

CLINICAL MA COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PREPARATION AND PROCEDURES

PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT CAREFULLY TO PREPARE FOR
TAKING THE MA COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Clinical Psychology Master's Degree students who entered the program prior to Fall 2010 and who have elected to matriculate in the "old" curriculum take a comprehensive examination after completing the prerequisite course work which is listed in the program handbook. In order to take the Comprehensive examination, students must be in good standing (GPA of 3.0/4.0) and not on probation; must petition to take the exam by the specified deadline, and demonstrate credit for all prerequisite courses.

The purposes of the Comprehensive Exam are as follows:

- to evaluate critical and integrative thinking skills
- to evaluate mastery and application of curricular concepts
- to evaluate the integration of course material and clinical experiences

THIS YEAR'S COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION WILL BE A TAKE HOME EXAM. STUDENTS WILL HAVE TWO WEEKS TO COMPLETE THE EXAM. EXAMS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PICKUP AT NOON ON WEDNESDAY JANUARY 5, 2011 AND WILL BE DUE AT NOON ON WEDNESDAY JANUARY 19, 2011. THIS DEADLINE WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

THE SPRING MAKE-UP COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION WILL FOLLOW THE SAME FORMAT AS THE WINTER EXAMINATION. EXAMS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PICKUP ON MONDAY MAY 2, 2011 AT NOON AND WILL BE DUE AT NOON ON MONDAY MAY 16, 2011. THIS DEADLINE WILL ALSO BE STRICTLY ENFORCED.

You must receive *prior* approval to sit for this exam by submitting the request form to the Department Administrator for Clinical Psychology, Toni Johnson by the deadline (Monday November 1, 2010). This deadline must be honored in order to allow the Department Administrator sufficient time to audit files and to approve students' eligibility. The deadline to apply for the Spring (May) exam will be publicized during Spring semester. **Students with disabilities or other students who plan to request accommodations for the examination should submit requests by the petition deadline (see attached petition).**

POLICY ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

It is the policy of the Argosy University, Chicago to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If a student with disabilities needs accommodations to complete comprehensive examination requirements, the student must notify the Director of Student Services, Mr. Eric Ziehlke. Procedure for documenting student disability and the development of reasonable accommodation will be provided to students upon request.

Students will be notified by the Director of Student Services when each request for accommodation is approved or denied in writing via a designated form. It is the student's responsibility to present the form (at his or her discretion) to the Department Administrator for Clinical Psychology (Ms. Toni Johnson) PRIOR TO THE EXAM in order to receive the requested accommodations during the Comprehensive Examination. In an effort to protect student privacy, the Department Administrator will not discuss the accommodation needs of any student with instructors involved in grading the exams.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PREPARATION GUIDELINES

Students have the primary responsibility for preparing to demonstrate their mastery of the course work that precedes the exam. Active preparation for the exam should begin during the Fall Semester. Students are encouraged to create study groups in order to support and assist one another. It is recommended that students put aside regular structured time to meet as a group. In addition, it is suggested that one dedicate structured time for individual study and preparation.

Preparation for comps entails a different study process than preparation for a course examination. One cannot "cram" for comps. Memorization of specific facts is not useful. There is no syllabus of specific readings to prepare for the exam. However, the following strategies are recommended:

1. A critical task on comps is to demonstrate thorough mastery of one particular theoretical orientation as applied to a particular case study. There is no one preferred theoretical orientation to choose for comps. One should choose an orientation that he/she feels solidly grounded in. Further, one should choose a specific theorist or school of thought within a particular theory (for example, self psychology, object relations, or drive theory within psychoanalytic theory). Please note that it is strongly recommended that students choose the theoretical orientation that corresponds to the Intervention Elective course that they have taken. Experience shows that students who choose to write their exams from an orientation that they have not taken a course in are typically not sufficiently prepared to demonstrate mastery in this area.
2. Application of theory to specific case material is essential. Some students demonstrate a solid understanding of a particular theoretical orientation but are unable to apply this conceptual knowledge to the particular facts of the case presented. Other students are strong in case

conceptualization skills, but are unable to link the case material to a particular theoretical framework. This integration of theory and practice is a crucial component of the comps exam.

3. In addition to demonstrating mastery of a particular theoretical orientation, all students will be expected to demonstrate basic mastery of developmental theory, family systems theory, diversity issues, and professional ethics. **Attention to multi-faceted issues of diversity is expected in each section of the exam.** Review of specific course work in these areas is recommended.
4. Students are encouraged to review old comprehensive exams which are held on reserve in the school library. This provides the opportunity to see examples of a range of past MA comprehensive exams.
5. In studying for the comps exam, students are encouraged to balance “input” with “output.” That is, in addition to absorption of different bodies of knowledge, students should also practice information retrieval and written expression. An excellent way of doing this is to practice taking old exams. Taking a “mock” exam will provide the student with a simulation of the actual comps experience. This experience provides feedback regarding one’s knowledge of content as well as time and anxiety management. Exchanging responses with other study group members will provide the opportunity for students to critique one another on their answers.
6. Practice positive strategies for anxiety management around the comps experience. Avoid rumors, myths, and contagion of anxiety from other students. You are not competing with other students on the exam. There is no grading curve on the comps exam. We wish for everyone to pass the exam!
7. Consider using the resources of the Academic Learning Center (ALC) to prepare for the exam. The ALC can provide students with guidance around test preparation and test taking strategies, and writing skills. Please be advised that you may use the services of the ALC during preparation for the exam but may not consult with them during the two weeks of exam administration.

STRUCTURE OF THE EXAMINATION

The Comprehensive Examination will consist of a case study and three sections of questions. Students will receive a grade of PASS or FAIL on **each** section. **Passage of all three sections is required to pass the examination.**

MA COMPREHENSIVE EXAM QUESTIONS

PLEASE BE SURE THAT YOU READ THE “ERRATA” SECTION OF THE MA

COMPREHENSIVE PREPARATION DOCUMENT, AS IT INCLUDES IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON FORMAT.

**I. CASE CONCEPTUALIZATION FOR AN INDIVIDUAL CLIENT:
8 page limit, no exceptions**

Present a case formulation of the identified client. **NOTE: ATTENTION TO RELEVANT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY ISSUES IN AN INTEGRATED FASHION SHOULD BE INCORPORATED THROUGHOUT THE CASE CONCEPTUALIZATION SECTION.** The following elements must be addressed.

- a. Case Conceptualization: Based on the information presented, offer a case conceptualization of the identified client from a particular theoretical perspective. Your conceptualization should include attention to presenting symptoms and complaints and should apply theoretical concepts to an analysis of why this person is in distress. If critical information is lacking, discuss what additional information you would like to have and why. You may choose among cognitive-behavioral, person-centered, or psychoanalytic concepts.
- b. Developmental Formulation: Present a developmental formulation of the same client. What developmental issues do you feel are pertinent in trying to understand the client and the client's concerns? Specific developmental theory should be identified and applied to the case.
- c. Diagnostic Impressions: What are your diagnostic impressions of the client? Be sure to include a rationale for your impressions. Include a DSM-IV TR diagnosis on Axes I through IV (**not** Axis V).
- d. Treatment Plan: Deriving from your case formulation, present a treatment plan for the client. Please note that your chosen treatment plan should be consistent with your theoretical conceptualization, developmental formulation and diagnostic impressions.

II. FAMILY CONCEPTUALIZATION: 4 pages limit, no exception

Provide a case conceptualization of the family from a specific systemic orientation (Bowenian, Structural, Emotionally Focused Therapy, or IPCT – Integrative Problem Centered Therapy). Include a discussion of relevant family developmental/stage issues and a theoretically devised treatment plan. **NOTE: A COMPLETE CASE CONCEPTUALIZATION WILL INCLUDE ATTENTION TO RELEVANT**

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FACTORS IN AN INTEGRATED FASHION.

III. ETHICAL/LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS: 4 page limit, no exception

This section should address the identification of relevant ethical, legal, and/or clinical considerations, correct application of relevant codes and laws, recognition of competing principles, consequences of one's chosen actions, and attention to relevant diversity factors. Students should respond to any specific ethical/legal dilemmas present in the case as well as discussing more general ethical/legal considerations in the case as a whole. **NOTE: A COMPLETE ETHICAL/LEGAL ANALYSIS WILL INCLUDE ATTENTION TO RELEVANT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY FACTORS IN AN INTEGRATED FASHION.**

TAKING THE EXAMINATION

1. Students who are approved to take Comps will pick up a copy of the Comprehensive Examination from the Department Administrator for Clinical Psychology, Ms. Toni Johnson. Students will be assigned a bar code number that should be typed on the exam in place of their name. Exams will be returned to school in a bar coded envelope.
2. **READ AND FOLLOW THE EXAMINATION INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. MAKE SURE TO ANSWER THE SPECIFIC QUESTION(S) ASKED.**
3. Do not assume facts about the clinical case in your answers. Lead the reader through your thinking rather than making statements that do not clearly follow from the clinical data. It is acceptable to state that you would proceed in a particular clinical direction if certain facts were known to be present. Be careful to voice your hypotheses and judgments as inferences (“it appears likely”, “one might hypothesize”, “if this were the case...”) rather than as proven facts. Define terms that may be ambiguous to the reader.
4. **Exams should flow and be consistent from one section to the other. That is, the case conceptualization, diagnostic impressions, and treatment plan should be integrated and consistent with one another. Review of previous exams has revealed that students should pay particular attention to the application and integration of theory and clinical application.**
5. Attention to diversity should be present in **all** sections of the exam. Diversity considerations might include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, SES, ability/disability, religion, age, culture, language, citizenship status, etc.
6. Students are discouraged from taking creative or non-traditional approaches to the exam.

A clear and proficient analysis of the case material is encouraged. While working on the exam, it may be helpful to put oneself in the role of the grader, assessing whether the submitted material is clear, understandable, and consistent.

7. A contact faculty member will be appointed to answer questions that may arise during the two week exam writing period. Students may not contact other faculty members, fellow students, ALC staff or anyone else to discuss the exam or to request review of their answers.
8. Comprehensive exams are not a group project. Students are expected to work independently of others during the two week examination period. This means that the case study may not be discussed with anyone else (other than the contact faculty member) during the period of the examination.
9. Plagiarism of ideas or content from outside sources is strictly forbidden. Information regarding proper citation of material and plagiarism standards may be found on the Academic Learning Center (ALC) link of the school library website.

GRADING PROCESS

Distribution and grading of the examination begins immediately after exams are submitted. The program director will distribute exams to designated faculty. The general criteria to pass the Clinical MA Comprehensive examination are:

- breadth and depth of knowledge
- integration and application of concepts
- organization and clarity
- understanding of issues related to diversity and ethics

In addition, faculty responsible for developing the exam will provide all grading faculty with more detailed criteria for the specific questions in any given examination, in order to provide consistency in grading standards. Students' names do not appear on examinations, which are graded "blindly." Test papers carry bar coded student ID numbers only. Exams from students who receive ADA accommodations will be distributed along with other exams so that anonymity will be preserved.

All comprehensive exams will automatically be read by two faculty members. This format is intended to bring rigor and fairness to the grading process. Each faculty member reading a given exam will assign a grade of PASS or FAIL to each section of the student's exam. If the faculty member has questions about how well the exam meets the criteria for passing, they will consult with a faculty member who is not grading the assigned exam or with the program director.

Following completion of this process, the two faculty members who graded an exam will meet to review their grades. In the event of a discrepancy in the initial assigned grades, the faculty members will consult with each other to determine the final grade. Detailed feedback will be provided on a final grade sheet, noting the strengths and weaknesses of the student's answers as well as the final grade for each section. In addition, one of the faculty members who graded the student's exam will be assigned to provide additional oral feedback to the student, if requested.

TEST OUTCOME

The Exam will consist of three sections as outlined above (Case Conceptualization, Family Conceptualization, and Ethical/Legal Considerations). Each section of the exam will be graded PASS or FAIL. Students must pass all three sections of the exam to receive an overall grade of PASS on the comprehensive exam. As of May 2008, for all students, any section of the exam which the student passes does not need to be re-taken.

Beginning in January 2009, students who are taking comprehensive exams for the first time will be given three opportunities to pass each section of the exam. Failure to fully pass all three sections of the comprehensive examination after three tries will result in dismissal from the program. For students who first took the comprehensive exam prior to January 2009, previous policies will apply regarding number of times that a student may take the exam.

Please note that the number of times a student may "take" the exam actually refers to a graded exam. If a student picks up the exam, but does not complete the exam, or the exam is not graded, this will not count as an attempt to pass the exam. However, beginning in May 2009, if a student submits an exam for grading, they will be expected to complete all sections of the exam that they are scheduled to take. That is, a student taking the exam for the first time who submits an exam must complete all three sections of the exam and a student retaking the exam who submits an exam must submit all sections which need to be retaken. Any scheduled section which is not submitted will be automatically assigned a grade of Fail.

Note: A small number of students will take the Comprehensive Exam for the first time in the Spring. For these students, any failed sections may be retaken during the next administration of the Comprehensive Exams the following January. As with other students, failure to pass all sections of the comprehensive exam after a specified number of attempts will result in dismissal from the program.

Successfully passing all three sections of the MA Comprehensive exam is a degree requirement in the MA Clinical program for students in the pre-Fall 2010 curriculum. Students who complete all other course requirements in the MA program but do not pass the comprehensive exam will not be eligible to graduate, begin a PsyD practicum, or begin as a degree seeking student in the PsyD program until this requirement is completed. In some cases, students may be eligible to take courses as a non-degree student in the PsyD program while they are working

towards successful completion of the MA comprehensive exam. Note, this only applies to students who have been accepted for admission to the PsyD program.

DISTRIBUTION OF EXAM RESULTS

Faculty will make every effort to have grading completed in a timely manner. For the January (Winter) exam, students may anticipate receiving results by mid-March. For the May (Spring) exam, students may anticipate receiving results by the end of June. Students may have questions about the criteria used in grading the exam, the feedback they receive, or how well their answer met the general criteria. For this reason, the clinical MA faculty will offer a feedback/debriefing meeting following the Winter Comps in order to discuss the examination with all of the students who completed the examination. This meeting will take place the week following the return of the exams during a common hour time slot. Grading faculty urge all students to attend this meeting, even if they passed the examination, as it will be an additional learning opportunity. Students will have an opportunity to get feedback about the strengths and weaknesses in their own performance, and to consolidate their learning, regardless of their performance on the exam. In addition, this meeting allows students the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about future steps in the comprehensive examination process.

In addition to the above meeting, students may also request that the department administrator identify the individual faculty member responsible for providing feedback on their particular examination. Students may approach this individual for clarification and further discussion of their comments. Students are also encouraged to consult with their advisors for further guidance regarding their performance. Students who failed any part of the exam are encouraged to explore the factors that may have contributed to their performance. It is recommended that the student develop a plan for successful passage of the subsequent examination in consultation with their academic advisor.

Questions regarding this document or any aspect of the comprehensive examination may be directed to one's academic advisor or to Dr. Adam Froerer, Assistant Program Chair.

ERRATA – IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON FORMAT

Exams **must** be double spaced, and must use a 12 point, Times New Roman font. Margins must be 1" on right, left, top and bottom of the page. The total length of the exam is 16 pages. Part I must not exceed 8 pages; Part II must not exceed 4 pages; Part III must not exceed 4 pages. Please begin each section on a new page. Any section which exceeds the assigned page limits will only be read and graded up to the page limit (i.e. words that exceed the page limit will not be included in the evaluation to determine the grade). These page limits will be strictly enforced; because the exam is graded in sections, this guideline has been instituted to ensure equity and fairness.

A bibliography will **NOT** count in the total number of pages allowed.

All references and citations **must** be in APA style and must be from scholarly publications; no exceptions.

Use of genograms or other types of diagrams are not allowed on the comprehensive exam.

Bullet points are acceptable to use in the treatment planning section, but each bullet point **must be a complete sentence** (no phrases) and be double spaced.

Be sure to **carefully read the entire exam**-even if you are only required to complete a portion of the exam (i.e. you are retaking certain sections of the exam).

If you have questions, contact Dr. Adam Froerer at afroerer@argosy.edu or by phone at 312-777-7709. During the two weeks of exam administration, students should address ALL questions to Dr. Froerer and Dr. Froerer **only**.