Study Guidelines When Preparing for the Ph.D. in Counseling Comprehensive Examination

I. General Preparatory Instructions

All doctoral students must satisfactorily complete a Comprehensive Examination before graduation. The Examination is taken following the completion of the Integrative Core Course requirements and prior to the beginning of the Dissertation. The following guidelines govern the Comprehensive Examination:

A. Each Exam will consist of three essay questions pertaining to 1) counseling theory and clinical practice; 2) research and statistics; and 3) theology, spirituality, and philosophy of religion. Students will be given three hours to complete the Examination. All answers are expected to have current sources cited with dates and authors relevant to the subject matter. To be adequately prepared for the Comprehensive Exam, students should be able to answer questions drawn from the content communicated in the Integrative Core Courses listed below:

- COUC 700 – The History and Theology of Care and Ethics
- COUC 705 – Philosophy of Religion and the Helping Professions
- COUC 710 – Advanced Group Leadership
- COUC 715 – Applied Counseling Theories
- COUC 720 – Family Development
- COUC 725 – Counseling Religious Clients
- COUC 730 – Issues in Integration
- COUC 735 – Spirituality and Identity
- COUC 740 – Advanced Research Design
- COUC 745 – Advanced Statistics

B. The Comprehensive Examination may be taken on campus in the Tutoring and Testing Center or the Computer Lab. On three specific dates each year, Liberty will proctor Comprehensive Exams. The dates will be published in all future Ph.D. materials. Since Ph.D. intensives occur in January, May, and August, the Saturday morning exam will be scheduled in and around these scheduled class dates. The student will need to go through the normal registration process for the Comprehensive Exam and be present at 8:30 a.m. in the designated location on campus for the Examination.

All Exam questions must be typed. A computer will be provided for all students taking the Exam. Students are not allowed to use their own computers. The proctoring professor will provide a clean or new computer disk upon arrival the morning of administration. Proctors will monitor the process to assure the honesty and integrity of the Exam.

Students must register with the Faculty Director of the Ph.D. program at least four weeks prior to the date they intend to take the Comprehensive Examination.

A student who fails the Comprehensive Examination may take it over one time. Students failing twice will not be allowed to move to Candidacy, will be awarded the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies, and will be dismissed from the Ph.D. program.
Grading of the Comprehensive Examination will take six to eight weeks. Once the Exam is graded, the student will be notified in writing of the results.

Students should develop a study schedule that allows them to spend significant time preparing for the different areas of content on which they will be tested. To help prepare for the Exam, a reading list and sample questions are included below.

II. Sample Questions

A. Sample Questions Related to Counseling Theory and Clinical Practice

1. Compare and contrast your favorite secular and Christian counseling approaches (one of each). Tell why you like these approaches and how you utilize them in practice. Also discuss their respective strengths and weaknesses.

2. Choose from one of the specific secular counseling approaches listed below, and discuss how you would utilize this approach from a Christian perspective. Discuss how you would adapt, add to, or alter the theory to align it with biblical thinking (Adlerian, REBT, Client-Centered, Reality Therapy, Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy).

3. Describe your own approach to counseling - what you do and how you do it with individuals. Compare and contrast your approach with specific secular and Christian theoretical approaches.

B. Sample Questions Related to Research and Statistics

1. What are the most important considerations when evaluating a published study? Identify what you consider to be an excellent research study (not authored by one of your mentors), which has had a significant impact on your area of interest in counseling. Discuss the appropriateness of the design, methodology, sample, measures, and analyses. Discuss any changes that might have been made to improve the study and provide additional relevant data.

2. Define what is meant by a “quasi-experimental” design and an “experimental design.” In what ways are they similar and different? What are the advantages and limitations of each? Is one more suited to certain types of investigation? Would you ever use a quasi-experimental design over an experimental design? Finally, what is the role of correlation in each of these designs? Be sure to give examples to explain your answers.

3. You have received a two-year grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study the impact of immediate and extended family members on children’s academic success. You have been given the freedom to pursue these issues as you see best.
   a. What theories and research will you use to guide you?
   b. What would be your primary hypotheses?
c. How would you define your population? How would you sample? Give your rationale for these decisions.
d. What would be your research design to test these hypotheses? Give your rationale for the design.
e. What would be your proposed approach to data analysis and why?

C. Sample Question Related to Theology, Spirituality, and Philosophy of Religion

1. Carter and Narramore have discussed four ways of viewing the relationship between psychology and theology. These four ways have both a secular version (four ways the non-Christian views the relationship between psychology and theology) and a sacred version (four ways various Christians view the relationship between psychology and theology). Identify whether you will be discussing the secular or sacred version. Then discuss the four ways, including the key points that distinguish each of these approaches from the other three.

2. Develop a structure of personality. Cite contributors to the development of the model. Identify and discuss the role of various modalities in addressing the challenges related to spiritual formation. Cite major authors who have contributed to your understanding of spiritual formation. Specifically, identify the contribution of these authors as they relate to the various elements in personality that may require attention in therapy as you assist persons with the achievement of psychological and spiritual health.

3. Understanding that our western culture is built on radical, self-determining freedom and recognizing that we are presently reaping the results of this philosophy as we consider the contemporary postmodern culture with its search for the spiritual realm, discuss how a premodernist, modernist, and postmodernist would view spirituality and identity. Include in your discussion the following ideas as they relate to spirituality and identity:
   a. Terms: intrusion, idolatry, insignificance, isolation, image, infinity, incarnation, and intimacy (as were presented in class)
   c. The mention of at least one essay from Care For The Soul (Mark R. McMinn & Timothy R. Phillips)
   d. The mention of at least one of the following categories as it relates to spirituality and identity: history, philosophy, theology, psychology, culture, worldview, or language
   e. Your perspective on the formation and establishment of your personal identity

III. Suggested Reading List


