

The National Counseling Exam (NCE)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) -- (updated 9/29/2014)

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

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 Clinical Mental Health, College, and School 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
You will be directed to download an application that will have pertinent information.

6. 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.

7. 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).

8. 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, **94%** of the SU counseling students who take the NCE pass it. SU students are well prepared to take this exam.

9. 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>. 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 (2014) 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.

10. 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.

11. If and when is the NCE offered at other sites?

Answer: The NCE is offered at various other sites besides Shippensburg University, which can be determined by accessing this link: <http://www.nbcc.org/Assets/Exam/sitelist.pdf>

12. How do I sign up for the NCE? (*there are important changes here!*)

Answer: First: notify Dr. Whitman and/or Janice Allen via email. We will submit your name and eligibility-status to NBCC. Shortly thereafter, NBCC will send you an email with a link inviting you to apply to register for the NCE. You'll need to create a login ID and Password. Once you do that and your email is verified, you'll be directed to complete an on-line application. You will need a valid credit card with sufficient available credit to process your application. **The exam's fee is \$310** and there is a \$75 annual fee after that to maintain your NCC credential (assuming you pass the exam). Shippensburg University no longer receives any paper-type applications. The process is now entirely on-line.

13. Can I take the NCE for licensure purposes only and for a reduced fee?

Answer: Yes, you may take the NCE for licensure purposes, and the fee is lower (\$75 rather than \$310). However, if you successfully pass the NCE exclusively for licensure-only purposes, you are **NOT** entitled to use the NCC credential with your name. To have the NCC credential, you will need to pay the \$310 exam fee and the \$75 annual maintenance fee. See this link for more information: <http://www.nbcc.org/StateLicensure>

14. Are there registration deadlines?

Answer: **YES!** For the **April** testing date, you will need to have your registration processed and funds paid by **January 16th**. Applications submitted after January 16th risk not being processed in time for the April test date. No applications will be processed after January 23rd for the April test date. For the October test date, registration will begin in April and conclude in early June. More details will be provided about the October 2015 exam date...

15. What happens after I've completed my on-line application?

Answer: Students will receive confirmation of their NCE registration via the email address they used to create their NBCC login. Be sure to check your email junk box if you haven't received an email from NBCC re the exam. You will also be reminded by email of your pending NCE test date approximately 2 weeks before your scheduled testing date. If you have not heard from the NBCC within 2 weeks of your testing date, contact the NBCC to verify your enrollment and your test site's location and start time.