

**AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF CERTIFIED EDUCATIONAL PLANNERS**  
**www.aicep.org**

**Questions and Answers about the CEP Program**

**ABOUT STEP ONE (THE APPLICATION)**

**1. What is the Certified Educational Planner designation?**

It is a Mark of Distinction demonstrating expanded experience, knowledge and commitment to the fields of educational advising and consulting.

**2. Why should I be certified?**

The profession of college counseling and educational consulting has grown in many ways in the last several decades. The need for qualified people in the field of consulting and college counseling has increased at a rapid pace. Indeed, anyone can hang out a shingle or be designated "counselor" or "college guidance". While people can join the professional associations, and that is encouraged, only the Certified Educational Planner program requires practitioners to stay current in and committed to the profession by visiting and evaluating schools, pursuing professional development opportunities, attending meetings, and staying involved. Thus, the CEP program is a major effort to increase the standards of the profession. We want the public, and our educational colleagues, to recognize excellence. We believe that the CEP program affords parents and educators a gauge of excellence.

**3. But I'm established in my school or in my practice. I have diplomas and other recognitions. Why should I do this?**

Because you wouldn't be in this profession if you didn't believe in the value of education and continued learning. This is your opportunity to turn that philosophy inward. These days, everyone from plumbers to psychologists is certified. Educational planning is no less important. Lastly, you are saying something to young people entering the profession. You are leaving a legacy of excellence for others to follow. You are also protecting the profession from lax standards and mediocrity.

**4. How does the process of certification work?**

Step One is to complete an application, available at [aicep.org](http://aicep.org). Points are awarded for education, experience, activities and professional activity. The application also asks for professional references and adherence to the Principles of Good Practice. Step Two is taking an examination.

**5. How many years of experience do I need to be certified?**

There are no absolutes or specific number of years. We know this makes it difficult to know for certain whether you will have the points, so let us explain. The pathways leading to success in educational planning are varied, and an appropriate background for one person is not necessarily right for the next.

While the CEP application includes many categories, almost no one will have relevant experience in every area. Some have been practicing a long while, some have been active in educational organizations, some have written articles, and so on.

While there is no set or "right" background for certification, it is fair to say certification is not intended for the person new to the field. It is intended for those who have demonstrated commitment and expertise. Members of the Commission on Credentialing are glad to discuss this with you and help you determine if an application is appropriate.

## 6. Can you be more specific about whether I can be certified?

As a very rough gauge, look at the following list and check off those that are true of you:

- Educational consultant for 4-5 years
- Paid educational experience directly or closely related to educational planning (for example, college counselor, admission officer, or special needs program head) for 4-5 years
- Attendance at professional association meetings (NACAC, NAIS, IECA, HECA, LDA, etc.) for the last 5 years
- Master's degree (see question #8)
- Speaking, or being a panelist at, related conferences or programs or writing on educational related themes
- Professional association leadership
- Educationally related volunteer service (sustained over 3 or more years)
- Consulting to educational institutions
- Other educational experiences or activities directly related to professional development in consulting

If none of these are true of you, additional time is likely necessary before you can become certified. If in doubt, we'd like to talk to you. More examples follow in the next question.

## 7. Can you give me some examples of persons who earned the points necessary in Step One?

Sure. Here are the credentials of one educational consultant who earned the points necessary to move onto the examination:

- Bachelors and Master's degrees (Master's in Human Development)
- Earned CEUs through attending programs sponsored by the College Board and LDA.
- Five years of conference attendance at national and regional ACAC's and the state association of independent schools
- Attendance at the IECA Summer Training Institute
- Educational consultant for 4 years
- College counselor at a public high school for 3 years
- Speaker and/or moderator at several educational meetings

Here is an example of a high school counselor who earned the points necessary to move onto the examination:

- Bachelors and Masters Degrees (Master's in Guidance and Counseling)
- High school college counselor for 7 years
- Writer of two articles about college admission
- Panelist at 3 national or regional admission conference sessions
- Attendance at many national and regional NACAC meetings
- Recognition from NACAC (PRO program)

## 8. Is a Master's degree required?

Yes, but exceptions are made on the basis of experience in the field. Indeed, a Master's degree has become the standard in many fields of education. The Commission recognizes, however that people vary in their backgrounds and that educational planning is in many ways experiential. Hence, those candidates *whose only deficit* in Step One is a lack of a Master's degree, are considered on a case-by-case basis in the category called "Special Circumstances." This category is designed to embrace any unique life skill or training.

As indicated above, there are many combinations of relevant experiences, leadership, and commitment and we are glad to discuss your circumstances individually. For example, a person who has been an education option provider for ten years or longer should apply under this provision. Also encouraged is the person who has been practicing for fewer years, but has demonstrated leadership in a professional association and visited widely. Again, if in doubt, please contact us so that we may review your individual circumstances.

## **9. Assuming I earn the points necessary, what happens next?**

At that point, you are notified and subsequently discuss the examination with a member of the Commission. The test parameters and any unique concerns you have are thoroughly discussed.

## **ABOUT STEP TWO (THE EXAMINATION)**

### **10. What does the examination contain?**

The examination is an "essay" type test with two sections: institutional knowledge and professional knowledge. The test is proctored. It can be written in long hand or typed on a laptop. Arrangements for taking the test are made individually, but the test is generally given at major education association meetings.

### **11. What is institutional knowledge?**

When you apply, you list 25 colleges/schools/special needs programs you visited recently. The examination covers three of those institutions. The questions are as follows:

- The type of student who might be happy and best-served
- Admission criteria
- Stand out features or attributes of the school
- An example of a similar school
- Description of the physical plant
- Environment in which the school is located and influences of surrounding communities.

### **12. Do I need to know every detail of each institution?**

No, but you need to have a sense for the distinctive qualities of the schools. You are expected to have a general understanding of particular schools. You are tested on your ability to describe the environment/culture of the institutions you chose to visit.

### **13. What is professional knowledge?**

This is the section of the examination that allows you to share the central elements of your work. Specifically, you are given 3 case studies covering your field(s) of professional expertise (for example, colleges, schools, or special needs programs). After reading a case study of a typical student and involving various educational planning issues, you are asked to describe a plan of action in working with the student, to assess college/school characteristics that would be right for the student, and to provide and rationalize specific institutional recommendations.

### **14. How do I study for the examination?**

For the institutional knowledge section, you have submitted 25 colleges/schools/special needs programs. Read over your visit and other notes about these institutions to refresh your memory. Look at the questions that will be asked. (Remember, three institutions are chosen for you to write about.) For the professional knowledge section, review your "plan" for working with students. What are the most important elements? How do you deliver services to students? What factors do you consider as you do your work (student background, qualities the student is seeking, parental input, etc.) How do you determine good matches? What are the limits of your advice?

**15. Oh dear. I haven't taken an examination in years. I don't know whether I can do it. Can you help reduce my fear?**

We'll try because this is a common feeling. First, this is a professional certification and so we won't minimize the fact that it is, however you cut it, an examination. Indeed, the examination is a reflection of a growing profession, and it is substantive and meaningful. That said, the examination is infinitely fair and doable for most consultants who earn the points necessary in Step One. A few additional points:

- The examination is pass/fail. There are no "shades" of passing and no grades.
- The examination measures general approaches to ones work with students, not details. No memorization is required.
- The examination contains no tricks or misleading information. It is straight-forward and professional.

**16. I'm embarrassed to have fellow counselors read my examination. What can you tell me about that?**

We understand. First, the members of the Commission on Credentialing are carefully chosen. It is, after all, an important certification board and we want those most fair to serve as board members. Of the fifteen or so members of the Commission, three read applications. Second, everyone taking the examination is given a number and that number is what readers see as they review your application. They do not see your name. This process is completely confidential.

**17. I've heard that the examination can take hours and hours. Is that true?**

It's true that a few people have taken 5 or 6 hours to complete the examination. It is also true that others have completed the examination in significantly less time. The average is around 3 hours. The Commission has grappled with the time issue and doesn't want time to be a limiting factor for anyone. While you will be given instructions that say "more is not necessarily better," you will also be told that we don't want you to feel rushed. Our goal is to be encouraging and helpful.

**19. What if I fail the examination?**

In the unlikely event that you passed Step One and do not pass the examination, you will have an opportunity to take it again. These matters are handled individually and sensitively.

**20. Will you help me become a CEP?**

Yes, absolutely. We want the best professionals to be certified. We will work with you in helping you consider experiences that may be relevant to amassing the points necessary for Step One and to be successful on the examination. We believe we've established a reasonable and unbiased way to assess professional know-how and want to work toward achieving this Mark of Distinction.

**21. How do I get more information about becoming a CEP?**

By writing [info@aicep.org](mailto:info@aicep.org) for an application. You can also, through the website, ask to speak with a Commissioner about your particular needs and concerns.