

To Genetic Counseling graduate program leadership, faculty, supervisors and students:

The ACGC recognizes that the current COVID-19 outbreak requires unprecedented action. Many academic institutions and health care systems have already moved to restrict travel and limit in-person gatherings for conferences or teaching. We recommend that programs follow their institutional guidance. ACGC recognizes that several Standards may be impacted relative to achievement of your program goals. Therefore, ACGC recommends that program leadership document within the program records the date of curricular changes due to COVID-19 accommodation and the contingency plan for alterations in program delivery including changes in the training schedule, case mix, and use of distance learning methods. A sample preparedness plan, compiled by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education & Training (ACCET), is offered at the end of this communication.

Programs may be concerned about the need to apply for the option to offer instruction via alternative modes such as through learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard) or webinar platforms (e.g., Web-Ex, Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.). The United States Department of Education (USDE) has released guidance permitting accreditors to waive their distance education review requirements for institutions working to accommodate students whose enrollment is otherwise interrupted as a result of COVID-19. The action limits permission to distance learning opportunities developed for the purpose of serving students who were already in attendance, but whose attendance was interrupted by COVID-19.

The USDE states that this “provides flexibilities for institutions that are working to help students complete the term in which they are currently enrolled and identifies options available to institutions so that they can continue to serve students during the coronavirus threat. Note that these instructions do not contemplate accommodations for students who have NOT yet enrolled or whose term has not yet begun.”

Genetic counseling programs may use online technologies to accommodate students on a temporary basis, without going through the regular approval process (including no need to submit substantive changes forms and fees) for the use or expansion of interactive distance learning (IDL) programs, under the following terms and conditions (as recommended by ACCET and ACGC):

- This temporary waiver of ACGCs required program approval process is only applicable to students who were already in attendance, but whose attendance was interrupted by COVID-19.
- For programs temporarily delivered through interactive distance learning (IDL) during this emergency, instructors must initiate substantive communication with students, either individually or collectively, on a regular basis (e.g., chat features, conference calls, email exchanges, and/or the submission of work electronically to be evaluated by the instructor).
- For programs that have had institutions prohibit student participation in fieldwork placements, clinical logbooks must reflect the dates in which students were removed from fieldwork sites due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- In addition, at the time of RCS and self-study applications, programs must document in Armature which students had a reduction in case acquisition due to the COVID-19 disruption.

For options relevant to fieldwork experiences, ACGC supports guidance from the American Association of Medical Colleges COVID-19 notification:

If the number of COVID-19 patients is very high for an extended period, it will be helpful to review the school's required clinical encounters and develop alternate ways for students to continue to meet these requirements (e.g., paper cases, simulations). *ACGC recognizes that many simulation centers are also closed.*

Institutions may also enter into temporary consortium agreements with other institutions so that students can complete courses at other institutions but be awarded credit by their home institution.

At this time, ACGC is operating normally without interruptions due to COVID-19 with no change in accreditation due dates including the annual completion of Report of Current Status (RCS) and completion of the self-study for those programs undergoing re-accreditation.

The COVID-19 outbreak is still evolving and the ACGC Executive Office will continue to send updates as the situation unfolds.

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Current Standards most relevant to the COVID-19 situation:

A3.1.5 The health, safety and privacy of clients, students, and faculty associated with the educational activities must be reasonably safeguarded by the institution.

B1.1 Instructional Plan

B1.1.1 Instruction must follow a plan that documents and assesses appropriate learning experiences and curriculum sequence to develop the competencies necessary for graduation. A variety of methods and materials can be used, including online learning and distance education.

B3.2.2 To be considered a “core case”, the clinical interaction must occur face-to-face (see annotation), and active student participation in at least 1 role in each of the 3 categories of Fundamental Counseling Roles (Management, Education, and Counseling) must be documented.

B3.2.5 To prepare students for the workforce in the best manner possible, clinical training should reflect current trends in the workplace. Programs should refer to the most recent ABGC Practice Analysis for a general breakdown of the distribution of the core cases across different practice areas.

ANNOTATION: Using this information as a guideline, it is the responsibility of the Program Director to ensure that all students have adequate exposure and involvement in a wide breadth of clinical cases in an approximately similar ratio to that determined by the most recent ABGC Practice Analysis. The student should not have an overwhelming majority of cases in any single practice area.

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PREPAREDNESS PLAN TO ADDRESS THE CORONAVIRUS THREAT

To ensure preparedness, ACCET is advising institutions to create a written contingency plan identifying its response to the coronavirus threat. The plan should include, at a minimum, the following:

1. Updated list of the names and contact information (cell phone, email address, and physical address) for: (1) all students and (2) all faculty/staff.
2. Identification of the institution's First-Responder Team to be available during the crisis.
3. The creation of a "Communications Tree" identifying who, how, and when communications will occur between staff, faculty, and students.
 - How will students be kept informed and frequently updated
 - How will faculty/staff be kept informed and frequently updated
4. Plans for maintaining good health while the campus continues to operate.
5. Any plans for temporarily altering the training schedule of current students.
6. Any plans for temporarily delivering program(s) by interactive distance learning.
7. Any plans to enter a temporary consortium agreement with other institutions so that students can complete courses at the other institution but be awarded credit by the home institution.

Plans in the event of a temporary closure and plans for reopening following the closure.

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