



NATIONAL BOARD FOR
CERTIFIED COUNSELORS®
AND AFFILIATES

Candidate Handbook for National Certified Counselor Certification

National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination™
(NCMHCE®)

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For More Information

All questions and requests for information about the NCMHCE should be directed to:

**National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
Certification and Credentialing Services Department**

3 Terrace Way
Greensboro, NC 27403
Tel: +336-547-0607
Fax: +336-547-0017
Website: nbcc.org

All questions and requests for information about examination scheduling should be directed to:

Pearson VUE
5601 Green Valley Dr.
Bloomington, MN 55437
Voice: 866-904-4432
Website: pearsonvue.com

Introduction

The National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE) is designed to assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities determined to be important for providing effective counseling services. The NCMHCE is a requirement for counselor licensure in many states. It is one of two examination options for the National Certified Counselor (NCC) certification and also fulfills the examination requirement for the Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) specialty certification.

There are two options for examination delivery for the NCMHCE:

1. You can take the examination as part of either the National Certified Counselor (NCC) or Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) application, which will be covered in this handbook. The benefit of taking the examination via this method is that it allows you to get a head start on earning your professional credentials.
2. You can take the examination on its own, as part of the state licensure process. For more information on this process, review the state licensure candidate handbook at nbcc.org/assets/exam/handbooks/ncmhce.pdf.

About NBCC

The National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc., and Affiliates (NBCC) is internationally recognized as a leading provider of national counselor credentialing examinations. All 50 states; the U.S. territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and the District of Columbia use NBCC examinations as part of their counselor licensure requirements. NBCC administers its examinations through the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE), its test administration services provider.

About Pearson VUE

Pearson VUE is NBCC's computer-based testing partner for the administration and scoring of the NCMHCE. As an independent testing agency, Pearson VUE has test centers across the globe and is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Pearson VUE provides two test delivery options for the NCMHCE:

- In-person administration, at a Pearson VUE test center.
- Internet-based (online) administration through Pearson VUE's OnVUE platform. The examination may be taken on a computer at home or in a private setting with a strong internet connection and webcam. Strict security protocols are in place to ensure the integrity and security of the testing process and examination content. For more information about the OnVUE process and system requirements, visit nbcc.org/exams/administration.

Nondiscrimination Policy

NBCC does not discriminate against any candidate based on gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law.

Examination Administration

When taking the NCMHCE as part of the NCC or CCMHC application, the examination is administered throughout the year. Candidates will have a 6-month window to sit for the examination during an administration. As noted, candidates have the choice to take the NCMHCE in-person at a Pearson VUE test center or online through Pearson VUE's OnVUE platform.

Holidays

Examinations are not offered on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth National Independence Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday
- Christmas Eve Day (Limited hours)
- Christmas Day

Examination Purpose, Content, and Form

History of the Examination's Development

The development of the NCMHCE in the early 1990s marked the expansion of counseling national certification into the evaluation of the ability of counselors to apply core knowledge to clinical practice.

The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) initially developed the Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) and, after a number of years of administration of the credential, determined that the credential could be strengthened and expanded by adding a national, standardized examination. In the early 1990s, NBCC agreed to acquire the credential and invest in the development of an examination to anchor the certification and align the application process with the profession's foundational national certification, the National Certified Counselor (NCC).

NBCC approached the development of the clinical certification examination with an intentional focus on drawing from the common core knowledge of professional counselors. NBCC convened a committee of subject matter experts (SMEs) to explore examination format and develop items built on the core knowledge base of practicing counselors. This committee was led by psychometric experts with a deep knowledge of counseling, uniquely positioned to frame an examination that reflected the central clinical requirements of counselors through real-world simulated cases.

Examination Purpose and Content

The NCMHCE measures an individual's ability to apply and evaluate knowledge in core counselor skills and competencies and to practice competently as a professional counselor. Specifically, the examination assesses an entry-level clinical mental health counselor's ability to apply knowledge of theoretical and skill-based tenets through response to clinical case studies. The case studies are designed to capture a candidate's ability to identify, analyze, diagnose, and develop plans for treatment of clinical concerns.

Measurement Focus and Target Population

See Appendix A for the NCMHCE Content Outline.

Minimally Qualified Candidate

The minimally qualified candidate (MQC) for the NCMHCE must have a graduate-level degree or higher from a counseling program that has been accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) or is administered by an institutionally accredited college or university.

The counseling degree program must contain courses in the following nine (9) requirement areas:

1. Human Growth and Development Theories in Counseling
2. Social and Cultural Foundations in Counseling
3. Helping Relationships in Counseling
4. Group Counseling Theories and Processes

5. Career Counseling and Lifestyle Development
6. Assessment in Counseling
7. Research and Program Evaluation
8. Professional Orientation to Counseling

Examination Format

The NCMHCE test format is composed of 11 case studies. Of the total number of multiple-choice questions, 100 will be scored, and one of the case studies will be unscored. The unscored narrative and questions are used for generating item statistics for future test forms. Candidates will have a total test session of **255 minutes** (4 hours and 15 minutes), as follows:

- Time to complete the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement: **5 minutes**
- Time to complete the testing tutorial (including sample case study): **10 minutes**
- Time to complete the examination: **225 minutes**
- One scheduled break (after fifth case study): **15 minutes**

Total Test Session Time: **255 minutes**

Case Studies

The case studies on the new format of the NCMHCE are designed to replicate the actual work of a clinical mental health counselor. Each case study will comprise one narrative and a range of 9–15 multiple-choice questions. These questions will measure application and other higher cognitive levels as defined in the Bloom's Taxonomy classification framework.

Each case study will be distributed in three sections: initial intake summary and two subsequent counseling sessions. Each of the sections will start with a piece of the narrative followed by a set of multiple-choice questions. These multiple-choice questions are based on the content of the narrative and measure an entry-level counselor's ability to apply knowledge of professional practice and ethics, intake, assessment and diagnosis, treatment planning, counseling skills and interventions, and core counseling attributes in a real-world clinical mental health session. See Appendix B for an NCMHCE sample case study.

Eligibility Requirements

Candidates can view the National Certified Counselor (NCC) Certification Eligibility Policy on our website at nbcc.org/assets/certification/ncc_certification_eligibility_policy.pdf, and the Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) Certification Eligibility Policy can be viewed at nbcc.org/assets/policies/ccmhc_certification_eligibility_policy.pdf.

Registering for the Examination

Registration Process

Candidates must register online using their Credentialing Gateway account as part of the NCC application or CCMHC application. Candidates should navigate to nbcc.org and choose “Login,” located in the top right corner of the screen. This will take them to a log-in screen where they can either log in or create a Credentialing Gateway account. The Credentialing Gateway can also be accessed directly at my.nbcc.org.

Test Authorization Window and Application Expiration

After a candidate has successfully registered with NBCC via the NCC or CCMHC application in their Credentialing Gateway account and has been approved to schedule their examination appointment, they will receive an Authorization to Test email from NBCC. This email will arrive 2 to 3 weeks prior to the opening of the examination window. Candidates may either schedule an appointment for the examination online or by telephone. Candidates failing to schedule and take the examination within the approved authorization window will forfeit all registration fees paid to take the examination. A separate registration fee will be required to reregister for an examination.

Any request to extend the test authorization time period window should be made in writing to certification@nbcc.org and must be requested a minimum of 7 days prior to the last day of the test authorization window.

Candidates may be authorized to take the examination a maximum of three times over a period of 2 years within a single NCC or CCMHC application. After the third failed attempt, the application will automatically close. If a candidate cannot successfully pass the NCMHCE within three attempts, or a period of 2 years has passed since the application was submitted, the application will automatically close.

Failing to Report for an Examination

Candidates who fail to report for an examination appointment will forfeit all registration fees paid within the application to take the examination. A separate registration fee will be required to reregister for an examination.

Examination Reregistration

If a candidate does not sit for the examination within the allotted 6-month window or is unsuccessful in their examination attempt, they may retake the examination during the next available examination administration cycle by reregistering in their Credentialing Gateway account. Those candidates who do not pass the NCMHCE must wait a minimum of 30 days to retake the examination. If they are taking the examination as part of their NCC or CCMHC application, they are allowed three examination attempts in a 2-year period. If the candidate is unable to pass the examination within the 2-year period, their NCC or CCMHC application will automatically close. A separate reregistration fee will be required for each examination reregistration.

Candidates also have the option to retake the examination through the “State Counselor Licensure” process through NBCC’s affiliate, the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE). A candidate’s passing score through this process can be used to complete the examination requirement for their NCC application. Please note that additional fees will apply when choosing this administration option.

For assistance with reregistration, please contact (336) 547-0607 or certification@nbcc.org.

Fees and Refund Policy

Online payments for the NCC and CCMHC applications, including examination fees, must be made by credit card (VISA, MasterCard, or American Express) and are not refundable or transferable.

Scheduling an Examination

After successfully registering for the examination, candidates will receive an Authorization to Test email from NBCC. Upon receipt of the Authorization to Test email, the candidate may then schedule an examination appointment through the Credentialing Gateway or by telephone.

If a candidate is taking the examination with approved special examination accommodations, they must schedule their examination appointment by phone at 800-466-0450, option 3.

See [Accommodations for Candidates with Disabilities on page 11](#) for more information.

To Schedule Online

- Log into your my.nbcc.org account.
- Click your NCC Application Button
- Under NCC Options, click Go To Pearson
 - If you are taking the NCMHCE through the CCMHC application, look under Specialty Options to click Go To Pearson.
- Use the Pearson Vue website to select a test date.

To Schedule by Telephone

- Contact Pearson VUE at (866) 904-4432 to schedule an examination appointment.
- Pearson VUE is available from 7 am through 7 pm Central Time, Mondays through Fridays, for scheduling purposes.

Candidates may only schedule an examination appointment with Pearson VUE upon receiving the Authorization to Test email.

When scheduling an examination appointment, candidates should be prepared to confirm a location (for in-person testing), communicate a preferred date and time for testing, and provide their Candidate ID number. Pearson VUE uses this ID number only for identification purposes for maintaining candidate records. When a candidate contacts Pearson VUE to schedule an examination appointment, the candidate will be notified of the time to report for the in-person administration at the test center, or the online administration via OnVUE.

After scheduling the examination appointment, candidates will receive a Confirmation of Examination Registration email from Pearson VUE to confirm the scheduled appointment. The Confirmation of Examination Registration will include the registration ID, date, time, appointment length, test center location (if applicable), and approved accommodation(s) (if applicable).

Accommodations for Candidates With Disabilities

NBCC and Pearson VUE provide reasonable and appropriate special examination accommodations for individuals with disabilities. The existence of a disability does not automatically necessitate an accommodation. Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity or bodily function. All accommodation requests are reviewed under the Special Examination Accommodations Policy located on the NBCC website at [nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC-CCE Special Examination Accommodations Policy.pdf](https://www.nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC-CCE_Special_Examination_Accommodations_Policy.pdf).

Only specific, limited accommodations may be available for those candidates opting for the OnVUE online administration of the NCMHCE.

Special examination accommodations (SEAs) must be requested for each examination registration. A candidate may use the Accommodation Request form at [nbcc.org/assets/exam/SEA-NBCC-Certification-and-CCE-Credentialing-Candidates-active.pdf](https://www.nbcc.org/assets/exam/SEA-NBCC-Certification-and-CCE-Credentialing-Candidates-active.pdf), or submit substantially similar documentation in accordance with the requirements set forth in the [Special Examination Accommodations Policy](https://www.nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC-CCE_Special_Examination_Accommodations_Policy.pdf).

Accommodations must be pre-approved by NBCC before scheduling the examination. If an examination is scheduled prior to receipt of written confirmation of SEA approval, the candidate may forfeit their accommodation request and/or their scheduled examination appointment time.

Candidates who receive written confirmation of SEA approval must schedule their examination appointment by calling Pearson VUE's toll-free number (800) 466-0450 and selecting Option 3.

For any questions related to accommodations, please feel free to contact: accommodations@cce-global.org.

Examination Appointment Changes

Candidates may reschedule their test up to 24 hours before the currently scheduled examination appointment by contacting Pearson VUE at (866) 904-4432. Candidates with approved accommodations must call (800) 466-0450, and select Option 3, to reschedule their examination.

Circumstances Resulting in Forfeiture of Examination Registration Fees

Examination registration fees and all fees paid to take the examination are forfeited when a candidate:

- misses an appointment and does not reschedule at least 24 hours before the examination appointment.
- arrives more than 15 minutes late for an examination.
- violates any NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE policy, rule, procedure, or instruction from a proctor or examination administrator.
- engages in any prohibited conduct during the examination administration, such as conduct related to cheating or a test security breach.

Examination Deferrals

Candidates may postpone or defer their examination registration to the next available administration without penalty if they contact NBCC at certification@nbcc.org more than 30 days prior to the opening of their examination cycle. If the request is less than 30 days prior to the opening of the examination cycle or if the candidate does not take the examination on their scheduled date, the candidate will be required to pay a \$150 reregistration fee to take it during the next examination cycle.

Personal Emergency, Inclement Weather, or Power Failure

In the event of a personal emergency or other circumstance that prevents the candidate from taking the examination at the scheduled appointment time, the candidate is required to: promptly contact NBCC at (336)547-0607 or certification@nbcc.org; explain the circumstances resulting in the inability to test; submit specific information and related documentation, if applicable, supporting the reason(s) and circumstance(s) identified to NBCC; and identify when the candidate is available to reschedule the examination. NBCC, in its sole discretion, will determine whether the candidate is permitted to cancel the current test appointment and reschedule the examination, or is required to reregister to take the NCMHCE.

In the event of inclement weather, Pearson VUE will determine whether circumstances warrant the cancellation and rescheduling of an examination appointment. An examination will usually be rescheduled if the test center personnel are unable to open the facility. Every attempt is made to administer an examination as scheduled; however, should an examination be canceled at a test center, all scheduled candidates will receive notification by email or telephone regarding rescheduling or reregistration procedures.

During an OnVUE online NCMHCE administration, if the candidate experiences a power outage that temporarily interrupts the administration of the examination, the NCMHCE will restart at the last question completed. The candidate will need to log back in to restart the examination. Details about this process and the steps a candidate must follow, including conducting a system test for software compatibility prior to testing, are provided at home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc. Important FAQs and instructions are provided under the “Learn More” tab of the Pearson VUE/CCE webpage.

Taking the Examination

In-Person Examination Administration (Pearson VUE Test Center)

The examination will be delivered in-person, via computer-based testing, at a physical Pearson VUE test center. Advanced computer experience or typing skills are not required to take the examination. On the day of the NCMHCE appointment, the candidate can check in up to 30 minutes before the examination and up to 15 minutes after the scheduled appointment time. **If the candidate checks in more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time, the candidate will not be allowed to test and will forfeit their registration fee.**

Note: The candidate must provide two forms of proper identification as part of the check-in process at the test center, and at least one form of identification must be one of the following: driver's license, state ID, military ID, or passport. Failure to provide appropriate identification at the time of the examination is considered a missed test appointment, and the candidate will forfeit their examination fee.

Prior to testing at a Pearson VUE test center, the candidate is required to review and sign the Pearson VUE Candidate Agreement before being allowed into the test center. The document explains what candidates must do if they need help during the examination and identifies other test administration policies.

Test Center Locations

Pearson VUE test centers have been selected to provide reasonable accessibility to candidates in all states and U.S. territories. A current listing of Pearson VUE test centers, including addresses and driving directions, is available at home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc under "Find a Test Center."

Security Requirements

NBCC/CCE and Pearson VUE maintain the highest degree of test administration and security standards. All test centers are monitored by audio and video surveillance equipment for security purposes.

The following security requirements apply during the in-person test administration:

- No cameras, notes, tape recorders, personal digital assistants (PDAs), pagers, cell phones, or smart watches are allowed in the testing room.
- No calculators are permitted.
- No guests, visitors, or family members are allowed in the testing room or reception areas.
- No personal items, valuables, or weapons should be brought to the test center.
- A locker is provided for storing keys, wallets, and cell phones. Pearson VUE is not responsible for items left in the reception areas.

NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE may modify these security requirements as needed.

Additional Test Administration Restrictions

- Writing materials will be provided during check in.
- All writing materials must be returned to the proctor at the completion of testing, or a score report will not be given.
- There will be a 15-minute break in the middle of the examination. Voluntary breaks may be taken during the examination; however, the examination clock will not stop during any voluntary breaks. Candidates must follow all Pearson VUE rules and procedures when requesting and taking a break.

Examination Process

Upon arrival at the test center, and following the check-in process, each candidate will be directed to a testing carrel. All candidate testing sessions will be monitored by video throughout the entirety of the test administration.

Candidates will have a total test session of 255 minutes (4 hours and 15 minutes), as follows:

- Time to complete the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement: **5 minutes**
- Time to complete the testing tutorial (including sample case study): **10 minutes**

Following acceptance of the Agreement, each candidate will be provided with a 10-minute examination tutorial that reviews how to navigate and respond to the test items. Upon completion of the tutorial, candidates will begin the timed examination.

- Time to complete the examination: **225 minutes**
- One scheduled break (after fifth case study): **15 minutes**

Total Test Session Time: **255 minutes**

The clock does not stop and will continue to run during any unscheduled break taken by the candidate during the test administration. Once the time has expired, the examination will terminate. A digital clock appearing on the computer screen indicates the time remaining to complete the examination.

Only one examination question is presented at a time. The question number appears in the upper right portion of the screen. Answer choices are identified as A, B, C, or D. The candidate chooses an answer by clicking the option for the best response. To change an answer, the candidate simply clicks on the alternate option. The candidate will have the opportunity to review their responses to each section of the case study before moving to the next section. Once the candidate has continued to the next section of the case study, they will neither be able to review nor change responses to prior sections. The candidate should therefore be sure to address any flagged or skipped questions before moving on to the next section. There is no limit on the number of times the candidate may change their answer before moving on to the next section of the case study. The candidate is encouraged to provide an answer for every examination question completing each section, as there is no penalty for guessing.

Online Examination Administration (OnVUE)

The examination will be delivered via internet-based, online-proctored testing administered by Pearson VUE, at an appropriate location selected by the candidate. Advanced computer experience or typing skills are not required to take the examination. On the day of the NCMHCE appointment, the candidate can check in up to 30 minutes before the examination and up to 15 minutes after the scheduled appointment time. **If the candidate checks in more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time, the candidate will not be allowed to test and will forfeit their registration fee.**

Prior to testing, the candidate is required to review and sign the [Pearson VUE Candidate Rules Agreement](#). The document explains what candidates must do if they need help during the examination and identifies other test administration policies.

Identification Requirements

- On examination day, candidates will be prompted to take a photo of their government-issued ID and a real-time photo of themselves. Candidates will be required to show that same photo ID to the proctor via the webcam.
- The following options satisfy this identification requirement:
 - Driver's license
 - State ID
 - Military ID
 - Passport

The first and last name used by the candidate to register for the examination must exactly match the first and last name on the government-issued ID that is presented on the day of the examination.

Note: The candidate must have proper identification to test via internet-based, online-proctored testing. Failure to provide appropriate identification at the time of the examination is considered a missed test appointment, and the candidate will forfeit their examination fee.

Candidates with questions or concerns about the ID requirements should contact Pearson VUE customer service at home.pearsonvue.com/Contact-Us.aspx.

OnVUE Test Administration Requirements

The candidate will be required to adhere to the following NBCC/Pearson VUE test administration policies and rules with respect to internet-based testing:

Security Requirements

- Immediately prior to the start of their testing session, each candidate must run a computer system check to ensure that the computer being used to complete the examination meets all Pearson VUE computer system and technical requirements. Information concerning the systems check is available at home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc/onvue. Failure to perform the system check may result in technical deficiencies that could adversely affect a candidate's test administration or ability to complete the examination.
- Prior to accessing the examination, candidates will be required to show their testing space to the online proctor via the computer webcam and capture four photos of their testing environment.
- Constant online proctoring/monitoring will be conducted by both artificial intelligence and a Pearson VUE-certified proctor by webcam and microphone throughout the test administration.

Testing Space Requirements

During the test administration, the candidate MUST:

- **Be alone in the room.** Other individuals (including children) and pets (except service animals) are not allowed in the testing environment. It is recommended that candidates use a room with a locking door to reduce the likelihood that an interruption will occur.
- **Have a clear desk and testing area.** The candidate is not permitted to have textbooks, cell phones, smart watches, or other materials that may have test content or exam-related information in their testing location, including bulletin boards, white boards, or other items.
- **Be connected to a power source and the internet.**
- **Keep their webcam, speakers, and microphone on for the duration of the test.** The proctor must be able to see and hear the candidate throughout the test.

The candidate CANNOT:

- Use a phone or headphones.
- Use dual computer monitors.
- Leave their seat or get up for any reason, unless specifically instructed by the proctor. A 15-minute break will be offered to all candidates at the halfway point of the examination.
- Talk or read the test questions aloud.

Any interruption, including contact with any person other than the examination proctor, or any violation of these test administration rules will result in termination of the online administration of the NCMHCE.

The proctor may provide other directives regarding the examination environment. Failure to follow any instructions or directives from the proctor will result in termination of the examination and forfeiture of the test appointment and NCMHCE registration fee.

Additional Examination Administration Restrictions

- Like the examination in the test centers, a 15-minute break will be offered to all candidates at the halfway point of the examination. No additional test time will be given to candidates.
- Candidates may not eat or drink during the test administration, unless specifically approved by the state licensing agency and/or NBCC/CCE. Candidates may have water in a clear container during the examination.

Examination Process

Candidates are encouraged to review the OnVUE test administration rules and procedures, which are explained on the Pearson VUE website, located at home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/Dell/Online-proctored/OnVUE-Online-Proctored-Exams.aspx.

Upon accessing the secure examination, the candidate will be instructed to show the proctor a full view of the testing area after the candidate's identification has been confirmed. Candidates will be monitored by video and audio throughout the examination session.

The candidate will review their candidate information to confirm that the information is accurate.

Candidates will have a total test session of 255 minutes (4 hours and 15 minutes), as follows:

- Time to complete the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement: **5 minutes**
- Time to complete the testing tutorial (including sample case study): **10 minutes**

Following acceptance of the Agreement, each candidate will be provided with a 10-minute examination tutorial that reviews how to navigate and respond to the test items. Upon completion of the tutorial, candidates will begin the timed examination.

- Time to complete the examination: **225 minutes**
- One scheduled break (after fifth case study): **15 minutes**

Total Test Session Time: **255 minutes**

The examination will terminate if the time allowed is exceeded. A digital clock indicates the time remaining to complete the examination.

Only one examination question is presented at a time. The question number appears in the upper right portion of the screen. Answer choices are identified as A, B, C, or D. The candidate chooses an answer by clicking the option for the best response. To change an answer, the candidate simply clicks on the alternate option. The candidate will have the opportunity to review their responses to each section of the case study before moving to the next section. Once the candidate has continued to the next section of the case study, they will neither be able to review nor change responses to prior sections. The candidate should therefore be sure to address any flagged or skipped questions before moving on to the next section. There is no limit on the number of times the candidate may change their answer before moving on to the next section of the case study. The candidate is encouraged to provide an answer for every examination question completing each section, as there is no penalty for guessing.

For security reasons, no unscheduled breaks will be permitted during the OnVUE test administration. If a candidate anticipates needing additional breaks outside of the scheduled 15-minute break, the candidate is strongly encouraged to test in-person at a testing center.

Examination Rules and Requirements

Regardless of test delivery format selected by the candidate (i.e., in-person or online test administrations), candidates will be required to comply with all NBCC/CCE and Pearson VUE test administration policies, rules, instructions, and security requirements, including the Pearson VUE Candidate Rules Agreement, which can be reviewed on the following website: home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/CCE/Rules-Agreements.aspx.

Misconduct

Candidates must not engage in any prohibited conduct during the examination, including, but not limited to:

- Cheating
- Using any unauthorized materials or communication devices, such as cell phones, PDAs, smart watches, or pagers
- Accessing other computer programs, applications, or content during the examination
- Communicating with other candidates or other persons during the test administration
- Being abusive to, or otherwise uncooperative with, the proctor and/or test administrator
- Interruptions where others enter or walk through the testing room
- Copying, or attempting to make copies of, any examination materials, including, without limitation, any questions, answers, or screen images; this includes taking photos or videos of computer screens, even if attempting to document a technical problem or other issue
- Attempting to take the examination for someone else
- Being observed with notes, books, or other aids
- Participating in any data dump activities (e.g., sharing specific test questions and content with others)
- Reading aloud or mouthing the questions and answer choices
- Looking around the room
- Taking an unauthorized break in test centers

- Taking an unscheduled break in the OnVUE examination
- Eating, chewing gum, smoking, or having a drink, other than water in a clear container
- Asking the proctor or examination administrator questions about the examination content
- Any other behavior deemed as misconduct or suspicious activity as reported by examination administrators or proctors

If NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE determines that a candidate has acted contrary to any applicable NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE test administration policy, rule, procedure, or instruction, or the terms of the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement, the candidate's examination may be terminated and/or their scores may be invalidated by NBCC. Additionally, a candidate may be subject to appropriate corrective actions and/or sanctions, including, but not limited to, ineligibility for any future NBCC tests.

Examination Materials Ownership

The NCMHCE, including all test questions and answers, is confidential and cannot be provided to any other person(s). NBCC owns all rights, titles, and interests related to the NCMHCE and all examination-related materials, including trademark and copyright interests and rights.

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Upon completion of the examination, candidates will be asked to complete a short evaluation of their examination experience. Test center candidates will then be instructed to report to the examination proctor to receive an unofficial score report, which includes the candidate's photograph. Candidates taking the examination through OnVUE will be able to access their score report information from their dashboard. They will log in to their Pearson account and select the View/Print Score Report option at the top right of the login page. If this option is not available, they should contact Pearson's customer service at 866-904-4432 to request a copy.

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NBCC reserves the right to withdraw or void official scores if NBCC determines that a candidate engaged in any prohibited conduct during the examination, including any violation of a NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE policy, rule, procedure, or instruction.

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The examination score is determined only by the candidate's performance on the test. It is important to note that a candidate's ability to pass the NCMHCE depends on the knowledge and skills of the candidate and not on the performance of other candidates.

Within the 130–150 questions on each form of the NCMHCE, 100 of the questions are scored for the purpose of determining whether the candidate meets the minimum criterion (passing) score for that test form. Each of these 100 questions count for one score point; thus, the maximum possible score a candidate can achieve is 100. The cut score (minimum passing score) for the NCMHCE is calculated through a standard-setting process, which requires a committee of subject matter experts to review and evaluate each question on the examination in order to determine the passing score that would be expected from a minimally qualified candidate (MQC).

A process of statistical equating is used to determine the cut score for each version of the examination. Statistical equating ensures fairness to all candidates by associating the cut score on a test form with the difficulty level of the items within the form. To ensure fairness, the cut score of each examination version will vary slightly.

Score Verification Requests

Candidates can order an official score report by submitting a Score Verification Request Form, with payment, through their Credentialing Gateway account.

Appealing Examination Results

In the event that a candidate wishes to appeal a failing test result, the candidate must satisfy the requirements in the NBCC/CCE Examination Appeals Policy located on the NBCC website at [nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC CCE Examination Appeals Policy.pdf](https://nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC_CCE_Examination_Appeals_Policy.pdf) and complete all appeal submission requirements. Failure to follow the appeal instructions identified in this Policy will result in rejection of the appeal.

A free retake of the examination is the only remedy for an accepted and approved appeal. The candidate's test score will not be changed or modified.

Appendix A

Content Outline

The examination’s development is based upon a national job analysis of more than 16,000 credentialed counselors identifying empirically validated work behaviors determined to be most relevant for competent counseling practice. The most recent job analysis was finalized in June 2019, and the test blueprint on the Content Outline was finalized in 2021 by the NCMHCE subject matter experts.

The committee’s responsibilities included, but were not limited to, identifying components of the profession and related job tasks and crafting survey items, and reviewing the format of the instrument to measure those components and tasks.

Table 1 presents the six content domains and the percent of scored items in an NCMHCE on each of these domains.

Table 1. The Weight of Each Domain

	Domain	Percent of items
1	Professional Practice and Ethics	15
2	Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis	25
3	Areas of Clinical Focus	0 ¹
4	Treatment Planning	15
5	Counseling Skills and Interventions	30
6	Core Counseling Attributes	15

¹The domain “Areas of Clinical Focus” represents the diagnoses and main presenting problems that were identified in the job analysis as being the most prevalent in clinical work. This domain is evaluated through a variety of diagnoses and case scenarios appearing on each examination form and not at the item level.

Table 2 presents the knowledge, skills, and tasks under each domain of the Content Outline.

Table 2. Knowledge, Skills, and Tasks Related to the Domains

1. Professional Practice and Ethics

This section encompasses counselors’ knowledge, skills, and abilities related to maintaining proper administrative and clinical protocols.

- A. Assess your (the counselor) competency to work with a specific client
- B. Understand statistical concepts and methods in research

- C. Practice legal and ethical counseling
- D. Clarify counselor/client roles
- E. Discuss client's rights and responsibilities
- F. Discuss limits of confidentiality
- G. Explain counselor/agency policies
- H. Review payment, fees, and insurance benefits
- I. Explain counseling processes, procedures, risks, and benefits
- J. Explain uses and limits of social media
- K. Inform clients about the legal aspects of counseling
- L. Obtain information consent
- M. Discuss confidentiality as it applies to electronic communication
- N. Establish group rules, expectations, and termination criteria
- O. Assess competency to provide informed consent
- P. Monitor the therapeutic relationship and build trust as needed
- Q. Review client records
- R. Provide adequate accommodations for clients with disabilities
- S. Provide information to third parties
- T. Provide referral sources if counseling services are inadequate/inappropriate
- U. Advocate for professional and client issues
- V. Supervision
- W. Create and maintain documentation appropriate for each aspect of the counseling process
- X. Awareness and practice of self-care

2. **Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively conduct client intake, assessment, and diagnosis.

- A. Conduct a biopsychosocial interview
- B. Conduct a diagnostic interview
- C. Conduct cultural formulation interview
- D. Conduct an initial interview
- E. Determine diagnosis
- F. Perform a Mental Status Exam (MSE)
- G. Consider co-occurring diagnoses
- H. Determine level of care needed
- I. Determine the appropriate modality of treatment
- J. Assess the presenting problem and level of distress
- K. Evaluate an individual's level of mental health functioning
- L. Screen clients for appropriate services
- M. Select, use, and interpret appropriate assessment instruments
- N. Use formal and informal observations
- O. Assess for trauma
- P. Assess substance use
- Q. Obtain client self-reports
- R. Evaluate interactional dynamics
- S. Conduct ongoing assessment for at-risk behaviors (e.g., suicide, homicide, self/other-injury, and relationship violence)
- T. Use pre-test and post-test measures to assess outcomes
- U. Evaluate counseling effectiveness

3. Areas of Clinical Focus

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge and skills related to areas of clients' concern(s).

- A. Adjustment related to physical loss/injury/illness
- B. Aging/geriatric concerns
- C. Behavioral problems
- D. Bullying
- E. Caregiving concerns
- F. Cultural adjustments
- G. End-of-life issues
- H. Fear and panic
- I. Financial issues
- J. Gender identity development
- K. Grief/loss
- L. Hopelessness/depression
- M. Loneliness/attachment
- N. Hyper/hypo mental focus
- O. Intellectual functioning issues
- P. Insomnia/sleep issues
- Q. Maladaptive eating behaviors
- R. Remarriage/recommitment
- S. Developmental processes/tasks/issues
- T. Obsessive thoughts/behaviors
- U. Occupation and career development
- V. Physical issues related to anxiety
- W. Physical issues related to depression
- X. Physical/emotional issues related to trauma
- Y. Process addictions (pornography, gambling)
- Z. Racism/discrimination/oppression
- AA. Religious values conflict
- AB. Retirement concerns
- AC. Ruminating and/or intrusive thoughts
- AD. Separation from primary caregivers
- AE. Sexual functioning concerns
- AF. Sleeping habits
- AG. Spiritual/existential concerns
- AH. Stress management
- AI. Substance use/addiction issues
- AJ. Suicidal thoughts/behaviors
- AK. Terminal illness issues
- AL. Visual/auditory hallucinations
- AM. Worry and anxiety
- AN. Adoption issues
- AO. Blended family issues
- AP. Child abuse-related concerns
- AQ. Child development issues
- AR. Dating/relationship problems
- AS. Divorce
- AT. Family abuse/violence (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional)

- AU. Interpersonal partner violence concerns
- AV. Marital/partner communication problems
- AW. Parenting/co-parenting conflicts
- AX. Emotional dysregulation

4. **Treatment Planning**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge, skills, and abilities to develop an effective course of treatment.

- A. Collaborate with client to establish treatment goals and objectives
- B. Establish short- and long-term counseling goals consistent with client's diagnosis
- C. Identify barriers affecting client goal attainment
- D. Identify strengths that improve the likelihood of goal attainment
- E. Refer to different levels of treatment (e.g., outpatient, inpatient, residential)
- F. Refer to others for concurrent treatment
- G. Guide treatment planning
- H. Discuss termination process and issues
- I. Discuss transitions in group membership
- J. Follow up after discharge
- K. Use assessment instrument results to facilitate client decision-making
- L. Review and revise the treatment plan
- M. Engage clients in review of progress toward treatment goals
- N. Collaborate with other providers and client support systems (documentation and report writing)
- O. Discuss with clients the integration and maintenance of therapeutic progress
- P. Educate client to the value of treatment plan compliance

5. **Counseling Skills and Interventions**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct effective counseling.

- A. Align intervention with client's developmental level
- B. Align intervention with counseling modality (individual, couple, family, or group)
- C. Align intervention with client population (e.g., veterans, minorities, disenfranchised, disabled)
- D. Implement individual counseling in relation to a plan of treatment
- E. Establish therapeutic alliance
- F. Apply theory-based counseling intervention(s)
- G. Address addiction issues
- H. Address cultural considerations
- I. Address family composition and cultural considerations
- J. Evaluate and explain systemic patterns of interaction
- K. Explore family member interaction
- L. Explore religious and spiritual values
- M. Guide clients in the development of skills or strategies for dealing with their problems
- N. Help clients develop support systems
- O. Help facilitate clients' motivation to make the changes they desire
- P. Improve interactional patterns
- Q. Provide crisis intervention
- R. Educate client about transference and defense mechanisms
- S. Facilitate trust and safety
- T. Build communication skills

- U. Develop conflict resolution strategies
- V. Develop safety plans
- W. Facilitate systematic change
- X. Provide distance counseling or telemental health
- Y. Provide education resources (e.g., stress management, assertiveness training, divorce adjustment)
- Z. Provide psychoeducation for client
- AA. Summarize
- AB. Reframe/redirect
- AC. Facilitate empathic responses
- AD. Use self-disclosure
- AE. Use constructive confrontation
- AF. Facilitate awareness of here-and-now interactions
- AG. Facilitate resolution of interpersonal conflict
- AH. Use linking and blocking in a group context
- AI. Management of leader-member dynamics
- AJ. Model giving and receiving of feedback
- AK. Address impact of extended families
- AL. Contain and manage intense feelings
- AM. Explore the influence of family of origin patterns and themes
- AN. Address the impact of social support network
- AO. Use “structured” activities
- AP. Promote and encourage interactions among group members
- AQ. Promote and encourage interactions with the group leader
- AR. Use psychoeducation as a part of the group process
- AS. Explain phases in the group process
- AT. Identify and discuss group themes and patterns
- AU. Create intervention based on the stage of group development
- AV. Challenge harmful group member behaviors
- AW. Address the potential interaction of members outside of the group

6. **Core Counseling Attributes**

This section encompasses behaviors, traits, and dispositions of effective counselors.

- A. Awareness of self and impact on clients
- B. Genuineness
- C. Congruence
- D. Demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to gender orientation and gender issues
- E. Demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to multicultural issues
- F. Demonstrate conflict tolerance and resolution
- G. Empathic attunement
- H. Empathic responding
- I. Foster the emergence of group therapeutic factors
- J. Non-judgmental stance
- K. Positive regard
- L. Respect and acceptance for diversity
- M. Use foundational listening, attending, and reflecting skill

Appendix B

NCMHCE Sample Case Study

Part One

Intake

Client

Age: 35

Gender: Female

Sexuality: Heterosexual

Ethnicity: White

Relationship Status: Single, Divorced

Counseling Setting: Agency

Types of Counseling: Individual

Provisional Diagnosis: Major depressive disorder, Single episode, Moderate, With anxious distress, Mild: F32.1

Presenting Problem:

You are a licensed mental health counselor working in a private practice setting. During the initial counseling session, a 35-year-old divorced female, mother of two children aged 10 and 12, says she has come for services because “I am in a rut and cannot find a way out. I feel hopeless and I am not sure what to do with my life.” Your client says the feelings of hopelessness began 6 months ago and the session with you is her first attempt at counseling. “I want to feel as confident and happy as I was when I first met my ex-husband.

I was working full-time as a case worker and taking classes to be a nurse.” She is currently unemployed but previously worked from home doing billing for a major insurance carrier. The client appears tearful and expresses that she has felt like a failure since moving back in with her mother a year ago. “My kids are often in trouble at school, and it got to a point where I couldn’t handle them on my own. So, I had to ask my mom for help.” The client reports feeling sad and anxious since her divorce from her husband 3 years ago. “He left me for a younger woman. I don’t know how I will make it without a spouse.” She feels sad, empty, and lonely most days, disclosing, “I wake up feeling sad. I can’t remember the last time I enjoyed something.” Your client reports her appetite has increased; she snacks throughout the day and has gained 15 pounds in the past 3 months. Your client reports that she used to create jewelry for fun and to supplement her income. However, she stopped making craft jewelry and closed her online shop about 4 months ago because of fatigue and an

inability to concentrate. “After dealing with the kids, I just want to eat and go to bed.” Your client reports that for the past 6 months she has been sleeping a couple of hours more than usual. She has asked her mother to watch her children three to four nights a week because she is so fatigued. “I’m not able to spend as much time with the kids as I did in the past, and when I am with them, I tend to zone out and can’t relax. I feel guilty. I’ve ruined their lives.” Although she states that she has no desire to commit suicide and has no plan to harm others, she does regularly think that everyone she knows would be better off without her. The only reason she is going to counseling is because her mother “won’t stop bugging” her for staying in bed all day.

Mental Status Exam:

Your client presents with fair grooming and hygiene. Her hair is clean and brushed. She is dressed appropriately for the weather in a gray sweatshirt and pants. She is alert and oriented to person, place, and time. The client’s flat affect is congruent with her sad and hopeless mood. The client’s long-term memories are within a normal range. No abnormalities are noted in the client’s motor movements or gait. Her eye contact is good. The client’s thoughts are cogent and linear. The client has difficulty concentrating, and questions must be repeated several times during the interview. The client’s thought content is focused primarily on harsh self-judgement, with an emphasis on recollections of past failings. No delusions or hallucinations are noted. The client denies any thoughts of self-harm, including ideas or plans to commit suicide. Client has not experienced a manic or hypomanic episode and denies using alcohol or other substances.

Psychosocial and Family History:

Your client has one sister, 2 years younger, who lives out of state. The client’s parents are still married, though her father lives in another state. Your client shares that she never felt valued in her family. She feels hopeless around them because they question her ability to achieve anything worthwhile, including maintaining a job.

She denies any physical or sexual abuse or other trauma. Your client reports experiencing significant financial difficulties since her divorce, which was another reason that she moved in with her mother despite conflicts in the mother–daughter relationship. At the end of the intake, the client asks, “Will my mother have access to my records because she pays for counseling?” You address the client’s concern about confidentiality since her mother has agreed to subsidize her counseling. You schedule the next session.

Domain 1. Professional Practice and Ethics

Sub-Domain 1.P. Monitor the therapeutic relationship and build trust as needed

1. During the intake, how would you establish a therapeutic relationship with this client?
 - A. Challenge her irrational thoughts about her self-evaluations.
 - B. Advise her about how to manage painful experiences.
 - C. Summarize her emotional struggles and desire for change.**
 - D. Explore areas in which she could improve interpersonal relationships.

Domain 1. Professional Practice and Ethics
Sub-Domain 1.F. Discuss limits of confidentiality

2. How would you manage the client's concern about confidentiality?
- A. Explain you will share whether or not the client is making progress but no details.
 - B. Use the informed consent process to discuss legal responsibilities and ethical guidelines.**
 - C. Request the mother consent to treatment and obtain the client's consent.
 - D. Ask the client to include her mother in her treatment to address this concern.

Domain 2. Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis
Sub-Domain 2.E. Determine diagnosis

3. What self-report from the client meets one of the supporting criteria for the diagnosis?
- A. the client's difficulty with her children
 - B. the client's job loss
 - C. the client's inability to manage children
 - D. the client's difficulty concentrating**

Domain 2. Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis
Sub-Domain 2.J. Assess the presenting problem and level of distress

4. Which criteria were used to determine the severity specifier for the client's major depressive disorder?
- A. number of symptoms is not substantially in excess of those needed to make the diagnosis, yet functional impairment exists**
 - B. the intensity of the symptoms is distressing, but manageable and result in minor impairment of social or occupational functioning
 - C. the intensity of symptoms is high and is accompanied by psychomotor agitation and mixed features associated with a major depressive episode
 - D. the number of symptoms and their intensity is distressing and unmanageable and interfere with client's social and occupational functioning

Domain 4. Treatment Planning

Sub-Domain 4.B. Establish short- and long-term counseling goals consistent with client's diagnosis

5. What long-term goal would guide treatment of the client's presenting problem?
- A. Spend 1 hour each day focusing on what is going right in life.
 - B. Return to pre-marital levels, or better, for self-confidence and autonomy.**
 - C. Decrease negative thoughts and feelings by half in 6 weeks.
 - D. Get out of bed before 8 am each morning.

Part Two

First session, 3 weeks after the intake session:

Your client arrives at the session on time. The client reports, "I feel about the same, not much has changed for me." The client shares that she applied for open job positions but has not performed well in interviews because she is feeling so hopeless. She was turned down for three jobs for which she interviewed. Your client states, "I must be a failure. I will probably never get a job, and me and my kids will end up living on the streets." In addition, she feels anxious and overwhelmed when she thinks about how she will take care of her kids financially in the future and states, "I worry a lot about paying the bills and feel like I will never have enough money again to live on my own." You provide empathy and educate the client on the tenets of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to challenge her thoughts and manage her feelings. In order to facilitate her understanding of CBT, you ask the client to keep a journal of her thoughts and feelings.

Domain 5. Counseling Skills and Interventions

Sub Domain 5.F. Apply theory-based counseling interventions(s)

6. From a CBT perspective, how would you help your client reduce her feelings of anxiety?
- A. Reflect and summarize her feelings accurately.
 - B. Challenge your client's ability to predict future outcomes.**
 - C. Determine how she managed feelings about the future as a child.
 - D. Explore your client's payoff for feeling anxious and overwhelmed.

Domain 5. Counseling Skills and Interventions

Sub-Domain 5.D. Implement individual counseling in relation to a plan of treatment

7. What cognitive error did the client make when disclosing not being hired for three jobs for which she interviewed?
- A. all-or-nothing thinking
 - B. personalizing
 - C. catastrophizing**
 - D. minimizing

Domain 4. Treatment Planning

Sub-Domain 4.D. Identify strengths that improve the likelihood of goal attainment

8. What information from the case study would you explore to help the client remember her strengths?
- A. Remind the client of the disclosure she made about her previous level of functioning.**
 - B. Ask the client to recall of how she responded to job interviews.
 - C. Explore the client's feelings of gratitude for her mother paying for counseling.
 - D. Praise the client for her ability to recognize cognitive errors in the session.

Domain 6. Core Counseling Attributes

Sub-Domain 6.M. Use foundational listening, attending, and reflecting skills

9. What nonjudgmental response would you make after the client's disclosure about not being selected for jobs?
- A. "I am sorry they didn't hire you and wonder what went wrong in the interview."
 - B. "You feel upset about this experience, but you will learn from this situation."
 - C. "We've all experienced this kind of rejection, even when we're overqualified."
 - D. "It sounds like the prospect of living with homelessness would be really scary for you."**

Part Three

Second session, 6 weeks after the intake session:

Your client arrives for the session on time. The client appears to be at a healthier weight, and it appears as though her posture has improved a bit. She says she has cut down on "eating her feelings" and is paying more attention to when she feels hungry. You praise her for this behavioral change. The client smiles at this affirmation and says, "Yes, it hasn't been easy. I am feeling more comfortable in my clothes, but I have a long way to go. I'm still a whale!" The client reports that she has been keeping her journal and has recognized patterns between her experiences and her feelings of hopelessness." She reports that she feels the most hopeless when she sees couples with their children. "I see that perfect little family and how great they are doing, and I start crying. I don't think I will find another spouse and not having a father around is hurting my kids. I am so upset about this that I can't sleep some nights." You validate the client's experience and work to build trust. You discuss cognitive distortions and examine cognitive errors the client has made during the session and the impact these errors have had on her emotions.

Domain 6. Core Counseling Attributes

Sub-Domain 6.M. Use foundational listening, attending, and reflecting skills.

10. What counseling skill would you use to empathetically validate the client's experience with how her relationship with food influences her behaviors and emotions?

- A. **Reflect the client's feelings about her weight loss.**
- B. Assess the logic of the client's claim that she is a whale.
- C. Reframe the client's statement to remind her she is capable of change
- D. Challenge the meaning of the client's statement about her weight loss.

Domain 5. Counseling Skills and Interventions

Sub-domain 5.F. Apply theory-based counseling intervention(s).

11. After validating the client's feelings about her weight, what cognitive error would you bring to her attention based on her statement?
- A. selective abstraction
 - B. all-or-nothing thinking
 - C. **minimizing**
 - D. catastrophizing

Domain 5. Counseling Skills and Interventions

Sub-Domain 5.N. Guide clients in the development of skills or strategies for dealing with their problems

12. From a CBT perspective, what question would you ask to challenge the logic of the client's belief about her behavior being detrimental to her children?
- A. "How would your children describe their life living with their grandmother?"
 - B. "What will your life look like if you find a new husband and remarry?"
 - C. "What other steps have you taken to improve your situation?"
 - D. **"How did you come to the conclusion that your children are being hurt?"**

Domain 2. Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis

Sub-Domain 2.G. Consider co-occurring diagnoses

13. Considering your client's statements in both sessions after the intake about worry and stress, what potential comorbid disorder warrants further assessment?
- A. separation anxiety disorder
 - B. prolonged grief disorder
 - C. panic disorder
 - D. **generalized anxiety disorder**

Review the [NCMHCE Content Outline](#) for a full description of the examination development, content, and weightage for each domain.

Selected References

NBCC does not endorse any study materials for the NCMHCE. The following references are presented as potentially helpful options in preparing for the NCMHCE. Performance enhancement on the NCMHCE is neither implied nor expressed.

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The Professional Resources Department of the National Board for Certified Counselors and Affiliates has developed a preparation guide for the NCMHCE that includes a six-simulation sample examination with an answer key and explanations for each choice. This guide can be purchased for \$34.95 at nbcc.org/exams/examprep.