Our comprehensive exams are organized into four 3-hour exams, distributed over two days, three hours each morning and afternoon. The examinations are entirely essay questions, and, on the Process and Person exams, they are organized in such a way that you have to answer at least one question from each of the three or four areas that each of these sections taps. Each of these two sections represents several distinct areas, each of which we will test you over. The Process exam entails ethics, cognitive & learning psychology, and neuropsychology; and the Person exam includes personality, psychopathology, social psychology, and life span development. For each area you will have two or more questions from which you must choose one to answer.

The Assessment and Intervention exams are organized somewhat differently, since, in one sense, they each represent a single broad area. Notwithstanding, these exams are organized in a similar fashion to those for Process and Person, in the sense that they are organized into clusters of two or more questions, and from each cluster you must choose one or more questions to answer. Where there is a clear conceptual distinction in content for school and applied psychology, each cluster will contain at least one option representing for each of these distinct disciplines. A question requiring an understanding of the use of the MMPI-2-RF might, for example, be paired with one entailing the use of applied behavior analysis or the BASC-2. This plan also appears in the ethics section of the Process examination, where, if there is specific question applicable to the school setting, there is also one more specific to traditional clinical practice.

The Assessment exam includes all phases of psychological assessment, and applied behavioral analysis. Inasmuch as Cattell-Horn-Carroll models of cognitive ability based on factor analysis are prevalent in psychological assessment (cognitive and neuropsychological assessment), you will almost certainly (at least for a while) have to write a response to a question in which you demonstrate both your theoretical and practical understanding of that model and the related cross-battery assessment. (Note that CHC theory is not the same as cross-battery assessment.) You will also be liable for knowing about and using with intentionality any number of assessment procedures that you have learned in your clinical courses or practicum. Perhaps of greatest importance, you will need to be able to articulate your own empirically valid strategy for psychological assessment in general, and in relationship to specific issues or referral questions that might present themselves in your practice as a specialist in school psychology or as a master’s level applied/clinical psychologist. Sometimes such questions will require you to integrate other materials into the answer. These could, for example, include an understanding of developmental processes, relevant ethical issues, diagnostic considerations, etc. As you know, the field you have chosen is not divided into distinct and unrelated plots of information, and the exam in this area may well require an understanding of the interrelated nature of all the content you should know.

The Intervention exam includes individual psychotherapy, family & couples therapy, group therapy, behavioral intervention, and consultation. Again, you should be able to articulate and use an evidence based model of psychotherapy, counseling, and/or consultation on this exam. An
understanding of other content areas (e.g., ethics, abnormal psychology, assessment, etc.), with an ability to integrate it into treatment planning, will also be necessary.

Sample Questions (in No Particular Order)

1. Describe the conceptual and technical development the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) model of intelligence, including the basic ideas behind, and meanings of, the first- and second-stratum factors of intelligence, as well as “g”. Show how this model can be useful in developing strategies for assessing and empirically confirming specific learning disorders in both reading and mathematics. Give concrete examples. [Please note that CHC theory is very distinct from (though related to) cross-battery assessment.]

2. A student or client of yours has had a particularly difficult experience (i.e., she was driving an automobile which was involved in an accident that killed her passenger and best friend). The experience occurred less than a week ago, but already she is showing signs of distress, including panic anxiety, disruptive dreams and difficulty going to sleep, flashbacks, disruption of relationships with her family and other friends, and physiological changes associated with stress and fear. Strategically, and in detail, describe how you would go about treating this student or client.

3. Describe the broad concept of “memory” and how it might be thought of, and used, in the framework of learning in the public schools or the framework of change in psychotherapy. Give concrete examples from your developing areas of expertise to illustrate your points.

4. Describe the process of synaptic transmission in the vertebrate brain, including its role in psychopharmacology and in long-term genomic changes.

5. Describe the process by which, under IDEA 2004 and TEA guidelines, a child in the public schools of Texas is dismissed from special education as a child with a specific learning disability. Be concrete and use an example.

6. Select and describe a theoretical view associated with the psychology of personality that will be of value in your career track. Discussing both its strengths and weaknesses (while making it clear to the reader that you understand the model), show how in your view the theory is optimal for your anticipated career practice. In addition, compare it with at least two other models in relation to their usability in your field. You may not select Freud, Erikson, or Karen Horney.

7. Describe the way in which the concept of cognitive dissonance can be of value in understanding bullying, either in a school situation or in a work setting. Speak theoretically and with concrete examples illustrating your view, and if possible tie your analysis to psychodynamic thinking about bullying.

8. In the professional context in which you anticipate working how do you conceptualize and plan to deal with behavior marked by disorders of ____________?
9. Physical development is of course different and important in all stages of the life span. Describe the issues and challenges of physical growth and development, both for the developing person and the people closely associated with that person, during the following life phases: (a) infants and toddlers, (b) children ages 7-10, (c) early and late adolescents, (d) adults ages 38-48, and (e) adults over age 75. Give detailed examples in each case.

10. Describe the practical and conceptual uses of the MMPI-2-RF, or the MMPI-A, or the Rorschach Inkblot procedure, or the BASC-2 parent and teacher forms in conducting an assessment of behavioral, personality, or emotional functioning in the population with whom you plan to work in your career. Give several concrete examples supporting the effective use of the procedure you choose.

11. Describe the nature and purpose of preparing a specific treatment plan for a client or student whom you are treating. Give a specific example that accomplishes all the things that a treatment plan is designed to do.

12. Describe the nature and purpose of preparing an individual educational plan (IEP) for a student who is receiving special educational services because of an emotional disturbance. Give a specific example that accomplishes all the things that such an IEP is designed to do.

Last Desultory Thoughts on Preparation for Your Comprehensive Examinations

Do not take this process lightly. If you fail any given section two times, you must petition the graduate school to take it a third time – and they may turn you down (as they have others). No one to my knowledge has been allowed to take a section a fourth time (instead the graduate school removed them from the program).

The sequence in which you will take these exams will be as follows:

- Morning of the first day: Process
- Afternoon of the first day: Person
- Morning of the second day: Assessment
- Afternoon of the second day: Intervention

The first time you attempt these exams, you must attempt all four of them, and the next time(s), you must attempt all that you have yet to pass.

The reference section of this guide (below) was provided by soliciting suggestions from the entire faculty of the department (including psychology, counseling, and special education). Responses were uneven (read “maddeningly tepid,” or perhaps “passive-aggressive”), but those who responded generally gave you some good stuff to take a look at. Some of it is more focused on school psychology, and some on applied. A few texts came from the current syllabi from relevant courses. And, of the responses that were relevant, some faculty members provided much more than others. In a word then, the list is not proportionally accurate to the content of the examinations (though I think we have covered most things adequately). Your job is to survey the references and decide which ones and to what extent you should review them. Though I have not
labeled them by area, you should have no trouble sorting them out, and deciding which ones you should emphasize.
References


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1 These are the current references solicited from and provided by members of the faculty of the Department of Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education between 21 August and 22 September 2014. A number of faculty members did not respond to the request.

2 Publication dates given for several books are the dates the book was actually released, not the dates given in the frontispiece of the book, which are often as much as a year later.


University of Miami. CITI program: Collaborative institutional training initiative at the University of Miami. https://www.citiprogram.org/
