

Montclair State University

**Department of Counseling, Human
Development and Educational
Leadership**

Counseling Program
Comprehensive Exam Study Guide
Fall 2006

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Comprehensive Exam Study Guide

The purpose of this study guide is to assist you in preparing for the comprehensive exam in counseling. Of course, no study guide is ever complete. The goal is to help you to expand, rather than limit, your studying. Hence, this study guide is not designed to tell you what questions will be on the exam. The goal is to provide you with guidance on key literature in each of the specialization areas.

The Fall Comprehensive Examination will be held on Saturday, October 28, 2006 in University Hall 1070. Doors open at 8:00 AM. The exam will begin at 8:30. You have three (3) hours to complete the exam.

Purpose of exam

The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to assess your comprehensive knowledge as a beginning professional counselor. Our intent, as faculty charged with ensuring that you are ready to competently perform the roles and responsibilities of a professional counselor, is to ensure that you have mastered the basics of the discipline. The comprehensive exam is designed to evaluate your ability to comprehend, recall, integrate, synthesize, analyze, and problem solve across the larger scope of the counseling course content area. You are also expected to demonstrate your ability to clearly communicate ideas in an acceptable writing style that reflects good grammar, organization, and composition.

Format of exam

The exam consists of three essay questions. Candidates in counseling will answer the questions related to Counseling Theories and Group courses. Candidates will also answer one question in their area of concentration/specialization.

- Question 1: Counseling Theories
- Question 2: Group Counseling
- Question 3: Community Counseling
- Question 4: School Counseling
- Question 5: Student Affairs/Higher Education
- Question 6: Addictions Counseling (CADC)
- Question 7: Substance Awareness Coordinator (SAC)

Students must answer question for the area of concentration/specialization currently on file at the time the exam is administered.

Scoring

Each of the three essays are scored separately on a rating scale from 0-5 points, with a total of three scores that add up to a total score.

Conditions of passing:

- (a) A score of 3 or above as a passing score on an individual question.
- (b) Minimum passing total score of "9" for responses to all three questions.
- (c) No score of "0" or "1" on any question.
- (d) No more than one score of "2."

Examples:

$$3 + 3 + 3 = 9 \text{ (Passed)}$$

$$3 + 4 + 2 = 9 \text{ (Passed)}$$

$$5 + 2 + 2 = 9 \text{ (Failed)}$$

$$5 + 5 + 1 = 11 \text{ (Failed)}$$

Test responses will be read by a second reader only when the first reader has scored the response below “3.” In the event that the first and second readers are not in agreement, the third and final reader will be the department chairperson. If the student fails the comprehensive exam, the entire exam must be retaken.

You will be notified in writing with the results of the exam no later than 4 to 6 weeks after the exam. If you do not pass the exam, you may retake the exam when it is offered again (e.g., the following semester). If you do not pass, the comprehensive exam may be re-taken twice more.

Preparing for the exam

Studying for the comprehensive exam can be a challenging process. You may want to form study groups or work with other students via email. Independent of how you study, you are ultimately responsible for your performance. Take deliberate steps to ensure that you master the material.

This is not a “regurgitative” exam. You will be expected to apply and integrate knowledge that you have gleaned through various courses. Therefore, simple memorization of information from your textbooks, supplementary readings, and class notes is not a good way to prepare. Instead, focus on how you would use the information in your work with clients.

In preparation for the exam, you may wish to review each course and identify the broad topic areas. From these broad areas, list the relative subcomponents. Address each of the major topics in the various classes in the same way. Course syllabi and exams are excellent ways of identifying the broad topic areas. Contrast the topics on the syllabi and exams with the table of contents in the textbook. If you consult a number of different sources, you will gain a broader perspective as well as an additional review.

Remember, that in writing a good essay, you need to accurately, clearly, and concisely answer the question while supporting your response. Do not just say, for example, that transference and countertransference can occur in the therapeutic relationship. Make sure that you have demonstrated that you know what transference and countertransference are and how they manifest in the therapeutic relationship.

Providing specific examples is very effective.

Additional Tips

- Read each question carefully so that you understand exactly what the question is asking.
- Underline or circle key words or phrases that provide cues for answering the questions. Such words include: analyze, compare, contrast, critique, discuss, evaluate, explain, illustrate, justify, relate, summarize, and support.
- Before writing, use a separate blue book to briefly outline the major points of your response.
- Write your response in the form of an essay. Do not simply list your ideas. Use complete sentences and appropriate paragraph construction. Sentence fragments appear more like incomplete, “rushed-through” responses.
- Get to the point. Leave off the introduction. Avoid wordy, rambling writing and filler sentences that say nothing.
- Support your answer with solid evidence and/or clear and relevant examples. Cite the relevant works of others.
- Write legibly and clearly. If we cannot read or understand what you have written, then we cannot give you credit for your work.
- Proofread your essays before turning in your exam. Review your answers for grammar and spelling errors, clarity, and legibility. To the extent that such errors make your responses unclear or even incorrect, your grade could be adversely affected. Furthermore, graduate students in counseling should be able to spell words like “cognitive” (not cognative) and “perception” (not persepction).
- In reviewing your essays, ask yourself the following questions:
 - Did I answer the question, all parts of the question, and all that was implied by the question?
 - Did I present a solid thesis, a reasonable progression of ideas, and an appropriate conclusion?
 - Did I allocate my time and presentation appropriately, developing all parts of the question in balance?
 - Did I include the best examples and illustrations to demonstrate the validity of my ideas?
 - Did I include and cite specific examples from the appropriate reading material?
 - Did I include the most significant and appropriate ideas from class sessions?
 - Did I include my own original ideas?
 - Are there factual inaccuracies in my presentation?
- On the day of the exam:
 - Dress in layers. The climate is not always within the control of the proctors.
 - Do not bring valuables. Everything except pens, pencils, white out, erasers, and water will have to be put to one side of the room.

A final note. We consider cheating on the comprehensive exam to be a serious breach of professional ethics. Students caught cheating will be immediately escorted from the exam session. Disciplinary procedures will be implemented.

Sample Questions

The following are sample questions from previous comprehensive examinations. These are questions are provided to give you an idea of the types of questions that are included on the comprehensive examination.

Question 1. Counseling Theories (to be answered by all candidates)

Counseling theories have been organized into three broad categories: psychodynamic, cognitive/behavioral, and humanistic. Compare and contrast one theory of counseling from each of these categories by discussing the most salient similarities and differences among the three theories in terms of how a counselor should:

- a. be with a client.
- b. understand a client.
- c. work with (i.e., goals and treatment plan) a client.

Question 2. Group Dynamics (to be answered by all candidates)

Four stages of group development are listed below.

1. Initial Stage
2. Transition Stage
3. Working Stage
4. Closure Stage

For each of these stages:

- a. list the characteristics for each of these stages.
- b. give examples of specific behaviors that you would engage in as a member of a group to improve the cohesiveness of the group in each of these stages.
- c. give examples of how your behaviors in each of these stages would differ if you were the leader of the group.

Question 3. Community Counseling or Individual Counseling

Roger is a 35-year-old White gay man who is currently employed as a middle school teacher in Fort Lee, New Jersey. He came to counseling reporting intense feelings of sadness and hopelessness. He also reports having difficulty sleeping due to nightmares and anxiety attacks. Once dedicated and committed to his role as an educator, he now dreads going to work and has missed a significant number of days over the past two years.

Roger's lover, Frank, was killed during the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Frank was employed as a financial broker with a major financial services corporation. He and Roger met 15 years ago during a candlelight New Year's Eve service at their local church where they remained very active throughout their relationship.

One year ago, Roger had to move in with his parents in northwestern New Jersey after losing the condo he and Frank shared for 10 years. Roger has very few friends and has lost interest in most of his hobbies (i.e., biking, hiking, and traveling), which he and Frank would often do together. Roger was referred by his parents who, while sympathetic about the death of another human being, had wished that the event would have prompted the end of "this gay business."

- a. Drawing from your theoretical perspective(s), provide a brief conceptualization of Roger and his presenting concerns.
- b. Outline specific short-term and long-term goals for Roger. Provide a rationale or justification for the goals (based on your theoretical orientation) you have selected.
- c. Describe the process you would utilize throughout your work with Roger. Indicate the theoretical basis for your work, the interventions you would use up to and including termination. Be sure to discuss the impact of identities (e.g. gender, class, and sexual orientation) on the Roger's life and the counseling process.

Question 4. School Counseling

Your supervisor has asked you to develop a counseling program for students whose parents are divorced. Discuss how you would:

- a. Recruit members for the program.
- b. Design the program to address the counseling needs of these students (Be specific and describe goals and rationale for goals).
- c. Introduce the program to students' parents.
- d. Develop strategies, techniques, and interventions for the program.
- e. Evaluate the effectiveness of the group.

Question 5. Counseling in Higher Education

You have just taken a position as advisor to junior and senior students at a medium-sized state college. The institution has as its mission the development of its students in the intellectual, emotional, career, and personal areas.

You are asked by the Dean of Student Affairs to conduct a needs assessment of all junior and senior students concerning career development goals and expectations. You already are aware that almost 50% of graduates go on to graduate school and the other large percentage seeks immediate employment in their field.

- a. Please address the following:
 - 1) How will you conduct the needs assessment on career development for junior and senior level students?
 - 2) What do you expect to find out about those needs?
 - 3) List the individuals (their positions and functions, not names) from which higher education/student affairs offices you might consult or include in your process?
- b. The second part of your new assignment is to then design a program for career development for upper class men and women on campus.

Question 6. Addictions [CADC]

Frank is a 36-year-old, married Latino male who is seeking treatment for his use of alcohol, at the insistence of his wife and three teenage children. He works as a manager in a city administrative agency, a job that frequently takes him out into the field to inspect various sites. On Fridays, after these inspections, he joins a small group of friends who meet each week in the same place, and they spend several hours having a "good time drinking and laughing." Frank

then drives home, frequently high on alcohol. He has received two DWI's in the past five years. The most recent arrest precipitated Frank's arrival in treatment because his wife and family threatened to leave if he didn't stop the drinking. In his family of origin, Frank is one of four siblings, and has an older brother who uses cocaine "recreationally;" his father died of cirrhosis of the liver.

Frank is an amiable, hardworking man, who has never been in treatment before. He describes himself as "a hardworking, loving father and husband" who drinks with his buddies on the weekends. He says, "I doesn't understand what the fuss is about when I keep a good roof over my family's head. Why can't they just leave me alone?"

- a. Describe Frank's situation using two different etiological theories of substance abuse.
- b. Based on each theory, describe your treatment plan.

Question 7. Substance Awareness Coordinator [SAC]

Codependency (co-alcoholism or co-addiction) occurs when the person closest to the individual with alcoholism or substance abuse addiction (e.g., a spouse or parent) enables their loved one by rescuing and defending.

- a. Give one example of codependent behavior.
- b. In your work with adolescents who are abusing substances, how will you respond to a parent who is engaging in enabling and codependent behaviors?
- c. To what extent might denial be a factor for family members? How might denial be manifested?

The Counseling Program faculty strongly recommends that you review all of the textbooks and class notes throughout your program. In addition, we suggest that you create and participate in student study groups, if you believe they will assist you in preparing for and achieving success on the exam.