The National Counseling Exam (NCE)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) -- (updated 4/2014)

This FAQ reflects the Department of Counseling and College Student Personnel at Shippensburg University's opinions. Anyone who is interested in taking the NCE or becoming a Nationally Certified Counselor is directed to review this information in conjunction with the information provided by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) on their website: [www.NBCC.org](http://www.NBCC.org)

1. What is the National Counseling Exam (NCE)?
   
   **Answer:** The NCE is a **standardized, criterion-referenced exam** developed by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) to establish a benchmark of counseling related knowledge, skills, and professionalism. Counselors who successfully pass the NCE and meet all other criteria (e.g., graduation requirements, sufficient supervisory hours) are eligible for the National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential, which establishes them as professionals who meet stringent standards for proficiency in counseling-related coursework and knowledge.

2. Why should I take the NCE? Do I need it?
   
   **Answer:** The NCE is **optional** for students. However, we **encourage** our School, College, and Mental Health specialization students to take the NCE for a variety of reasons. Students who graduate from Shippensburg University’s CACREP accredited programs and who pass the NCE are eligible to become Nationally Certified Counselors. NCC credentialed counseling professionals will find improved interstate portability of their counseling credential. In addition, some organizations and school systems may provide salary incentives for counselors who have an NCC credential. Some states, including Pennsylvania, require the NCC credential for counselors seeking licensure (i.e., becoming a Licensed Professional Counselor [LPC]). Lastly, being an NCC helps to promote counselors’ professional identity and gives them greater access to counseling-related resources like affordable liability insurance policies.

3. Do College Student Personnel (CSP) specialization students need to take the NCE?
   
   **Answer:** Very **few student affairs positions require it** and very few student affairs professionals are nationally certified counselors. However, some Community Colleges (including HACC) prefer employees to be a nationally certified counselor. Also, if you think you may want to earn a doctorate in counselor education or clinical psychology, then you should take the NCE. Lastly, CSP students who plan to take the NCE should take Theories of Counseling as one of their electives, as this content is covered on the exam.

4. Do I need to take the NCE now or can I wait?
   
   **Answer:** If you elect to take the NCE, it’s your decision when you take it, but we recommend that you **take it within six months of your graduation date**. It’s less expensive and students may find it easier to pass the NCE when less time has passed between their coursework and the testing date.

5. How much does the NCE cost, and are there other costs associated with having an NCC credential?
   
   **Answer:** For SU Master’s degree-seeking students who are within 6 months of their graduation date from one of our counseling programs, **the cost is $310**. Once students pass the NCE, there is an annual fee of $75 to maintain the credential. For information regarding the pricing of the NCE for graduates beyond the six-month window, see the following link on the NBCC website: [http://www.nbcc.org/ncc_credential](http://www.nbcc.org/ncc_credential)

You will be directed to download an application that will have pertinent information.
6. What types of payments does NBCC accept for the NCE?
   Answer: NBCC will only accept money orders for payment. They no longer accept cash, credit cards, traveler’s checks, or personal checks. If you attempt to pay by cash, credit card, traveler’s check, or personal check, your application will not be processed and you will not be allowed to test. Money orders are available from the post office and other commercial vendors.

7. What is the format of the exam, and what is covered on it?
   Answer: The NCE is composed of 200 multiple-choice questions that cover CACREP’s eight core content areas: (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. In addition, the NCE also covers knowledge about applicable Field-related experience.

8. What score do I need to pass the NCE?
   Answer: The NBCC scores the NCE and determines the cut-scores for passing the exam. The exact percentage of correct answers necessary to pass is not published or available to the general public, but test-takers will receive a scoring summary that provides information about their respective success across the different content areas of the exam as well as descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations).

9. Of the counseling students at Shippensburg University who have taken the NCE, how have they typically fared?
   Answer: NBCC does not release students’ individual results or scores to SU. However, NBCC releases aggregate program results, and based on historical data taken from the past three years, 96% of the SU counseling students who take the NCE pass it. SU students are well prepared to take this exam.

10. Are study guides available?
    Answer: Study guides are available from the NBCC by accessing the following link on their website: [http://www.nbcc.org/study](http://www.nbcc.org/study). You may be able to find other resources in commercial bookstores as well, like Mastering the National Counselor Examination and Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination by Erford, Hays, Crockett and Miller (2010) or the Encyclopedia of Counseling by Rosenthal (2007), both of which cost about $45. These study guides are helpful because they provide overviews of the 8 CACREP content areas as well as practice examinations so that students will see which content areas they are proficient in and which ones require more intensive review. If you have maintained course materials and class notes, you may find them valuable too. If you plan to take the exam, be sure to practice your test-taking skills and strategies as they apply to multiple choice exams. Note: Study guides are also available on a short-term basis in the Department library.

11. When is the NCE offered at Shippensburg University (SU)?
    Answer: The NCE is offered twice per year at SU if enrollment is sufficient, which it has been since 1999. The test is administered on typically the third Saturday in October and April. The actual dates vary by year, but it is roughly around the 20th of those respective months.

12. How do I sign up for the NCE?
    Answer: Stop by Dr. Whitman’s office (Shippen 115) or Janice Allen’s (our department’s administrative assistant) office to obtain an NCE packet. Note: Packets are mailed from the NBCC headquarters directly to Dr. Whitman about six months prior to the actual testing date. If you stop by and packets are not available yet, please check back later. It is the responsibility of students to obtain a packet when packets become available.

13. What should I do with the packet once I’ve filled it out?
    Answer: Return it to Dr. Whitman along with your money order. Do not send it to NBCC! Packets from all of student test-takers are mailed en-masse (together), as required by the NBCC.
14. **When exactly are packets due to Dr. Whitman? What are the deadlines?**
   
   **Answer:** For the Spring (April) testing date, the **deadline** for submitting packets is **January 5th**.  
   **Answer:** For the Fall (October) testing date, the **deadline** for submitting packets is **June 10th**.

15. **What happens after I’ve filled out the application and given it to Dr. Whitman?**
   
   **Answer:** Dr. Whitman mails one parcel containing all the packets to NBCC. Students will receive notification of their exam status **approximately 2 weeks** before their scheduled testing date. If you have not heard from the NBCC within 2 weeks of your testing date, contact Dr. Whitman, who will inquire with the NBCC on your behalf.

16. **Can I take the NCE at a reduced cost if it is solely for licensure purposes?**
   
   **Answer:** Yes, you may take the NCE at a reduced cost (~$75 instead of $310), but you do not earn the NCC credential. When you pay the reduced fee, it is solely for licensure purposes. To carry the NCC credential, you must pay the full price and the annual maintenance fee.