Genetic counseling (GC) is a rapidly expanding field, and the supply of certified genetic counselors is currently unable to keep up with job demand. Research is fairly limited regarding the awareness and perceptions potential genetic counseling program applicants have of the field and what factors most influence their interest in the field. This study aimed to examine some of these topics. The current study includes data collected from 1,389 undergraduate students in the sciences at 23 universities across the United States who were surveyed regarding information related to their awareness, perceptions, knowledge, and interest in GC. Data analysis was performed using STATA statistical software and included descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests and ANOVA for continuous variables, and chi-square analysis for categorical variables. The majority of participants had heard of GC (78.0%), many from a high school course (37.3%), college course (28.1%), or online (11.5%). Familiarity was significantly associated with factors such as gender ($p = 0.003$), year in school ($p < 0.001$), and major ($p = 0.018$). Participants found hands-on experiences such as shadowing and internships to be most helpful for learning about the career. After taking the survey, participant interest was associated with several factors including gender ($p < 0.001$) and ethnicity ($p = 0.012$). Commonly reported factors that attracted students to the field included direct patient care, the variety of roles available, cultural competency and psychosocial training, and helping others. Discussion elaborates upon specific factors related to student awareness and interest in GC and potential ways to tailor recruitment strategies for maximum benefit to the field. This includes recommendations for: (1) specific places to target efforts, such as high schools and science-related majors; (2) types of recruitment efforts to use, such as hands-on exposure opportunities and various online resources; (3) talking points for genetic counselors, such as helping others and various aspects of program training.

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