

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAM POLICIES

The comprehensive examination (i.e., comps) is an exit examination required of all Master's degree counseling students. It is taken while students are enrolled in their final semester. In order to be eligible for the comprehensive examination, students must have completed all the core courses, have an overall average of 'B' or better, and be a student in good standing (i.e., not on probation or in remediation). Core courses include the following:

Content Area	WIU CORE Course Equivalent
Human growth and development	CN 554 Counseling Across the Lifespan
Social and cultural diversity	CN 552 Counseling/Helping in Multicultural Society
Helping relationships	CN 545 Counseling Theories and Applications <u>and</u> CN 500 Pre-Practicum
Group work	CN 581 Group Counseling: Theories and Procedures
Career development	CN 541 Lifestyles and Career Development
Assessment	CN 542 Assessment Techniques in Counseling
Research and program evaluation	CN 515 Research and Program Evaluation
Professional orientation and ethical practice	CN 549 Professional, Legal, and Ethical Issues

### Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE)

The Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) is used as the Department's comprehensive exam. 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). It is a highly valid and reliable way to make judgments about a student's progress toward mastery of the subject matter of professional counseling.

#### Benefits of Using the CPCE

1. Allows master's programs with a comprehensive exam to better meet psychometric standards.
2. Gives programs an objective view of the knowledge level of their students.
3. Allows programs to examine student functioning in various curricular areas.
4. Promotes longitudinal self-study.
5. Compares a program's results to national data.
6. Stimulates integration of knowledge learned in separate courses.
7. Gives students comparative strength/weakness feedback.

## **Administration and Evaluation**

The purpose of the examination is to determine whether students have attained the level of knowledge in the field of counseling that can ensure minimal competence in the field. The CPCE is typically scheduled for a Saturday or Sunday prior to Spring Break. Cost of the exam will be provided during the semester prior to CPCE. Students are responsible for the cost of the CPCE.

After each examination, upon obtaining the results from the CPCE examination office, the department's comprehensive examination committee establishes cut off points for passing and failure. Typical cut points are 1.5 *SD* below the National Mean for Exit Exams for the Total Score.

Students who fall below the cut point for the Total Score on the CPCE must adhere to the following:

1. If the total Score on the CPCE is below the cut point and you failed 3 or less of the content areas (cut point for content areas are established using the same procedures as the Total Score cut point) you may complete an essay examination (developed by the content area faculty expert) for each of the content areas you failed (up to 3) prior to the end of the that same semester. You must pass all the essay examinations in order to advance toward degree candidacy. Students who do not pass all the essay examinations may retake the CPCE once during a future schedule exam date (typically the following Spring semester). You must pass the retake in order to advance toward degree candidacy. Students who do not pass the retake may petition the department's comprehensive examination committee and request a 3rd opportunity to take the CPCE. With the committee's approval, students will first be required to retake the associated core courses related to the area(s) that were not successfully passed during the retake prior to this administration (typically the following Spring semester). Students who do not pass this administration of the CPCE will be dismissed from the department and will not be awarded a degree in Counseling.
  
2. If the Total Score on the CPCE is below the cut point and you failed 4 or more of the content areas (cut points for content areas are established using the same procedures as the Total Score cut point) you may retake the CPCE once during a future scheduled exam date

(typically the following Spring semester). You must pass the retake in order to advance toward degree candidacy. Students who do not pass the retake may petition the department's comprehensive examination committee and request a 3rd opportunity. With the committee's approval, students will first be required to retake the associated core courses related to the area(s) that were not successfully passed during the retake prior to this administration (typically the following Spring semester) Students who do not pass this administration of the CPCE will be dismissed from the department and will not be awarded a degree in Counseling.

Note: Regardless of the results, students must complete all degree requirements, including successful passage of the CPCE within a 6-year time frame. Multiple failures may result in automatic dismissal due to time limitations. "The work required for a graduate degree must be completed within six consecutive calendar years for master's students, including transfer courses. Students may petition the Graduate Council for an extension of time for outdated courses. Evidence must show that such courses have been revalidated by examination or some other means as determined by the department. Transfer courses must be revalidated by instructors from the credit-granting institution. Graduate courses with grades of C or lower may not be revalidated" (Academic Guidelines and Graduate School Policies).

Students will be provided with their results by their Internship Instructor. Any student wishing to appeal the grade on the comprehensive examination must comply with the same procedures for grade appeal outlined in the University Catalog and the CNED Student Manual.

## **Preparing for 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*:

1. **PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION AND ETHICAL PRACTICE** - studies that provide an understanding of all aspects of professional functioning.
2. **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY** - studies that provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a multicultural society.
3. **HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT** - studies that provide an understanding of the nature and needs of persons at all developmental levels and in multicultural contexts.
4. **CAREER DEVELOPMENT** - studies that provide an understanding of career development and related life factors.
5. **HELPING RELATIONSHIPS** - studies that provide an understanding of the counseling process in a multicultural society.
6. **GROUP WORK** - studies that provide both theoretical and experiential understandings of group purpose, development, dynamics, theories, methods, skills, and other group approaches in a multicultural society.
7. **ASSESSMENT** - studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation in a multicultural society.
8. **RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION** - studies that provide an understanding of research methods, statistical analysis, needs assessment, and program evaluation.

The content addressed in the CPCE is covered in the core courses students complete in your master's degree program at WIU. As a result, a review of core course materials with a focus on information that might be included in multiple-choice questions is the best way to prepare for the exam. There are no published study materials available for the CPCE; however, the exam content is similar to the NBCC National Counselor Examination. Students may obtain information regarding study guides at the following web site: <http://www.nbcc.org/study>. Please note that neither NBCC nor Western Illinois University endorses any study materials for these exams.

The CPCE consists of 160 multiple choice 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.

The Xi Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota offers study seminars to assist master's student in preparing for the comprehensive examination and for the NBCC examination. Contact the Xi Chapter faculty advisor at [cned@wiu.edu](mailto:cned@wiu.edu) for additional information.

**NOTE:** Please make sure that you have taken and passed all **core courses** listed in your graduate catalog prior to the term that you plan to take the exit exam. Students may not take the exit exam if this requirement and others listed are not fully satisfied.