



Why Delay Scoring on August's Exam?

Interviews with **Angie Trepanier, MS, CGC**, and **Frank Williams, PhD**

Future genetic counselors who take the certification exam during the August 2023 cycle can expect to receive their scores six to eight weeks later than usual. Typically, exams are scored instantly, but this temporary change (exam scoring will be instant again in February) is being implemented as the final step toward improving the exam based on changes to our practice analysis, which ABGC's testing vendor, PSI, updated last year.

ABGC spoke with Dr. Frank Williams, a psychometrician at PSI, as well as ABGC board member Angie Trepanier, MS, CGC, to answer a few frequently asked questions that you may have as an educator or friend of someone taking the exam during August's window.

What will delay scoring?

Once the exam window closes, Dr. Frank Williams will spend a week evaluating newly added exam questions to gauge if they are performing well or not. Depending on the results of this evaluation, he may choose to re-score the exam.

Once this is done, ABGC's Standard Setting Task Force will examine how the items performed and provide input on appropriateness and difficulty. They will answer tough questions regarding each exam question, such as, "what percent of competent CGCs would answer this question correctly?"

This information will be used to set a board pass set point (a passing score) for the August exam and all exams moving forward under the current practice analysis. Once

the set point is established, all future exams conducted using the current practice analysis will have instant scoring.

The Standard Setting Task Force will be composed of 12 volunteers from a variety of work settings and roles.

What is a practice analysis, and what was PSI's process for conducting one?

A practice analysis (also called a job analysis) evaluates what knowledge professionals currently have to have and what tasks they currently perform in their professional roles. Certification exam content is developed based on the practice analysis.

A practice analysis is conducted every five years to ensure an exam will reflect current practice, including any changes in knowledge and tasks since the last practice analysis. ABGC's previous practice analysis was conducted in 2017.

To develop the new practice analysis, ABGC first convened a Practice Analysis Task Force. Members were selected via a call for volunteers to represent diverse roles, practice areas, years of experience, and geographic locations as well as other aspects of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity). PSI then worked with the Practice Analysis Task Force to identify knowledge areas and tasks performed in current genetic counseling practice. This work led to the development of the practice analysis survey. The purpose of the survey was to assess how often genetic counselors use each knowledge compo-



Angie Trepanier, MS, CGC



Frank Williams, PhD

nent and how often they perform each task in their jobs. Respondents could also indicate whether there were knowledge areas and tasks they used that were not included in the survey. The survey was distributed to genetic counselors through ABGC and professional organizations, and the survey's results were then used to develop the exam specifications.

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President's Perspective

It is my pleasure to introduce myself as the new president of the American Board of Genetic Counseling. I am both honored and excited to follow in the footsteps of our previous president, Catherine A. Fine, MS, CGC, and continue to guide ABGC's strategic initiatives in order to meet our core purpose of promoting high standards in genetic counseling.

One of our core values is to ensure transparency and trust with our Diplomates. We believe that open communication is vital, and we are continually improving the way we share information with you. We understand that changes can be challenging, but we are committed to making ABGC better than ever. This year, I'll be sharing quarterly updates about what is happening within our organization.

I want to thank those who have shared feedback with us regarding the test-taking experience in our most recent test-taking window. Please know that our executive director and her staff, along with the board, is listening and actively working with our vendor to resolve any issues. Please know that we are dedicated to improving the test-taking experience for our candidates.

As someone who has taken the CGC® exam myself, I understand the pressure and stress that accompanies such a high-stakes exam. However, I am certainly glad I took the step toward becoming a certified genetic counselor. The work I do every day is incredibly rewarding, even when challenging. While I work in a laboratory setting now, I previously spent 20 years in clinical practice and had the pleasure of being part of the leadership of a genetic counseling training program during the majority of that time. It is never easy to realize that I simply can't fix everything for the people I work with, whether they are patients, students, or clients. As counselors, we can't "make it better" for a family receiving unexpected news, but by listening and empowering them with the information they need, we are able to support them in difficult times.

Speaking of support, I look forward to this new chapter in supporting ABGC Diplomates. Your new executive director, Heather Rich, the executive office staff, and your board of directors is dedicated to supporting each and every diplomate and candidate alike. Serving in a leadership role for our small, tight-knit community is a highlight of my career, and I am proud of the

work we do to support one another.

If you are interested in getting involved with ABGC, we welcome your participation. We have several committees, including the certification exam committee and the new DEIJ committee, that are working to ensure equitable access to the exam. Volunteering with ABGC is a rewarding experience that can lead to new connections and friendships while working to support the genetic counseling profession.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude for your patience and understanding during our recent transition in management companies. I am excited about the new changes coming down the pike. We are dedicated to making ABGC the best it can be, and we appreciate your support.



Sarah Jane Noblin, MS, CGC



Executive Director's Message

I am excited to introduce myself as the new executive director of ABGC, Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP. It is an honor to be here and to offer my experience in certification program innovation. I know that together we can continue the standard of excellence upheld by ABGC, while making improvements that will only increase our organization's ability to serve Diplomates, the genetic counseling community and the people we support.

With over 15 years of experience in certification covering over 21 different exams, I have worked with various high-stakes testing programs across industries. Most recently, I have spent seven years in the certification executive suite.

A little more about me: I am passionate about advancing certification programs and ensuring their effectiveness and relevance in today's rapidly evolving world. Even though change is never a walk in the park, working through all aspects of certification, governance and accreditation standards is my specialty — and I truly enjoy being involved on the journey of re-accreditation. In fact, I've led the re-accreditation process for five organizations and 10 separate programs.

All of the fresh ideas at ABGC are giving me a positive perspective on the future, and I am eager to explore new possibilities for our organization. Moving to a new management company has given ABGC an open road to understand automation, which will lead to

more efficient and effective processes for Diplomates, including some recent updates to the recertification application process.

I am committed to working closely with all of you and ensuring that ABGC continues to evolve and meet the needs of the genetic counseling community. Thank you for your support, and I look forward to collaborating with you very soon.



Heather Rich, MPA, ICE-CCP



The DEIJ Committee: Where We Are Now

Q&A With Enrique Lopez, MS, LCGC

The ABGC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) Committee is continuing its journey toward implementing structured, intentional, and permanent DEIJ efforts within ABGC, the exam process, and the recertification process. Currently, this means developing objectives in the Committee Guidance Document for board approval.

Objectives — some of which are already being implemented — include reviewing [Nonprofit HR findings](#), determining demographic metrics, proposing DEIJ language and definitions, promoting exam access, and considering opportunities to partner with regulatory authorities and relevant associations on complementary DEIJ efforts.

Enrique Lopez, MS, LCGC, committee chair, shares a few details about how this journey toward DEIJ is going.

Can you share updates on the process of implementing Nonprofit HR's findings?

So far, we have been tackling this in terms of short-term versus long-term goals. Our main goal has been to figure out a way to implement collection of demographic data voluntarily for individuals taking the certification exam. We are trying not to recreate the wheel by looking to other organizations like NSGC, but we're also complementing previous efforts with some we deem valuable. I think the challenge is that we have to take into account what testing centers can accommodate, whether it be logistical or technological challenges. The

committee is close to being done choosing what demographic questions will be asked. We will then work with PSI to see how this is implemented.

As explained in last year's newsletter, the Certification Exam Committee has reviewed all items and has been enhancing recruitment of diverse item writers.

Numerous objectives are being proposed in the DEIJ Committee Guidance Document. Which one are you personally most eager to start and why?

I'm keen on working on a potential way to collect demographic data on the certification exam as well as to assess if the exam can be translated to additional languages. The data collected will give us a nuanced representation of individuals taking the exam and with knowledge of this comes the ability to enact the necessary change to reduce barriers identified.

What would you say to an ABGC Diplomate worried that the committee could implement too many changes? How will these changes make genetic counselors better?

I think it's necessary to be transparent in the decisions we make. Not everyone will have the same opinion on how to move forward, and that's important to take into account. We can discuss this as a committee and think of ways to mitigate situations like this. I also think it's not about making genetic counselors better. It's about allowing all in-



Enrique Lopez, MS, LCGC

dividuals to have a fair chance with the end goal of increasing diversity.

How will these goals be measured and when can Diplomates expect to start seeing measurable changes coming from the objectives?

We are still discussing how to proceed with reporting measurement of goals and how that would be described to Diplomates. As of now, we are trying to finalize the demographic collection piece. The plan is to implement collection during the next certification exam in August, and we will discuss as a committee how the data will be analyzed and in what time intervals — e.g., after a certain number of certification exams.

Why did you choose to serve on the DEIJ Committee and what are your personal goals as chair?

I want to make an effort for our profession to be representative of the population we serve. There should be individuals of all different backgrounds practicing in our field, because that is how we build a more inclusive community. With inclusivity, we can foster compassion and empathy towards others and attempt to understand their perspectives and values. I applied to the DEIJ Committee to try and push us further into this direction. I'm hopeful we can reduce the barriers to certification for individuals of all identified backgrounds. ○

"There should be individuals of all different backgrounds practicing in our field, because that is how we build a more inclusive community."

The Continuing Competence Committee: Empowering CGCs for Lifelong Learning

Interviews with **Sharon Aufox, MS, CGC**, and **Claire Davis, EdD, MS, CGC**

ABGC's Continuing Competence Committee formed in 2022 as the next stage in ABGC's process of evaluating and improving recertification — a process that began in 2019 with the Continuing Competency Task Force. Claire Davis, EdD, MS, CGC, and Sharon Aufox, MS, CGC, serve as the committee's co-chairs, and they're excited for the committee's role in strengthening genetic counseling's future.

As in nearly every other area of healthcare, the practice of genetic counseling is continually changing and adapting. The committee was formed to explore what these changes and growth in practice should mean for continuing competence and board certification. With advancements in genetics and growth in practice, ABGC wants to ensure that the CGC designation signifies competency throughout a genetic counselor's career.

"I look at my colleagues and see how driven and committed we are to always learning."

Ensuring Continuing Competency Meets Industry Standards

Over the past year, the committee has evaluated the current recertification process's strengths and weaknesses. This evaluation has revealed ways the process could improve that will allow CGCs to maintain competency to industry standards, something CGCs, as well as their patients, deserve.

The committee is currently exploring practical ways to support continuing competence (currently called **recertification**) for CGCs, and is planning to start a beta test soon. Addition-

ally, the committee is aiming to begin a pilot of the new competency program in 2024.

Most genetic counselors would agree that they've learned a lot throughout their careers, and not just from CEUs. Realizing this, one aspect the committee is exploring is recognizing in-job learning as part of continuing competence. Another aspect they're considering is providing CGCs opportunities to learn from how their peers would make decisions in tricky, unstandardized situations.

Sharing a Joy of Learning

Dr. Claire Davis, an educator, has an innate love of learning, and has seen this love shared by many in her profession. She's excited that improving the recertification process will bring education to the forefront of the practice.

"I think genetic counselors are incredibly smart and dedicated professionals," she said. "I look at my colleagues and see how driven and committed we are to always learning. This could be a way for that to be supported and celebrated."

Claire believes changes to the process will also "strengthen evidence we have about competence beyond certification," she said. "It's added confidence to their own skillset, and they will know that through actual evidence."

Although change can bring growth and improve outcomes, Claire and Sharon understand there are challenges and hesitation when changing any process. Right now, the bar is high for getting people's attention. There are many competing priorities CGCs experience that could make it tough for them to accept that processes need to change.

That the process is happening slowly over the next couple of years should help build awareness and interest. Much consideration and research is being poured into every decision.



Sharon Aufox, MS, CGC



Claire Davis, EdD, MS, CGC

As ABGC continues its journey of integrating principles of DEI, including a wide range of voices in all decision-making processes is essential. This is very true for the CCC, which benefits from collaboration and exchange of ideas among people with different perspectives and identities who work in varied specialties of genetic counseling practice. In addition to Sharon and Claire, committee members are: Lila Aiyar, Susan Armel, Jennifer Berkowitz, Tiffani Carter, Bronson Riley, Jenna Scott, and Angela Trepanier (ABGC Board Liaison).

The CCC aims to start providing more information and rolling out more details about the recertification exam changes in fall 2023. ○

ABGC Spotlight: Enrique Lopez

Enrique Lopez, MS, LCGC, is a genetic counselor at Saint Joseph's University Medical Center in Paterson, NJ. As an ABGC Diplomate, he serves as co-chair of the diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice committee.

His dedication to the profession and determination to make it inclusive for people of all backgrounds certainly makes him worthy of a spotlight. Below, read how he came to the profession and the challenges and celebrations he's experienced along this journey.

Why did you choose to become a genetic counselor?

I honestly never heard of the profession until I was halfway through my undergraduate career. I was fortunate enough to be guided towards shadowing and was then suddenly met with individuals who had an intricate knowledge of not only genetics but of psychosocial counseling. I observed them provide care in a compassionate and considerate manner, and they fostered my love for genetic counseling. They will always be a core reason why I practice in this field.

This profession combines my love for genetics and the arduous process of navigating medical, social, and psychological implications with individuals and family members who have genetic conditions. I chose it because I can make a difference not only for the individual in front of me, but for their family as well.

Can you tell us about your current role as a genetic counselor?

I currently work as a pediatric, cancer, and prenatal counselor in Paterson, New Jersey. The three specialties are involved in my

weekly practice continuously; however, I focus more heavily on pediatric genetics. It turns out that if you're too indecisive about what specialty you want, you can just practice all three! I do enjoy aspects of every specialty, but I enjoy the continual care that pediatrics provides so much. It's also convenient to be able to self-refer between specialties as well.

Practicing every specialty is a significant reason for why I took this current role; however, what made me truly consider it was the type of population we serve.

Close to 50% of the patients I see are from underserved communities and primarily speak Spanish. I provide counseling in Spanish and Portuguese, and after doing so for over a year now, I don't see how I could practice any other way.

Lastly, although this isn't a part of my clinical genetic counseling role, I am also an independent contractor to the New York Mid-Atlantic and Caribbean (NYMAC) Regional Genetics Network. Their aim is to provide genetic services and support to underserved communities in states and territories encompassing their domain. I'm one of the contributors, alongside many others, to increasing access to genetic services and hopefully establishing the field of genetic counseling in the territory of Puerto Rico.

What has it been like for you as a genetic counselor who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

I'd say that from what I've personally experienced during graduate training and in my current role, I haven't had any adverse



Enrique Lopez, MS, LCGC

experiences in regard to my sexual identity specifically. However, I know not all individuals will have the same exact experience, unfortunately. For the most part, the genetic counseling community is generally welcoming of the LGBTQIA+ community, which can make for a safe environment to practice in the profession.

The LGBTQIA+ community is small within genetic counseling, and I'm meeting more individuals who are a part of it and always looking to meet more!

How has being part of the LGBTQ+ community influenced your work as a genetic counselor?

It's been easier to put myself in other people's shoes because of me being gay. I experienced so much doubt, uncertainty, fear, anger, and so many other emotions when coming to terms with my sexuality. It allows me to identify these emotions in stressful situations, because I've been through so many of them myself. It makes for a safe environment when I'm counseling, since no judgement is passed for feeling a specific emotion or thought.

I also value the perspective of so many other individuals in my community because there isn't a universal way of thinking, and that's how you create inclusivity — by listening to everyone.

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Is the new test very different from before?

One of the changes made to the Exam Content Outline (ECO), which item writers reference when creating questions, was to make questions more knowledge-based instead of chronology-driven and task-based. Previously, the ECO was bound by the order in which test takers would accomplish tasks. PSI also changed the practice analysis so that it is less granular. All of these changes will make it easier for item writers to create exam questions.

Changes made to the exam content outline only happen after a new practice analysis has been performed. Other changes, like updating exam questions to reflect new technologies and improving questions to make them more inclusive, are made annually by the Certification Examination Committee and the work of item writers. Despite changes

to the content outline, Frank explained PSI was able to continue to use around 90% of previously written items in the new versions of the exam.

What should I tell my student/friend who is nervous about delayed scoring?

ABGC recognizes that delaying results reporting for the August exam cycle may be nerve-wracking for examinees and that it impacts the timeline to achieving full licensure. Angie certainly empathizes. However, she explained, "ABGC must go through the standard setting process in order to ensure that the new forms of the exam are a valid measure of competence. The board exam is a high-stakes exam since the results may be tied to licensure and professional practice. As such, ABGC must follow established procedures to ensure a valid examination." ○

ABGC Spotlight: Enrique Lopez

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What advice do you have for members of the LGBTQ+ committee who are referred for genetic counseling? What advice do you have for genetic counselors and other health care providers caring for their patients who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community?

The most important thing is for someone to be comfortable enough in a session, so they can express what they want and what they expect. That unfortunately is not possible at all times, and so inquiring about a considerate provider may be something worthwhile. Being comfortable can vary drastically from person to person, but for some, it means explicitly stating their sexuality. For others, it means identifying pronouns, and for others, it may mean not stating anything at all. There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach.

I think my advice to other LGBTQIA+ health-care providers is to always engage in meaningful conversation. That for me starts when

I contract. Asking what someone's specific concerns are, if there are any questions, and if there is anything an individual would like to tell me about themselves that would impact the session from their point of view. Even though the LGBTQIA+ community is a minority, it certainly does not mean we are alone. Don't be afraid to reach out to other individuals in the community to ask for support or to simply form a connection.

What guidance do you have for prospective genetic counselors who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community?

I echo the same message above I gave for providers. Don't be afraid to reach out. Ask how your experiences may be valuable in this field and how it will ultimately affect you. At the end of the day, there will always be someone in your corner, and I'll definitely be one of them. ○

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