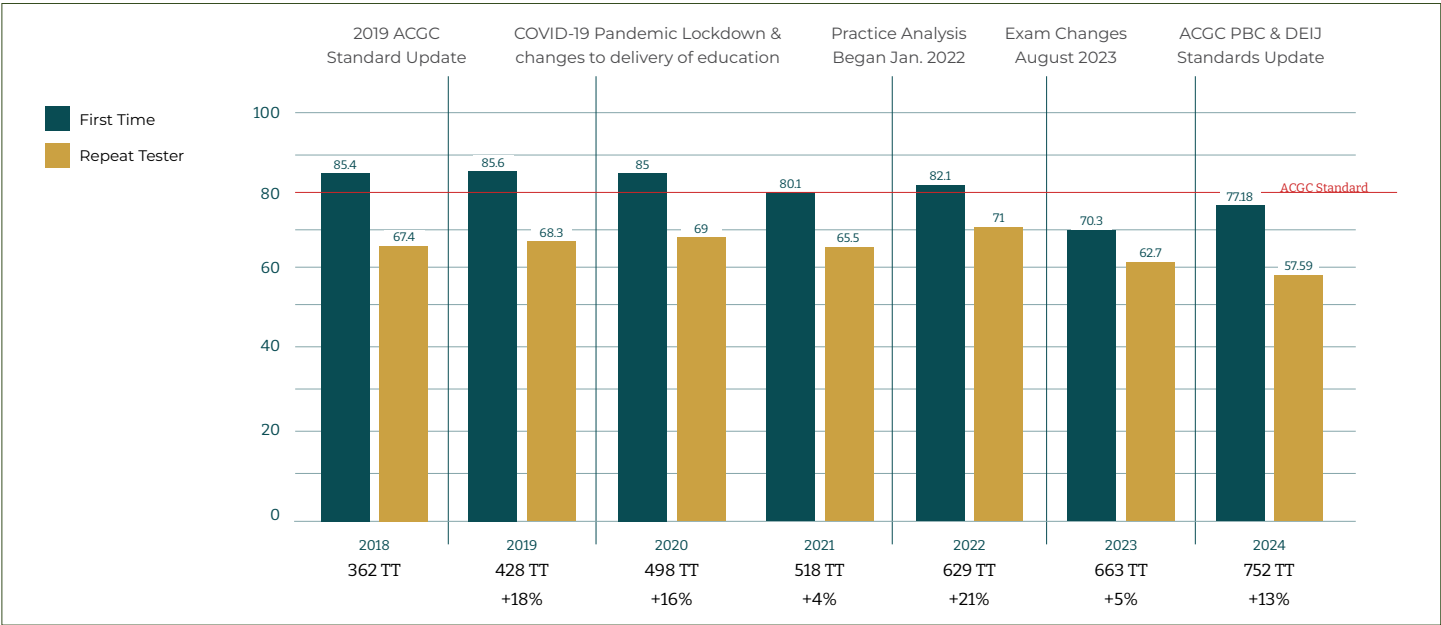
ABGC conducts a practice analysis every 5 years per accreditation guidelines. That practice analysis informs

the development of the new exam content outline and construction of exam forms.

ABGC provided data on pass rates for first-time and repeat test takers, which are plotted in Figure 3 for 2018 - 2024. To contextualize the data, the timing of the most recent practice analysis and exam content outline is also depicted. The CGC new exam form took effect in August 2023. As shown in Figure 3, the exam pass rate is higher for first-time TTs compared to repeat TTs. However, for both the first-time TTs and repeat TTs, the pass rates declined after the new exam form was introduced — from 82.1%/71% (2022, before exam change) to 70.3%/62.7% (2023, after exam change) and 77.2%/57.6% (2024, after exam change).

The new CGC exam has five domains encompassing 14 subdomains. ABGC data on national performance on these domains and subdomains for all TTs and first-time TTs is provided in Figures 4.1 - 4.3 for the March 2024, August 2024 and February 2025 exam cycles. Inspection of exam domain-level data showed that Domain 3: Testing Interpretation, Testing Options and Reproductive Risk Management is consistently problematic across all three exam cycles, with two of its three subdomains (Testing and Interpretation and Reproductive Risk Management) performing at less than 75% correct for all TTs and for first-time TTs. These two subdomains account for 23 of 170 max score points (13.5% of max score)

Figure 3: ABGC exam pass rates (2018-2024) by first-time vs. repeat test takers, with percent change in test-taker volume on the X-axis, ACGC Standard C2.1 3-year first-time average pass rate threshold (80%) marked in red, and timeline of key events (ACGC/ABGC updates, COVID-19) annotated.



Tables 1.1-1.3: National average of CGC exam performance by domain and subdomain for three exam cycles.

Table 1.1 – March 2024 Exam Cycle	Max score	National All		National First Time Test Taker	
		Average	%Total	Average	%Total
1. Clinical Information, Human Development, and Genetic Conditions	34	24.08	71%	24.43	72%
A. Clinical Information	13	9.71	75%	9.85	76%
B. Human Development	6	3.99	66%	3.93	66%
C. Genetic Conditions	15	10.39	69%	10.66	71%
2. Risk Assessment and Principles of Human Genetics and Genomics	32	21.42	67%	22.03	69%
A. Risk Assessment	17	11.84	70%	12.09	71%
B. Principles of Human Genetics and Genomics	15	9.58	64%	9.94	66%
3. Testing Interpretation, Testing Options, and Reproductive Risk Management	35	25.53	73%	26.08	75%
A. Testing and Interpretation	15	10.26	68%	10.50	70%
B. Testing Options	12	9.68	81%	9.82	82%
C. Reproductive Risk Management	8	5.59	70%	5.76	72%
4. Counseling Skills, Communication, and Education	30	22.70	76%	23.08	77%
A. Counseling Skills	15	11.70	78%	11.87	79%
B. Communication and Patient Education	15	11.00	73%	11.21	75%
5. Financial/Reimbursement Issues, Resources and Services for Clients, Legal and Regulatory Requirements, and Professional Frameworks	39	31.27	80%	31.33	80%
A. Financial/Reimbursements Issues	7	5.39	77%	5.31	76%
B. Resources and Services for Clients	8	7.21	90%	7.27	91%
C. Legal and Regulatory Requirements	11	8.64	79%	8.66	79%
D. Professional Frameworks	13	10.03	77%	10.08	78%
		National All: 261		National First Time: 143	
		Pass: 168 (64%)		Pass: 100 (70%)	
		Fail: 93 (36%)		Fail: 43 (30%)	

Table 1.2 – August 2024 Exam Cycle	Max score	National All		National First Time Test Taker	
		Average	%Total	Average	%Total
1. Clinical Information, Human Development, and Genetic Conditions	34	26.86	79%	27.22	80%
A. Clinical Information	13	10.27	79%	10.42	80%
B. Human Development	6	4.95	82%	4.95	82%
C. Genetic Conditions	15	11.64	78%	11.85	79%
2. Risk Assessment and Principles of Human Genetics and Genomics	32	25.63	80%	25.98	81%
A. Risk Assessment	17	13.36	79%	13.57	80%
B. Principles of Human Genetics and Genomics	15	12.26	82%	12.41	83%
3. Testing Interpretation, Testing Options, and Reproductive Risk Management	35	24.39	70%	24.78	71%
A. Testing and Interpretation	15	10.25	68%	10.50	70%
B. Testing Options	12	9.14	76%	9.24	77%
C. Reproductive Risk Management	8	5.00	62%	5.04	63%
4. Counseling Skills, Communication, and Education	30	22.31	74%	22.51	75%
A. Counseling Skills	15	10.42	69%	10.47	70%
B. Communication and Patient Education	15	11.89	79%	12.05	80%
5. Financial/Reimbursement Issues, Resources and Services for Clients, Legal and Regulatory Requirements, and Professional Frameworks	39	30.32	78%	30.51	78%
A. Financial/Reimbursements Issues	7	5.82	83%	5.84	83%
B. Resources and Services for Clients	8	6.68	84%	6.72	84%
C. Legal and Regulatory Requirements	11	8.06	73%	8.12	74%
D. Professional Frameworks	13	9.77	75%	9.82	76%
		National All: 491		National First Time: 418	
		Pass: 375 (76%)		Pass: 333 (80%)	
		Fail: 116 (24%)		Fail: 85 (20%)	

Table 1.1- 1.3: National average of CGC exam performance by domain and subdomain for three exam cycles. (cont.)

Table 1.3 – February 2025 Exam Cycle	Max score	National All		National First Time Test Taker	
		Average	%Total	Average	%Total
1. Clinical Information, Human Development, and Genetic Conditions	34	23.64	70%	23.63	70%
A. Clinical Information	13	8.93	69%	8.93	69%
B. Human Development	6	4.64	77%	4.57	76%
C. Genetic Conditions	15	10.07	67%	10.13	68%
2. Risk Assessment and Principles of Human Genetics and Genomics	32	22.21	69%	22.53	70%
A. Risk Assessment	17	10.58	62%	10.98	65%
B. Principles of Human Genetics and Genomics	15	11.62	77%	11.55	77%
3. Testing Interpretation, Testing Options, and Reproductive Risk Management	35	22.77	65%	23.09	66%
A. Testing and Interpretation	15	8.64	58%	8.84	59%
B. Testing Options	12	8.94	75%	8.98	75%
C. Reproductive Risk Management	8	5.18	65%	5.27	66%
4. Counseling Skills, Communication, and Education	30	21.61	72%	21.65	72%
A. Counseling Skills	15	10.54	70%	10.57	70%
B. Communication and Patient Education	15	11.06	74%	11.09	74%
5. Financial/Reimbursement Issues, Resources and Services for Clients, Legal and Regulatory Requirements, and Professional Frameworks	39	29.75	76%	29.88	77%
A. Financial/Reimbursements Issues	7	5.58	80%	5.55	79%
B. Resources and Services for Clients	8	6.48	81%	6.44	81%
C. Legal and Regulatory Requirements	11	8.43	77%	8.49	77%
D. Professional Frameworks	13	9.25	71%	9.40	72%
		National All: 236		National First Time: 138	
		Pass: 114 (48%)		Pass: 74 (54%)	
		Fail: 122 (52%)		Fail: 64 (46%)	

Recommendation: Genetic counseling programs could review how their curriculum supports student learning in these areas.

Recommendation: ABGC could consider augmenting the Practice Exam with items from these subdomains to provide targeted practice to these areas.

Recommendation: ABGC could consider reviewing test items in these areas for clarity, terminology and generality of concepts tested.

Priority Recommendation: ABGC could provide more granular understanding to stakeholders of what all subdomains entail.

Is there an association between mode of exam administration and pass rate?

ABGC provided exam performance data by test modality (test center, remote) for the March 2024 and August 2024 exam cycles, which combined are:

- Test center — 73.4% passed
- Remote — 63.7% passed

The Taskforce concluded that there is a statistically significant association between mode of exam administration and pass rate for the 2024 exam year that needs to be further investigated.

Priority Recommendation: ABGC could conduct analysis on 2025 exam year performance data to see if there continues to be an association between mode of exam administration and pass rate.

Recommendation: ABGC could investigate factors that might contribute to differential exam performance based on mode of administration, such as the remote test taking experience, TT reasons for mode of administration, TT study preparation strategies.

Does composition of Practice Analysis Advisory Committee (PAAC) affect exam pass rate?

Per ABGC data and explanation the 2022 Practice Analysis group: Ranged in years' experience from 2-27. Additionally, the members of the PAAC were experienced genetic counselors, all thoroughly familiar with the skills and activities of a genetic counselor and were chosen to represent a cross-section of genetic counselors (e.g., years of experience, geographic region, professional roles, work environment).



Priority Recommendation: ABGC could prioritize entry-level experience in foundational aspects of certification exam construction by ensuring that more than 50% of the PAAC is composed of members with five or fewer years of practice experience.

Priority Recommendation: ABGC could prioritize entry-level experience by ensuring that more than 50% of the Item Writing Committee is composed of members with five or fewer years of practice experience.

Priority Recommendation: ABGC could consider statistically overweighting responses from PA survey respondents with five or fewer years' experience, in order to more closely capture entry-level practice experience.

Priority Recommendation: ABGC could consider weighting responses to the PA survey to reflect recent PSS patient-facing and non-patient-facing percentages because training emphasis is on clinical competencies and many non-patient-facing roles require certification. An entry-level genetic counselor can practice in either setting, and the purpose of certification is to demonstrate accountability to the public through advanced training in medical genetics and counseling to guide and support patients.

ACGC

Did the ACGC PBC & DEIJ Standards update affect the pass rate?

This is a difficult question to address, and the Taskforce was unable to determine recommendations for consideration specific to exam pass rate. It is clear that the ABGC exam changed in August 2023, the ACGC DEIJ

Standards update went into effect August 2023 with compliance date August 1, 2024, and then the ACGC PBCs' change went into effect September 2023 with compliance date June 15, 2025. There is no intentional connection between ABGC and ACGC regarding their respective revisions, changes and updates, other than the graduate programs and their students are subject to all.

How do PBCs compare to the practice analysis/content outline?

The ACGC summary of 2023 PBC revision process in **Appendix 2** indicates that the PBC taskforce used principles of best practices, including "aligning with practice analysis," to guide the PBC review and revision process.

Recommendation: ACGC and ABGC could work together to explicitly address how the current PBCs are aligned with the practice analysis that was used to inform the current credentialing exam. A resulting document could be provided on the ABGC and ACGC websites.

Recommendation: GCEA/ABGC/ACGC could work together to explicitly address how PBCs align with the Exam Content Outline. A resulting document could be provided on the GCEA, ABGC and ACGC websites.

How does the ACGC Standard C2.1 - Student Performance on the ABGC Certification Exam for programs, defined as the three-year average of at least 80% first-time pass rate, compare to other accrediting bodies?

ACGC collected information on exam pass rate Standards from other accrediting bodies that belong to the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). Synthesis of 20 responses suggests that most accrediting bodies focus on all-time pass rate over a specified period time instead of first-time pass rate. Synthesis of responses shows that the most common program level exam accreditation standard is a pass rate of 80%.



Priority Recommendation: ACGC could consider updating Standard C2.1 to an overall pass rate instead of first-time pass rate.

C: Programs

Does the date of graduation affect the timing of when candidates test?

ABGC provided data on graduation date and test outcome data for August 2024 and February 2025 TTs. August and February exams were comprised mostly of the class of 2024 (~80%), and the class of 2024 comprised the vast majority of first-time test takers. These data (though limited to two time points) suggest that majority of candidates are not deferring taking the exam.

Is there any correlation with the years a program has been in existence and the performance on the exam?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Recommendation: ACGC could collect this information and explore this question.

When did programs stop requiring GRE for admissions?

Does a GRE requirement associate with certification exam pass rate?

The idea behind this question is that having experience with a standardized exam might associate with certification exam performance. While the Myers et al (2021) paper states that “many [GC programs] no longer require the GRE examination,” and the National Matching Service, Inc. site states, “GRE scores have been optional for many programs since 2021,” the Taskforce did not have data on GRE requirements of current programs.

Recommendation: GCEA could launch a study to address this question.

Does the nature of program admissions associate with exam performance?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Recommendation: GCEA/Independent Researchers could conduct studies of program admissions practices (e.g., holistic, metric-based) and certification examination pass rate and other metrics of success.

Does the number of students per training program affect the clinical rotations? Is clinical rotation experience associated with pass rate?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Recommendation: GCEA/Independent Researchers could conduct studies to address this topic

Does program size affect pass rate?

ACGC data suggest that the percentage of “small” programs (up to 16 students) went down from 52% of existing programs in 2018 to 42% of existing programs with students in 2024, while the percentage of “medium” (17-32 students) and the percentage of “large” programs (33+ students) increased during that time, which is suggestive that decreasing pass rate is connected to increasing program size, though actual analysis must be performed to demonstrate an association.

Recommendation: ACGC could consider examining if program pass rates are associated with program size since ACGC has both types of data.

Does mode of education delivery affect pass rate? Online vs. hybrid vs. in-person instruction?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Recommendation: ACGC/GCEA/Independent Researchers might be able to address this question. This is an area in need of research.

Is telemedicine/in-person clinical training associated with pass rate?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Recommendation: GCEA/Independent Researcher could conduct research on this topic. This is an area in need of research.

D: Students

Do study efforts on the part of candidates associate with exam performance?

There was no data available for the Taskforce to consider.

Recommendation: ABGC/GCEA/Independent Researchers could survey past TTs on this topic (e.g., study strategies, attitudes toward taking test multiple times, feelings of preparedness, etc). ABGC/GCEA/Independent Researchers could conduct focus groups or other study design of TTs in the window of when the exam pass rate declined to better understand TT experience.

We note that ABGC asks TTs to complete a brief survey after the exam is submitted but before they receive their score. It could be possible to add some questions about study efforts and TT experience and then disseminate information to GCEA. Dissemination might also take the form of ABGC “test tips” through their communication venues.

Are there student demographics associated with exam performance?

Myers et al. (2021) assessed variables associated with exam performance between 2007-2016 on 1494 trainees from 24 of 36 eligible GC programs:

- “...trainees with higher GPA (OR = 3.41; 95% CI = 1.99, 5.83), higher verbal (OR = 1.02; 95% CI = 1.01, 1.03) and quantitative (OR = 1.02; 95% CI = 1.01, 1.03) GRE® scores, female trainees (OR = 2.95; 95% CI = 1.70, 5.12), and white trainees (OR 3.37; 95% CI = 2.14, 5.30) had higher odds of passing the certification examination on the first attempt.”
- Per Myers et al., the 1494 trainees represented ~60.5% of matriculants in 2007-2016. The sample was 93% female, 89% white, 3% Hispanic and 3% non-U.S./non-Canadian. The first-time pass rate between 2013 and 2018 ranged from 79% to 90%; the overall average first-time pass rate was 87.5%. At the univariable level, remediation, part-time employment and delayed graduation were associated with pass/fail rates. These variables were no longer significant in a stepwise logistic regression analysis.

Data from the National Matching Services Inc site on applicants to genetic counseling programs were reviewed for comparison with Myers et al. We note that matching data are not linked to exam performance:

- **GPA** — Per the National Matching Services, Inc. website, the class of 2023 and the class of 2024 had similar average GPAs (3.57, 3.61) compared to

cohorts before them (3.55-3.6, Classes of 2020-2022), suggesting that GPA is not providing an additional explanation for changes in certification examination performance. In Myers et al., GPAs ranged from 3.2-3.79, with those passing exams having a median GPA of 3.58. We note that on the National Matching Services, Inc. website that average GPA has increased between 2018 and 2025 from 3.55 to 3.65. Grade inflation has been reported over the years (summarized in **Nam 2024** using data from the US Department of Education), and this could influence exam performance.

- **GRE** — Per the National Matching Services, Inc. website, the class of 2023 and the class of 2024 had lower average verbal (74%) and quantitative (56-57%) GRE scores than the classes between 2020-2022 (76-78% verbal; 60-63% quantitative) among programs requiring GRE scores. These variables might be associated with a decrease in board scores. In Myers et al., the highest verbal % ranged from 52%-87% with median 77% in the group who passed the exam and median 69% in the group who failed the exam. In Myers et al., the highest quantitative % ranged from 48%-78%; with median 69% in the group who passed exam and median 60% in the group who failed the exam. Per the National Matching Services, Inc. website, we note that average GRE verbal scores are generally holding steady ~76%, while average GRE quantitative scores for the 2025 matched applicants is at its lowest (53%). We also note that the National Matching Service, Inc. website states, “GRE scores have been optional for many programs since 2021, so score data in 2021 and subsequent years are based on a smaller population.”
- **Gender** — Per the National Matching Services, Inc. website, the class of 2023 and the class of 2024 had slightly smaller % female (84-89%) compared to cohorts before them (classes of 2022, 2021, 2020: 87-90%) and in the Myers et al. cohort (93%). This variable might be associated with changes in board scores, though actual analysis must be performed to demonstrate an association.
- **Race** — Per the National Matching Services, Inc. website, the classes of 2023 and 2024 were more racially diverse (62-63% white) compared to earlier 2020-2022 cohorts (70-73%) and in the Myers et al. cohort (89%). This variable may coincide with changes in board scores, however, further analysis needs to be conducted to demonstrate an association.

Conclusion: There have been changes in these demographic characteristics for recent cohorts. We note that category selection for gender and race were expanded in 2022, which may have affected these results. Formal assessment is needed to ascertain if these variables are associated with board performance as they were in the Myers et al. (2021) study.

Recommendation: ABGC could continue to collect demographic information on TTs such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, year of graduation, parental status, working status, and first-generation college student status, and conduct analyses to study potential relationships between demographics and pass rates.

Does National Matching Services, Inc. data provide useful student demographic information that could be associated with exam performance (e.g., age, parental status, working status, first gen, etc.)?

GCEA determines data collection via NMS as part of the admissions Match process. However, GCEA does not routinely collect certification exam scores from programs, and thus it would not be possible to link board scores with data collected via the Match.

Recommendation: GC programs could begin to systematically collect these data and then GCEA/Independent Researchers could conduct a study to examine subject-level associations between these and other demographic characteristics and pass rate, akin to the study performed by Myers et al. (2021).

Since GCEA and ABGC collect demographic data on program applicants and exam takers, respectively, they could work together to align the demographic items asked so that analyses on applicants and exam takers can be compared.

What are TT reasons for taking the exam in August or February, and do they differ in ways that might be associated with board performance?

Wang et al. (2023) studied state licensure and pass rates from graduates between 2017-2021 and collected brief responses to reasons for taking the exam “sooner” or “later.” Reasons for taking the exam sooner included a need for closure (most common response), “wanting to get it over with”, “rip off the Band-aid”, or “needed to get the test behind me”, believing they had the broadest knowledge base at the time and were concerned that waiting might result in losing knowledge in areas different from the specialty they are practicing. Reasons for waiting included not feeling ready and to take a break from studying. This study did not specifically ask about August or February exam cycles but suggests that TTs would like more agency in when to take the exam, particularly in light of other factors such as state licensure.

Recommendation: GCEA, ABGC or an independent researcher could design a more in-depth study to address this topic.

Is there an association between graduation year and exam performance?

ABGC provided data on graduation date and test outcomes for August 2024 and February 2025 TTs.

~80% of TTs for August 2024 and February 2025 were 2024 graduates, as mentioned earlier. To appreciate if there is a pattern over time, longitudinal data is needed.

The class of 2024 was more likely to pass the August 2024 exam than prior cohorts taking the August 2024 exam ($p < .0001$); however, the class of 2024 were just as likely to pass the February 2025 exam as other cohorts taking the February 2025 exam ($p = .43$, no association). This suggests a potential degradation of knowledge further out from graduation; however, more longitudinal data is needed.

The class of 2024 were more likely to be first-time TTs in August 2024 ($p < .0001$) and February 2025 ($p < .0001$) than earlier cohorts taking the August 2024 and February 2025 exams.

The February 2025 exam cycle had a higher proportion of repeat test takers compared to the August 2024 exam cycle ($p < .0001$).

First-time TTs were more likely to pass the August 2024 exam than repeat TTs ($p < .0001$). First-time TTs were also more likely to pass the February 2025 exam than repeat TTs ($p = .047$).

Recommendation: No further action is needed.

The Taskforce identified factors at every level of the systems framework for which action and/or research is needed to address their (potential) involvement in exam performance.



Acronyms

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ABGC

American Board of Genetic Counseling

ACGC

Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling

DEIJ

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice

GCEA

Genetic Counselor Educators Association

GC

Genetic Counseling

I.C.E.

Institute for Credentialing Excellence

PA

Practice Analysis

PAAC

Practice Analysis Advisory Committee

PBC

Practice-Based Competencies

PSS

Professional Status Survey

TT

Test Taker



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References & Data Sources

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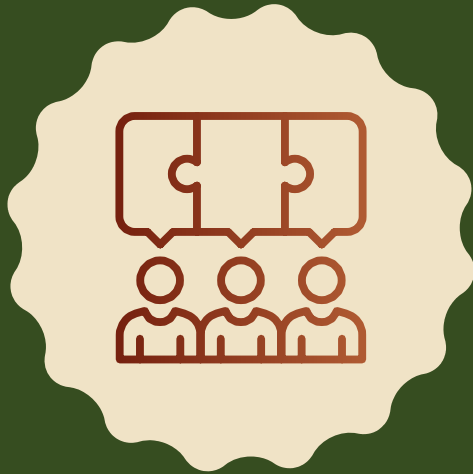
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Taskforce Members

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ABGC engaged a broad and diverse group of stakeholders — including newly certified professionals and leaders from partner organizations — to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. This inclusive approach brought a variety of perspectives and professional experiences to the Taskforce, strengthening the depth and relevance of its analysis and recommendations.

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