

The National Counseling Exam (NCE)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) -- (updated 5/2/2019)

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 and/or Human Development 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: It's your decision when you take the NCE, but we recommend that you **take it within six months of your graduation date, preferably in your last semester**. 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. If you elect to wait to take the exam after more than 6 months has elapsed from the time you graduated from your Counseling Masters program, you will need to register for the exam directly with NBCC.

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 **\$335**. Once students pass the NCE, there is an annual fee of **\$75** to maintain the credential. If you elect to wait to take the NCE (i.e. more than six months have elapsed since your graduation date, the cost increases to \$400.

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, and (8) Professional orientation. In addition, the NCE also covers knowledge about applicable Field-related experiences. Only 160 questions count towards your score; the other questions are "experimental" and used to norm future NCE exams. You won't know which questions count towards your score and which ones do not, however.

Also, the NCE is exclusively administered electronically now through Internet-Based Testing (IBT), which is done through Pearson VUE. It is strongly advised that students practice taking NCE simulated exams on a computer or smartphone app to familiarize themselves with this testing modality. Reminder: there is no more paper-and-pencil version of the NCE offered!

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 to the Department of Counseling and CSP or Shippensburg University. However, NBCC releases aggregate program results, and based on historical data taken from the past ten 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: <https://www.nbcc.org/exams/examprep>. 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 (2019) or the *Encyclopedia of Counseling* by Rosenthal (2018), both of which cost under \$100 (much less if you purchase a used version!). 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. **UPDATE:** There are also smartphone apps available from the Apple and Google app stores to help students prepare for the NCE. Because the exam is now administered exclusively electronically (i.e. by computer), it may be advantageous to use one of these apps in lieu of a hardcopy study-guide so you can practice on the same electronic modality that the test is administered.

10. When is the NCE offered to Shippensburg University (SU) students?

Answer: The NCE is offered **twice per year** if enrollment is sufficient, which it has been since 1999, but the NCE is no longer administered on Ship's campus! The test is administered in **October** and **April** at Pearson VUE testing centers, which are located in Harrisburg, Lancaster, and other locations. When students register for the test with NBCC and Pearson, they have a 3-week window in October or April during which they must take the test.

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

Answer: As noted in #10, the NCE is offered at Pearson VUE sites. Here's a link to search for them: <https://wsr.pearsonvue.com/testtaker/registration/SelectTestCenterProximity/NES?conversationId=1133235> Or just Google "Pearson VUE testing sites" and click accordingly. Harrisburg and Lancaster are the closest sites for most students.

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

Answer: You must be enrolled in one of Shippensburg University's CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Dr. Whitman and/or Janice Allen will provide NBCC with the names and Ship-email addresses of students who are in the final year of their counseling program (i.e. have accrued at least 48 hours). NBCC will send these students an emailed invitation to apply online to register for the NCE. Follow their instructions! Note: You'll need to create a login ID and Password for NBCC's *Procounselor* portal. Once you do that and your email is verified, you'll be directed to complete an on-line application/account. You will need a valid credit card with sufficient available credit to process your application.

13. Is there anything else I must do to register for the NCE?

Answer: **Please check your email regularly for communications from NBCC**, as it will be your responsibility to register for the exam and pay for it. Submitting your name to Dr. Whitman is only the first step of a multistep process! Also, you will eventually need to register with **Pearson VUE**, which the NBCC email will outline. Check your junk mail folder periodically to make sure you don't miss a critical email from NBCC or Pearson, both of which you'll need to respond to in order for your test date to be set up.

14. 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 than the standard fee. 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 standard exam fee and the annual maintenance fee.

15. Are there registration deadlines?

Answer: **YES!** For the **April** testing date, you will need to have your registration processed and funds paid by the **middle of January** (NBCC will publish their exact deadlines). Applications submitted late may not be processed in time for the April test date. For the October test date, registration will begin in April.