

## Misperceptions about Comprehensive Exams

1. **I've heard that everyone passes comps. Many people I've spoken with study a few nights before the exam and end up passing. No one really fails.**

Actually, this misperception might have a grain of truth. *In the past*, many students might have done well with minimal preparation. Keep in mind that your classmates might have underreported the actual amount of study time they devoted to this exam (it is good for the old ego). Also, you might not hear about people failing the exam because folks usually don't advertise this fact—would you? The reality is people do fail this exam and it is important to take every opportunity to ensure your success.

***Beginning in the fall of 2003, the cutoff for passing the exam will be 70% minus the standard deviation (SD).*** What is important to know is that this exam consists of 160 questions of which 136 are scored and the rest are norming questions (...but you don't know which questions are the norming questions!). If you answer at least 70% of these questions correctly (95) you will definitely pass this exam. The actual cutoff score is going to be lower because the standard deviation (if you don't know what a standard deviation is you should look it up before you take this exam!) will be subtracted from ninety-five. For example, if the SD for the sample of test takers is 10.35, then the actual passing score is 85.65. In this case an 86 would be sufficient to pass this exam. The standard deviation is going to vary from semester to semester. The SD is usually between 8 and 12.

2. **I've made A's and B's in all the recommended courses. There is no way I can fail this exam. If I fail the exam then the counseling department faculty would have to admit that they did not teach me anything, and I have the grades to prove that I do know something.**

The aforementioned argument presents a very good point. How in the world can you fail an exam over material that you have made A's and B's? Keep in mind that the CPCE is exclusively a knowledge-based, objective exam (multiple-choice). Reflect back on your courses. . . how many of them evaluated you exclusively using objective type measures? Probably very few. Most of your courses had a 60%/40% split between objective, multiple choice/essay tests and papers, group presentations, projects, participation, and/or field-based projects (i.e. interviews of counseling professional). Reasonably, you might have not done well on some of the objective exams and were able to bring your grade up with a group project or a reflective paper. Generally speaking, most students do better on subjective versus objective evaluation. Think about it—it is pretty difficult for a professor to give you a bad grade on a reflection paper (unless you did not follow directions).

**The second fact that you need to be aware of is that performance on an exam or in a course is completely different from the integration and retention of knowledge.** I think we all have experienced classes in which we remembered the information for a test, and as soon as the exam was over, the information sprouted

wings and flew right out of our heads. As educators, we hope that students will integrate the material but we know that this is not always the case. You might have taken Human Development Across the Lifespan two years ago and names like Piaget and Kohlberg are distant memories. The good news is that this information is likely to be stored away in some mental file in the back of your brain. However, if you can't access the file then it will do you no good. This is why it is important to study.

A third point that is important to know about any standardized test is that sometimes knowing the material is not enough. In fact, many professors would argue that knowing how to take the test is equally important as having mastered the knowledge. I would encourage you to take as many practice tests as possible. It might have been some time since you had to answer an application question. Your comprehensive exam is likely to have some of those.

**3. I'll take the test cold and won't study to see how I do. After all, I don't graduate until two semesters down the road so if I fail it I can take it again.**

Yes, you are correct—you can take it again. However if you fail the exam a second time you might have to repeat coursework. I would advise against taking the comprehensives "cold."

**4. I don't need to take the outlined coursework on the application before I take the exam. I can do well with out taking courses such as career, research and so on.**

The faculty has made a decision that you will have to have *completed, as of Fall 2003*, (not in progress) all the courses outlined on the application before the test date.

**5. I can still graduate even if I don't pass comps.**

No, I'm afraid you cannot formally graduate until you pass comprehensives. Sometimes students get into a situation in which they failed the test but did not wait to find out the results and sent out their graduation invitations prematurely. I would advise you to hold on to your invitations as long as possible. The next available test date will not be until the following semester.

## **I want to take this exam seriously--what should I do to Prepare?**

### **Top Tips for Success**

1. Look over the lists of study resources (available in the department office, DB 4.322). Don't take this test lightly. There are study guides you can purchase and on-line resources. If you make the effort, you can find help.
2. Ask professors to borrow old study guides. Most of your professors have taken licensure exams and used study materials that are just collecting dust on their bookshelves.
3. Raid the half-priced bookstores—you can find some study guides at very low prices. Search the internet for used study material such as sites like [www.half.com](http://www.half.com) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).
4. Find a small group and meet once a week. You will be amazed how much peer support can help.
5. Try not to study too much material during any one sitting. I would approach each section one at a time and try to devote an hour or so to that subject three or four times a week. This means you should start studying well in advance.
6. Take practice exams.
7. Explore the following website: <http://www.cce-global.org/cpce>
8. If you know you suffer from test anxiety, you might want to seek out services at the University Counseling Center to help with relaxation exercises. You get 12 free counseling sessions per academic year.
9. Don't sell your texts from key courses such as theories, group counseling, career, human growth and development, research and your introduction courses. These books and class notes can help you review.
10. When it comes to reviewing theories, pay attention to the language that is associated with the theorist or theory. Sometimes, if you can recognize the theorist/theory and pair him/her or the theory with the right terminology it will help you answer the question correctly. For example, despair, anxiety, responsibility, loneliness, and freedom are all words that are associated with Existentialism. Existentialism is associated with Rollo May, Viktor Frankl and Jean Paul Sartre, to name a few.
11. Memorize the distribution for a normal curve.
12. Talk to your advisors for more helpful tips. There isn't a single faculty member in the department that has not taken a comprehensive (both oral and written) and/or a licensure exam. They might have some helpful hints.
13. Statistically speaking, the career and research sections give test takers the most trouble. You might want to spend extra time on these subjects.

### **Helpful hints for the day and night before the exam**

- **Go to the exam room a few days or the day before the exam. Sit in the room and desensitize yourself to the environment.**
- **Don't study after 8:00 pm the night before. Give yourself two hours to unwind before going to bed. Watch your favorite TV show. Don't cram.**

- **When it comes to your body and anxiety, no one knows it better than you. Some people don't like to eat a heavy breakfast before they take a major exam. However it is advisable to have something nutritious to eat in the morning. You will have to be the judge on that one.**
- **Make sure you have all the materials you need: picture I.D. and check.**
- **Make sure you have enough gas in your car the night before.**
- **If you find journals helpful and you are feeling anxious, write about your anxiety.**