

**Comprehensive Preparation
Comprehensive Examination (CPCE)
and National Counselor Exam (NCE)
Preparation Guide**



**Counseling and School Psychology
Clinical Mental Health Counseling**

Clinical Mental Health Counseling

CPCE & NCE Preparation Guide

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to provide Clinical Mental Health Counseling students information to prepare for two exams: the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE), which is one of the requirements for graduation in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program, and the National Counselor Exam (NCE), required for licensure as a Professional Counselor.

We understand that preparing for these exams can be incredibly difficult and anxiety-provoking. Know that we, as faculty, have the utmost confidence in you and your abilities. We hope that this guide is helpful and welcome your feedback.

Preparing for the Exams

The best way to prepare for the CPCE and the NCE is to do the following:

1. Remember to practice positive self-care.
2. Read all of your assigned materials in all of your classes.
3. Take all of your assignments seriously.
4. Keep all of your notes from classes.
5. Read this guide thoroughly.
6. Ask questions as you progress through your program.
7. Join a study group at least by the semester before your exam(s).
8. Use the information that you receive in this manual to create study materials.
9. CONTROL your test anxiety.
10. Reinforce your positive study behaviors.

Checklist

Date Completed	Task
	Complete all core courses and two-thirds of all courses on required program.
	Attend Mandatory Comprehensive Examination Preparation Meeting semester BEFORE you will take the CPCE.
	Complete application form for the CPCE and submit payment.
	Complete application form for the NCE and submit payment.
	Form study groups.
	Study, study, study!
	Take CPCE.
	Take the NCE
	Celebrate!

Practicing Positive Self Care

As you try to fit studying for this exam into your already hectic schedule which balances your personal life, course work, and field experiences, you may find yourself forgetting to take care of yourself. Success on these exams (as well as in your future profession) depends on your ability to balance your many roles, while still making your work of significant import. Consider the following areas and tailor the information to best aid you in caring for yourself.

Physical:

Although every individual is different, good nutrition, adequate rest and moderate exercise are important for your physical and mental health. With a busy schedule, you may find yourself forgetting to eat, eating on the run and generally not paying attention to your body's needs. This is not self care. You must continually remind yourself to pay attention to your body's needs, including when and what you need to eat.

You are likely to experience high levels of stress when studying for this exam. These levels of stress will impact you physically. Stress can cause a variety of physical responses, including headaches, stomachaches, difficulty sleeping and increased blood pressure. In order to manage the stress that you will face, it is imperative that you find healthy coping skills. You will be very tempted to use quick and possibly unhealthy ways to deal with your stress. However, the best way to manage your stress level is to be proactive. By learning relaxation skills, cognitive self-talk, and other strategies that meet your needs (e.g., yoga, meditation, light exercise) you will find that you will not need to use more unhealthy methods of stress management.

Social:

Social support, including your friends and family, are crucial to your success. It is important to create a wide social support system; this will include your peers from your program and your sites. This not only creates a network of future opportunities, it allows you to have positive peer relations which may directly aid in your stress management and success in your program. Graduate students often forget how important their social lives really are. You may find yourself cancelling engagements with friends and family in order to work or to just vegetate on your couch. However tempting cancelling these social activities may be, you need to remind yourself that your social life is as important as your academic life. Balancing your social needs with the rest of your life is an important life skill.

Emotional:

High levels of stress not only impact you physically, it will have impacts on you psychologically and emotionally. The above-mentioned stress management techniques will improve your emotional functioning as well. In addition, another proven method of stress management can be utilized to improve your overall quality of life. Using humor and laughter have been shown to yield positive outcomes for individual's physical and mental health. Remember to see the lighter side of things and not take yourself too seriously.

Spiritual:

Nurturing your spirit is a positive way to care for your needs. This can be done in a variety of ways, including using your faith, religious beliefs, spirituality or inner self. Regardless of your specific beliefs, research supports the role of spirit in physical and emotional wellness.

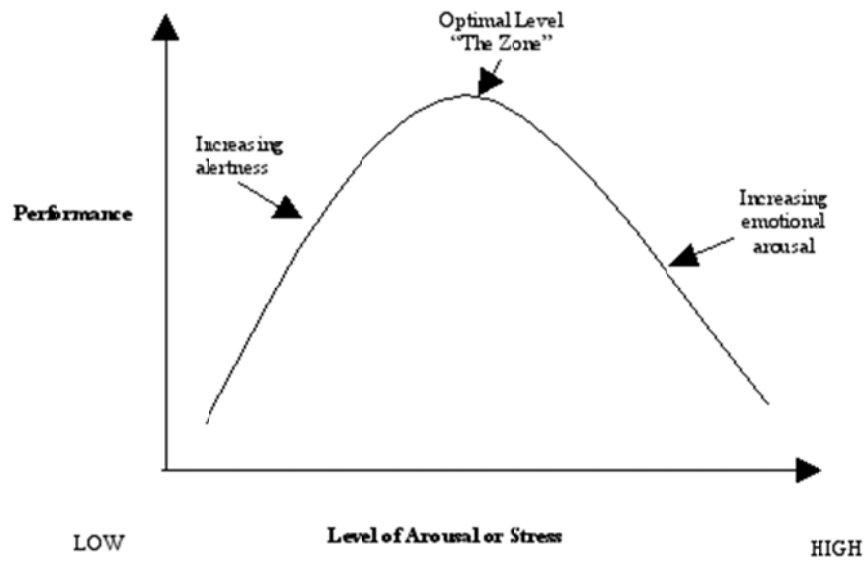
Recreational:

Playing and having fun is not just for children. It is an important aspect of a complete life for individuals at any developmental stage. Remember to allow yourself the time to relax and enjoy life's simple pleasures.

Test Anxiety

Why do we have test anxiety? Most research points to an evolutionary purpose. When you are encountered by a threatening stimuli, you will physiological respond with fight/ flight / or freeze. Unfortunately, these responses do not necessarily hold useful in today's world. Most certainly, they will not help you when you are preparing for you exams.

Some anxiety about tests is normal and even beneficial (inverted "U" curve). A mild to moderate amount of anxiety before and even during a test can help keep you alert, focused, motivated and on your toes! It only becomes a problem when it begins to feel overwhelming and unmanageable.



In understanding your test anxiety, it will be most helpful to know the Cognitive Model of Test Anxiety. The test anxiety functions on the following:

- BELIEFS about how you will perform
- FEELINGS (like anxiety)
- PHYSICAL REACTIONS (like headaches or nausea)
- BEHAVIORS (like “blacking out,” avoiding studying)

The following are some not helpful anxiety-provoking thoughts about tests.

1. If I don't do well on this test/paper, I will certainly flunk the class.
2. If I don't do well on this test/paper, people (family, friends, the professor) will think less of me.
3. If I don't do well on this test/paper, I will feel extremely miserable.
4. If I don't do well on this test/paper, it means I am “dumb & stupid”.
5. Other people are doing much better than I am. No one else is having trouble. I am alone.
6. If I don't do well on this test/paper, I won't do well on future tests/papers.
7. Because I've done well in the past, I have to do well.
8. Because I am interested in this material, I have to do well.
9. Because lots of people expect me to do well, I have to do well.
10. I must know all the material in order to get an “A”.
11. Success is defined by my grades.
12. In order to feel worthwhile, I need to be competent, intelligent and successful.
13. In order to be liked or loved, I need to be competent, intelligent and successful.
14. If I can't answer the first question, I will probably fail the test.
15. If I can't concentrate well as I study, I will probably fail the test.

Follow this four-step model to reducing your test anxiety:

Step One: Identify

Identify your typical thought patterns that may be feeding into your anxiety. Write them down. Later, when you notice yourself feeling anxious, write down what thoughts you are having.

Step Two: Evaluate

Are the thoughts correct? Examine each one objectively.

Step Three: Respond

For each thought, what would be a better (more useful) thought about an exam or studying? For example:

- I've done well before on tests. I can do well on this one, too.
- I'll put in a good effort.
- All I can do is try my best.

Write down your responses to each thought you identified before.

Step Four: Relax

Because our bodies physically feel the stress of our initial unhelpful thoughts, we can directly change this by using various techniques to relax.

- Take slow deep breaths from your abdomen. Four seconds in. Hold for four. Six seconds out. Pause briefly. Think of breathing in relaxation and say "relax" to yourself. Say "calm" as you exhale.
- Tense and relax muscles. Tense various muscle groups for five seconds. Then relax. Do this throughout your body.
- Investigate other ways to relax, such as learning and practicing meditation, buying a relaxation tape, playing soothing music, etc.

Last Notes

One final point: this may seem obvious, but it is important to make sure that your anxiety is not due to poor preparation for tests. If you do not understand the course material, or have not been studying enough or going to class and have not been adequately learning the information all along, your anxiety may be due to the fact that you are unprepared. If that is the case, the anxiety is alerting you that something is wrong, so rather than simply attempting to manage or calm the anxiety, you may benefit from learning more effective time management or study skills, or from tutoring or extra help.

What Students Need to Know About the CPCE

The comprehensive exam is an exit examination required of all master's degree students. It is ordinarily taken during the student's last semester of study in the program. The purpose of the exam is to assess the student's knowledge of counseling to ensure minimum competence in the field. The CPCE will also provide collective feedback that can be used by the program in developing/adapting curriculum.

Eligibility and registration for the CPCE

In order to be eligible for the comprehensive examination, students must have completed all the core courses, finished two-thirds of their planned program and be a student in good standing.

Benefits of using the CPCE

- Allows Master's program comprehensive exam to better meet psychometric standards.
- Gives program an objective view of the knowledge level of students.
- Allows program to examine student functioning in various curriculum areas.
- Promotes longitudinal self study.
- Compares program results to national data.
- Stimulates student integration of knowledge learned in separate courses.
- Gives students comparative strength/weakness feedback.

Development of the CPCE

The CPCE is researched, developed, and distributed by both the Research and Assessment Corporation for Counseling (RACC) and the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE), two affiliate corporations of the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). The item writing committee was selected from master's and doctoral level professionals. The committee compiled a comprehensive listing of texts used in counselor education programs. Each question was developed based on information found in the most commonly used textbooks.

Content of the CPCE

The CPCE will cover the eight Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) common-core areas as defined by their Standards for Preparation and listed below. These eight core areas serve as the primary theoretical basis for the examination. It is through these areas that the CPCE is associated with accepted professional standards.

1. Human growth and development – studies that provide an understanding of the nature and needs of individuals at all developmental levels.
2. Social and cultural foundations – studies that provide an understanding of issues and trends in a multicultural and diverse society.
3. Helping relationships – studies that provide an understanding of counseling and consultation processes.
4. Group work – studies that provide an understanding of group development, dynamics, counseling theories, group counseling methods and skills, and other group work approaches.
5. Career and lifestyle development – studies that provide an understanding of career development and related life factors.
6. Appraisal – studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation.
7. Research and program evaluation – studies that provide an understanding of types of research methods, basic statistics, and ethical and legal considerations in research.
8. Professional orientation and ethics – studies that provide an understanding of all aspects of professional functioning including history, roles, organizational structures, ethics, standards, and credentialing.

Format of the CPCE

The CPCE consists of 160 items with 20 items per CACREP area. Of the 20 items per section, 17 will be scored; the remaining three will be pretest items that are not identified to the student.

The purpose of imbedded pre-testing is to generate actual score performance data on items. This allows CCE to select items for future test construction that have the most desirable psychometric attributes. Scores for each section and a total score will be reported for each student. The CCE will provide statistics on the program's students as well as national data. Each institution is responsible for determining a minimum criterion score for their students. A demographic questionnaire will be included on the answer sheet for research purposes. Students are allowed four hours to complete the examination.

After each examination, upon obtaining the results from the CPCE office, we will contact students by mail of their grade results. Results will be sent approximately 3 weeks after the test administration. Students who fail the exam may take sub-tests of the section(s) not passed.

What Students Need to Know About the NCE

Although taking and passing the NCE is not part of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program's requirements, satisfactory performance on the National Counselor Examination (NCE®) is one of the criteria used by the National Board for Certified Counselors to identify professionals who may be eligible to become a National Certified Counselor (NCC). It is also used for state licensure as a Professional Counselor in Connecticut.

Eligibility and registration for the NCE

You can take the NCE, but we do not recommend that you take this exam until after you have completed the CPCE and received feedback on your performance.

Content of the CPCE

The purpose of the NCE is to assess knowledge, skills, and abilities viewed as important for providing effective counseling services. The NCE is designed to be general in nature. It is intended to assess cognitive knowledge which should be known by all counselors regardless of their individual professional specialties.

Although different questions are used for each administration of the examination, the following eight content areas are always covered:

1. Human Growth and Development
2. Social and Cultural Foundations
3. Helping Relationships
4. Group Work
5. Career and Lifestyle Development
6. Appraisal
7. Research and Program Evaluation
8. Professional Orientation & Ethics

In addition, the NCE is based on the following five work behaviors:

1. Fundamentals of Counseling
2. Assessment and Career Counseling
3. Group Counseling
4. Programmatic and Clinical Intervention
5. Professional Practice Issues

Examination Format

The NCE is comprised of 200 multiple choice questions and is scheduled for a four-hour period beginning at 9:00 a.m. Responses are recorded on a separate machine-scorable answer sheet.

A different edition of the NCE is compiled for each administration of the exam. Each form's questions are drawn from the NCE item pool which has undergone extensive review and field testing. The entire item pool, each form of the NCE and the answer sheet are copyrighted. Consequently, any distribution of the examination content or materials through any form of reproduction or oral or written communication is strictly prohibited. Disclosure of examination content is a violation of the NBCC Code of Ethics.

Special Accommodations

Examination administration sites are selected with access for candidates with physical disabilities. If you require special assistance from other individuals, such as readers or recorders, you must request permission from NBCC for the admittance of an assisting individual at the examination site. This request must be made in writing at the time of application.

If you cannot participate in the examination on Saturday for religious reasons, send a written request with your application to arrange for a special administration of the NCE on the Friday immediately preceding or the Monday immediately following the scheduled administration date.

Four hours are scheduled for the NCE. If additional time is necessary because of special needs or because English is a candidate's second language, you may request a time extension. This request must be submitted **in writing with your application**.

Scoring Procedures

Of the 200 items on the examination, only 160 items are scored to determine whether you meet or surpass the minimum criterion (passing) score for that form of the NCE.

The **MAXIMUM** possible score on the NCE is 160.

The remaining 40 items on the exam are being field tested to determine their appropriateness for future use.

Since the 160 items to be scored are not identified in the exam booklet, you should respond with equal effort to all items.

The minimum criterion (passing) score is derived from a modified Angoff procedure.

The NCE is not scored on a "curve," therefore the candidate pool does not determine the passing score.

Examination Results

NBCC will mail examination results to examinees within eight weeks of the date of the examination. No scores are released by telephone.

NBCC's score report contains: (1) your number of correct responses for 13 domains on the NCE and your TOTAL SCORE, which is the sum of the correct responses; (2) the group mean and standard deviation for each domain and the total exam; (3) the minimum criterion (passing) score for that form of the NCE.

If your TOTAL SCORE meets or exceeds the minimum criterion score, you have passed the NCE. Score reports are mailed only to the examinee at the address provided on the NCC application or Exam Registration Form.

It is your responsibility to send written notification to NBCC if there is a change of address. [Click here to email a change of address.](#)

Your specific examination scores will not be released to a third party without your written permission. Scores cannot be released until all requirements, including fees, are fulfilled. There is a fee charged for sending score verifications to third parties.

Preparing for the CPCE and the NCE

There are no published study materials available for the CPCE; however, the exam content is similar to the NBCC National Counselor Examination. The following information can be used for your study purposes. Note that the below suggestions are not specific endorsements of any particular product.

Online under the MySCSU group folder, you will find free practice tests and other study materials. You can also look at the following websites for additional materials.

Practice Tests;

<http://counselingexam.com/nce/index.shtml>

Fun Flashcards:

http://www.testprepreview.com/nce_practice.htm (on this one you can also have an NCE question of the day emailed to you)

<http://www.flashcardexchange.com/tag/nce>

<http://counselingexam.com/ncmhce/flip/definitions/index.html>

Other Resources:

Programs Listed by the National Board of Certified Counselors can be found at:

<http://www.nbcc.org/study>

Encyclopedia of Counseling: Master Review and Tutorial by Howard, Ed.D. Rosenthal (Brunner-Routledge; 2nd edition) (<http://www.routledgejournalhealth.com/>)

Review Questions for NBCC and state counselor examination, 2nd edition (5 audio cassette tapes and booklet; (<http://www.routledgejournalhealth.com/>)

Vital information for NBCC and State Counselor Examination, 2nd edition (9 audio cassettes and booklet; (<http://www.routledgejournalhealth.com/>)

Gregoire, J., & Jungers, C. M. (2007). *The counselor's companion: What every beginning counselor needs to know*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. <http://www.routledgeeducation.com/books/The-Counselors-Companion-isbn9780805856842>

Descriptions of Areas

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY - studies that provide an understanding of all of the following aspects of professional functioning:

- history and philosophy of the counseling profession, including significant factors and events;
- professional roles, functions, and relationships with other human service providers;
- technological competence and computer literacy;
- professional organizations, primarily ACA, its divisions, branches, and affiliates, including membership benefits, activities, services to members, and current emphases;
- professional credentialing, including certification, licensure, and accreditation practices and standards, and the effects of public policy on these issues;
- public and private policy processes, including the role of the professional counselor in advocating on behalf of the profession;
- advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for clients; and
- ethical standards of ACA and related entities, and applications of ethical and legal considerations in professional counseling.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY - studies that provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues and trends in a multicultural and diverse society related to such factors as culture, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical characteristics, education, family values, religious and spiritual values, socioeconomic status and unique characteristics of individuals, couples, families, ethnic groups, and communities including all of the following:

- multicultural and pluralistic trends, including characteristics and concerns between and within diverse groups nationally and internationally;
- attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences, including specific experiential learning activities;
- individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with diverse populations and ethnic groups;
- counselors' roles in social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, cultural self-awareness, the nature of biases, prejudices, processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination, and other culturally supported behaviors that are detrimental to the growth of the human spirit, mind, or body;
- theories of multicultural counseling, theories of identity development, and multicultural competencies; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT - studies that provide an understanding of the nature and needs of individuals at all developmental levels, including all of the following:

- theories of individual and family development and transitions across the life-span;
- theories of learning and personality development;
- human behavior including an understanding of developmental crises, disability, exceptional behavior, addictive behavior, psychopathology, and situational and environmental factors that affect both normal and abnormal behavior;
- strategies for facilitating optimum development over the life-span; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT - studies that provide an understanding of career development and related life factors, including all of the following:

- career development theories and decision-making models;
- career, avocational, educational, occupational and labor market information resources, visual and print media, computer-based career information systems, and other electronic career information systems;
- career development program planning, organization, implementation, administration, and evaluation;
- interrelationships among and between work, family, and other life roles and factors including the role of diversity and gender in career development;
- career and educational planning, placement, follow-up, and evaluation;
- assessment instruments and techniques that are relevant to career planning and decision making;
- technology-based career development applications and strategies, including computer-assisted career guidance and information systems and appropriate world-wide web sites;
- career counseling processes, techniques, and resources, including those applicable to specific populations; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

HELPING RELATIONSHIPS - studies that provide an understanding of counseling and consultation processes, including all of the following:

- counselor and consultant characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes including age, gender, and ethnic differences, verbal and nonverbal behaviors and personal characteristics, orientations, and skills;
- an understanding of essential interviewing and counseling skills so that the student is able to develop a therapeutic relationship, establish appropriate counseling goals, design intervention strategies, evaluate client outcome, and successfully terminate the counselor-client relationship. Studies will also facilitate student self-awareness so that the counselor-client relationship is therapeutic and the counselor maintains appropriate professional boundaries;
- counseling theories that provide the student with a consistent model(s) to conceptualize client presentation and select appropriate counseling interventions. Student experiences should include an examination of the historical development of counseling theories, an exploration of affective, behavioral, and cognitive theories, and an opportunity to apply the theoretical material to case studies. Students will also be exposed to models of counseling that are consistent with current professional research and practice in the field so that they can begin to develop a personal model of counseling;
- a systems perspective that provides an understanding of family and other systems theories and major models of family and related interventions. Students will be exposed to a rationale for selecting family and other systems theories as appropriate modalities for family assessment and counseling;
- a general framework for understanding and practicing consultation. Student experiences should include an examination of the historical development of consultation, an exploration of the stages of consultation and the major models of consultation, and an opportunity to apply the theoretical material to case presentations. Students will begin to develop a personal model of consultation;
- integration of technological strategies and applications within counseling and consultation processes; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

GROUP WORK - studies that provide both theoretical and experiential understandings of group purpose, development, dynamics, counseling theories, group counseling methods and skills, and other group approaches, including all of the following:

- principles of group dynamics, including group process components, developmental stage theories, group members' roles and behaviors, and therapeutic factors of group work;
- group leadership styles and approaches, including characteristics of various types of group leaders and leadership styles;
- theories of group counseling, including commonalities, distinguishing characteristics, and pertinent research and literature;
- group counseling methods, including group counselor orientations and behaviors, appropriate selection criteria and methods, and methods of evaluation of effectiveness;
- approaches used for other types of group work, including task groups, psychoeducational groups, and therapy groups;
- professional preparation standards for group leaders; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

ASSESSMENT - studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation, including all of the following:

- historical perspectives concerning the nature and meaning of assessment;
- basic concepts of standardized and non-standardized testing and other assessment techniques including norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment, environmental assessment, performance assessment, individual and group test and inventory methods, behavioral observations, and computer-managed and computer-assisted methods;
- statistical concepts, including scales of measurement, measures of central tendency, indices of variability, shapes and types of distributions, and correlations;
- reliability (i.e., theory of measurement error, models of reliability, and the use of reliability information);
- validity (i.e., evidence of validity, types of validity, and the relationship between reliability and validity);
- age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, disability, culture, spirituality, and other factors related to the assessment and evaluation of individuals, groups, and specific populations;
- strategies for selecting, administering, and interpreting assessment and evaluation instruments and techniques in counseling;
- an understanding of general principles and methods of case conceptualization, assessment, and/or diagnoses of mental and emotional status; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION - studies that provide an understanding of research methods, statistical analysis, needs assessment, and program evaluation, including all of the following:

- the importance of research and opportunities and difficulties in conducting research in the counseling profession,
- research methods such as qualitative, quantitative, single-case designs, action research, and outcome-based research;
- use of technology and statistical methods in conducting research and program evaluation, assuming basic computer literacy;
- principles, models, and applications of needs assessment, program evaluation, and use of findings to effect program modifications;
- use of research to improve counseling effectiveness; and
- ethical and legal considerations.

Final Words...

With the correct preparation, we know that you will be prepared to do well on these exams. Paying close attention to your classes, your requirements in your program, all learning experiences and caring for yourself and your anxiety level will ensure that you have a satisfactory result on the CPCE and the NCE. We hope that this guide will help you in your journey. Also, please feel free to download the practice questions under CPCE & NCE Practice Exams in the MySCSU CSP group files under Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Please provide Dr. Ginicola (ginicolam2@southernct.edu) with any comments that you may have about this guide.