



Genetic Counseling Master's Program

Rutgers University—
New Brunswick



Rutgers University Genetic Counseling Program

This spring semester has been both one of our most challenging and rewarding semesters yet. With the onset of remote learning and remote clinical rotations halfway through the semester due to COVID-19, our students, faculty, and clinical sites were all pushed to find creative solutions to uphold the standard of learning that the Rutgers program is known for. In the face of difficult times, our RUGCMP family came together and has embraced this new way of learning.

From remote thesis defenses, telehealth, remote interviews, and even Zoom happy hours, our program has found ways to thrive during these difficult times. Read on to see where the class of 2020 will be going next year, highlights from the class of 2021, and more on Rutgers's role in the fight against COVID-19!

***Thank you for
your support!***

The Genetic Counseling Master's Program is very grateful to the following organizations for their generous scholarship support:

- Rutgers Div of Life Sciences
- Amicus Therapeutics
- Johnson & Johnson, Janssen
- Human Genetics Assoc of NJ
- Bioreference Laboratories

Their support provides tuition assistance to many of our students and helps our program attract the best of the best. If you are interested in making a scholarship contribution, please contact Jessica Joines.





We are so proud of the class of 2020 graduates for securing amazing jobs; we can't wait to see what you'll do!

Class of 2020 Destinations



Sarah Belsky will be a cardiovascular genetic counselor at Yale New Haven Hospital, in New Haven, Connecticut



Emily Chien will be working in cancer, prenatal, pediatric, and adult genetics at the Genetics Center in Orange, California



**Atlantic
Health System**

Jessalyn Gerber will be a prenatal genetic counselor at Atlantic Health in Morristown, New Jersey



**Intermountain[®]
Healthcare**

Kendall Kaufmann will be a cardiovascular genetic counselor at Intermountain Healthcare in Salt Lake City, Utah



Deirdre Sumski will be a prenatal genetic counselor at Crystal Run Healthcare in West Nyack, New York



**Children's Hospital
of The King's Daughters**

Erin Swartz will be a pediatric genetic counselor at the Children's Specialty Group at the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Norfolk, Virginia

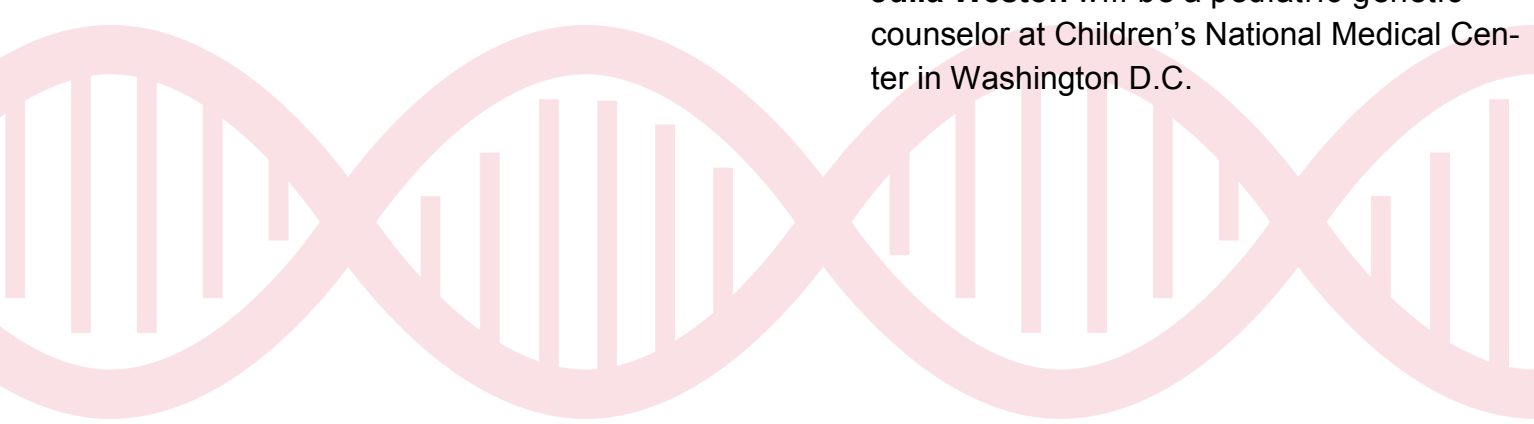


Jillian Tocarczyk will be a prenatal genetic counselor at Lehigh Valley Health Network in Allentown, Pennsylvania



**Children's
National[®]
Medical Center**

Julia Weston will be a pediatric genetic counselor at Children's National Medical Center in Washington D.C.



Class of 2021 Updates

What was your favorite part of first year, and what are you looking forward to?

I enjoyed learning about the different areas of genetic counseling, which led me to enjoy pre-natal a lot! I was excited to learn about many different genetic syndromes and seeing them in clinical rotations. One of my favorite parts of my 1st year though was meeting my amazing classmates (now friends)! I'm mostly excited now to start our longer clinical rotations and practice a lot of the skills we've learned in our first year!

-Enrique Lopez

I can't believe my first year as graduate student is coming to an end - it definitely flew by! I am grateful for the friendships and the connections with faculty and local medical professionals that I have made this past year. I am excited for summer rotations and working on my thesis this summer and hopefully getting back to the good ol' Nelson building in the fall!

-Melissa Gandhi

One of my favorite parts of my first year at Rutgers has been meeting my classmates, who are now my great friends and future colleagues! I've also enjoyed becoming more familiar with the field of genetic counseling through our first 5-week rotation and am excited to continue rotations through telehealth soon!

-Kelly Roche

This past year I enjoyed the variety of classes that prepared me to start participating in clinic. I had the opportunity to rotate in a cancer clinic where I learned a great deal from my supervisor and began practicing my skills I have learned this year. This coming school year I'm looking forward to the rest of my rotations and participating in the NJ LEND program.

-Alexis Morgan

I cannot believe our first year is already coming to an end! It has gone by so fast, but we have learned so much. My favorite part of the year has been building relationships with not only my classmates, but also with the program leadership, our professors, and the genetic counselors we've been meeting in clinic. I'm looking forward to getting back into clinic this summer for our first full rotation and getting to practice the skills we've been learning in the classroom!

-Natalie Jacob

Rutgers Response to COVID-19

On March 17th, Rutgers announced that in-person instruction would be suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While much of campus became deserted, teams of researchers at the university were hard at work leveraging the amazing labs and research power at Rutgers in an effort to aid the fight against COVID-19. Within the same building that our program is housed is RUCDR Infinite Biologics. The mission of RUCDR Infinite Biologics is to “understand the genetic causes of common, complex diseases and to discover diagnoses, treatments and, eventually, cures for these diseases. To this end, we collaborate with researchers in the public and private sectors throughout the world, providing the highest quality biobanking services and biomaterials, as well as scientific and technical support.” The lab has been the world’s largest university-based biorepository, RUCDR has been perfecting the science of biobanking, bioprocessing and analytics since 1999.

During the lab’s normal operations, they have the capacity to process thousands of saliva samples a day and perform DNA extraction from these samples for research as well as commercial testing. In light of the pandemic, however, they have reallocated their processing power to analyze COVID-19 tests from saliva samples. This test methodology, as opposed to the original nasal-pharyngeal swab allows for easier collection of samples and will even allow for patients to collect their own samples at home and send them into the lab for testing.

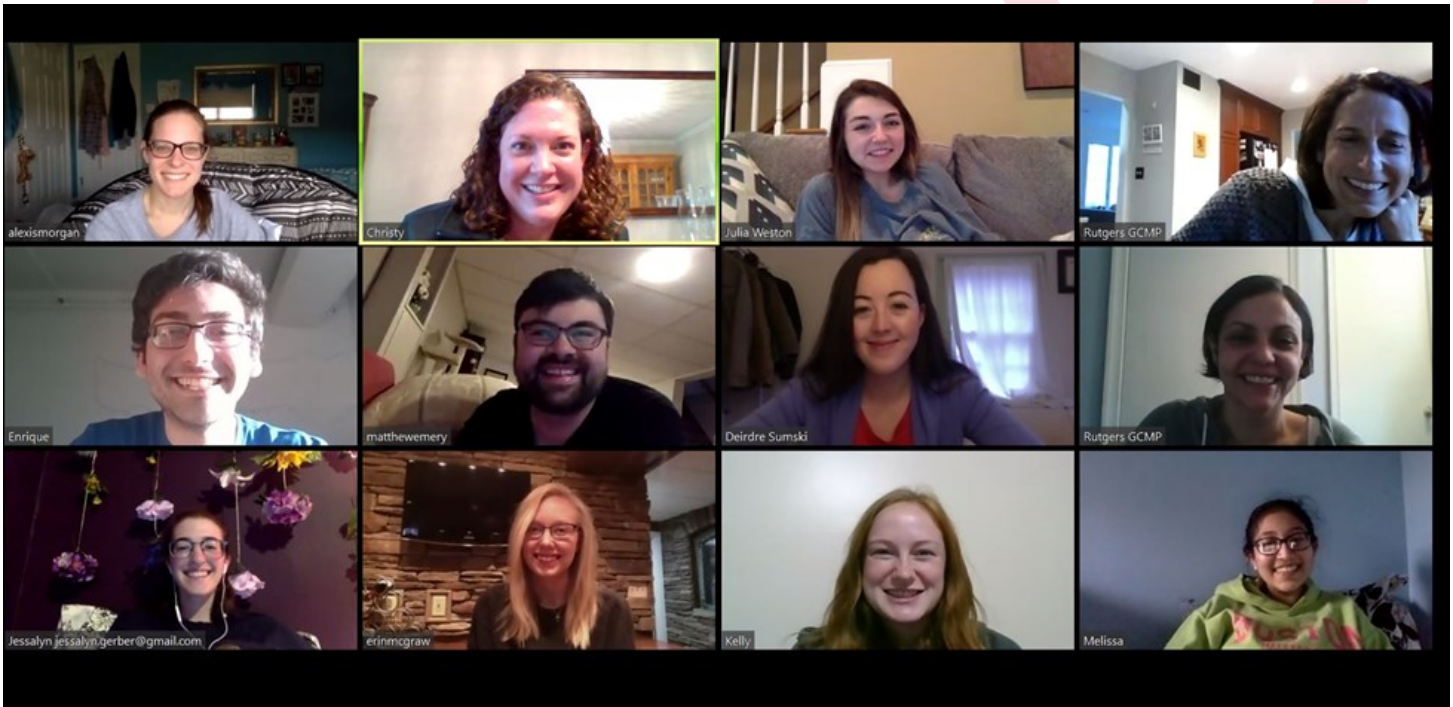
The saliva-based COVID-19 testing developed at RUCDR Infinite Biologics along with Spectrum solutions marks a huge milestone in testing. These tests can be offered for under \$100 and the easy collection as

well as fast turnaround times will allow for rapid expansion of testing not only in New Jersey, but throughout the country. Labs in other states such as Oklahoma have been working to validate the saliva test kits in their own labs as well to allow for expansion of testing to other parts of the country.

Based on early data, the saliva test kits have shown promising results for being able to detect lower levels of the virus than previous tests. In separate research, a Yale University team reported that saliva may be able to detect the virus in people who are only mildly ill, while a nasopharyngeal swab cannot. This ability will be critical in the effort to reopen businesses and allow individuals to go back to work and school as the biggest threat in the spread of COVID-19 has been mildly symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals. Along with the increased sensitivity of these tests, there is also a lower false-negative rate than the previous nasopharyngeal swab-based tests.

The saliva testing was originally offered at multiple testing site throughout New Jersey including sites in New Brunswick, Somerset, and Edison. The recent FDA approval of using the saliva test kits for at home collection will allow for this testing to be offered to patients throughout the country, from the comfort of their homes. At-home testing not only will increase the availability of testing, but it will hopefully decrease the spread of the virus as it will allow contagious individuals to stay home instead of having to venture out to a testing center, urgent care, or their doctor’s office.

We are honored to be at an institution that is a leader in the fight against COVID-19!



Zoom happy hour, while not as fun as in person has been a great way to keep in touch. Pictured above are some of our first- and second-year students along faculty enjoying some much-needed time to relax and check in!

Contact Information

Jessica Rispoli Joines, MGC, CGC
Program Director
joines@dls.rutgers.edu
Phone: (848) 445-9637

Sherry Pernice
Administrative Assistant
pernice@dls.rutgers.edu
Phone: (848) 445-9636

Christy Seymour, MS, CGC
Assistant Program Director
seymour@dls.rutgers.edu
Phone: (848) 445-9547

Special thanks to Jessalyn Gerber for her work in putting together this newsletter

RUTGERS

School of Arts and Sciences

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Department of Genetics
Life Sciences Building
145 Bevier Road
Piscataway, NJ 08854

