SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

SPRING 2025 COMPREHENSIVE EXAM GUIDELINES

Plan B students must pass a Comprehensive Examination administered by the School as one of the requirements for the MSW degree. "A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination evidence independent thinking, appropriate organization and high level of writing competency, critical analysis, and accuracy of documentation" (The SDSU Online Catalog, San Diego State University, 2024-2025). The school has developed a written comprehensive examination process to meet this University requirement. Students are permitted to take the examination up to three times. If a student is unable to pass the examination after three attempts the school will disqualify them from the MSW program and the degree will not be awarded. Thus, the examination is seen by the School and the University as the culmination of your educational process and should be taken quite seriously.

EXAM SCHEDULE

	COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION TIMELINE
March 17, 2025	Eligibility Criteria Must be Met
March 25, 2025	Eligibility status emailed to students
April 7, 2025	Examination – Direct practice (9:00am to 1:00pm) (Aztec Student Union: Templo Mayor) Examination – Admin & CD (9:00am to 1:00pm) (Location: North Education (NE-073))
April 14, 2025	Results are emailed to students.
April 14-18, 2025	Students who fail the exam may contact their assigned faculty reviewer to review the exam. Direct practice students should contact Dr. Ko. Macro students should contact Dr. Urada for the identity of their reviewer.
July 8, 2025	Retake Examination Location and time TBA
July 15, 2025	Results of Retake Exam will be sent to you by Dr. Fuentes.

ELIGIBILITY To be eligible to take the written comprehensive examination you must meet ALL of the following criteria by the deadline date:

- 1. Complete all first-year classes (31 units) and SW 744 or 740, SW 791 or SW 797, SW 720 ("Civic Engagement" topic required for students in the Admin/CD area of specialization) and 750 or 755 (4 units) with a minimum grade of C in each letter-graded course.
- 2. Be advanced to candidacy
- 3. Have a cumulative 3.0 GPA
- 4. Have no Incomplete grades
- 5. Have filed for May graduation or be eligible to graduate in August or December

If you are not eligible to take the examination you will have to wait until the Spring 2026 semester to take the examination. Taking the exam assumes that your eligibility problem has been cleared up. There are no exceptions to this rule so it is the student's responsibility to ensure that they meet all eligibility criteria.

ELIGIBILITY LIST

You will receive an email indicating your eligibility for either the Direct Practice or the Administration/Community Development Comprehensive Exam on <u>March 25, 2025</u>. If you do not receive an email indicating your eligibility, it means:

- a. You are a Plan A student doing a thesis or doing the Alternative publication option
- b. You have not met one or more eligibility criteria
- c. We made an error

If you were left off the list, put under the wrong area of specialization, or do not plan to take the examination, please contact Dr. Fuentes by email (dahlia.fuentes@sdsu.edu) or stop in at her office HH-119.

EXAMINATION FORMAT

The examination is a four-hour exam focusing on your advanced year area of specialization in either the direct practice/ clinical or administrative /community development (macro) practice area. The direct practice and macro exams will include a series of vignettes where students will be asked to answer a series of objective questions that are related to that vignette. The exams will also include a series of objective questions covering a variety of topic areas, and these questions do not refer to a specific vignette. Both exams require students to use appropriate social work intervention models, knowledge/skills, and methods of evaluating those interventions.

WHAT TO BRING

The School will provide Gradescope forms. You should bring the following items with you to the examination:

- a. Your SDSU ID card for identification
- b. #2 pencil(s) for filling out the Gradescope answer sheet
- c. A good quality eraser for changing your answers on the answer sheet

No cell phones are allowed in the exam room

NO SHOWS

The policy on students who miss the examination is:

- a. If you are ill on the examination day you must notify the School by either calling the main telephone number 619-594-6865, and leaving a phone message, or informing HH 119 office staff directly, or by emailing Dr. Fuentes (dahlia.fuentes@sdsu.edu). You must bring a letter from a doctor verifying your illness to be eligible to take the exam on the second examination day as your first try.
- b. You may have an unanticipated event or emergency of a serious nature that prevents you from taking the examination. You should call the School office and follow the procedures outlined above. In addition, contact the School as early as possible so your request can be evaluated before the exam. If you are unable to inform the School of your request before exam you must present a justification and documentation that includes: (1) a description of the event that caused you to miss the exam, (2) a justification of why the event was unanticipated and necessitated missing the exam, (3) and you must present satisfactory reasons for why you were not able to contact the School prior to the exam. Based on the evidence you present; the School will decide whether or not you are eligible to take the exam on the second examination day as your first try.
- c. If you do not meet the conditions in a and b, or the School decides based on the evidence you present that your reason for missing the exam was not justified, you forfeit your first examination try. This forfeit means you have only 2 actual chances to take the examination. You are eligible to take the examination in <u>July 8, 2025</u> which is the date scheduled for the retake examination. You need to follow procedures outlined in this document in order to take the exam.

APPEALING FAILING GRADES

If a student sits for the exam, the grade will stand, unless they can demonstrate either of the following two conditions. (1) A student may believe that procedures outlined in this document have not been followed by the School. It is the student's responsibility to present evidence that this is the case. (2) A student can demonstrate that the answer key used to score grades was unambiguously wrong.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Special testing arrangements are available for students identified through SDSU Student Disability Services. Students requiring these arrangements must contact Shelly Paule (Graduate Advisor) and go through the appropriate procedures and documentation at Student Disability Services.

EVALUATING THE EXAMINATION

Students must mark their Gradescope form carefully using a #2 pencil. To change an answer a student must **completely erase** the former answer with a **clean eraser**. If a student has doubts about whether an answer was completely erased, please complete a new Gradescope form.

A Gradescope machine will be used to score this test. The grade will be based on how the machine reads the answer sheet. There will be 100 questions used to calculate the student's score, and a score of 75 or more is a passing score. Students will have up to 4 hours to complete the exam. Questions may be included on the exam that are under consideration for use in future presentations of the exam. These will not be identified in the exam, but they

will not be used in the calculation of your final score.

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Results for the exam will be emailed to students by April 14, 2025. If a problem arises in the notification process, you will be contacted by Dr. Fuentes.

EXAMINATION REVIEW-FAILURES

For both Advanced Direct Practice and Administration and Community Development students, you will be assigned a faculty member to review your exam performance. The faculty member will not go over specific items in the exam nor will they allow you to read test items. The aim is to help you understand the areas in which you are weak as you prepare for your retake. You are not allowed to remove the examination from the faculty member's office or to make copies.

SECOND EXAMINATION PROCEDURE

Procedures duplicate the conditions of the first examination process. All the same expectations of the first examination will apply again and different examinations will be given. The different examinations, however, reflect the same set of knowledge and skills requirements, as the initial examinations required.

If you plan to retake the comprehensive examination, you must notify Dr. Fuentes by email (<u>dahlia.fuentes@sdsu.edu</u>) or stop by her office (HH-119). If you do not notify us, you will not be permitted to sit for the examination(s).

SECOND EXAMINATION EVALUATION/NOTIFICATION

Evaluation and notification procedures for the second examination process are handled somewhat differently. Students will be emailed to confirm the date/time and location of the retake exam. Results will not be communicated over the telephone. Results of the examination will be emailed to the students.

THIRD EXAMINATION PROCESS

If a student fails the examination a second time, a meeting must be scheduled with Shelly Paule (Graduate Advisor). At this meeting, a review of the issues and processes up to that point is made. No student can sit for the comprehensive examination for a third time until a written plan of action is developed and implemented to address the identified deficit areas or skills. The Student Affairs Committee must approve the written plan of action and approve its satisfactory completion. No student will be permitted to take the comprehensive examination a third time until April 2026.

EXAM INTEGRITY

Your exam will be numbered and you will sign for receipt, and again when you return it. The Exam must be returned in order for you to receive a grade. **Cell phones are not allowed to be turned on while in the exam room.** If you need to leave the room during the exam, you must ask the Proctor for permission. The Proctor will hold the student's Gradescope sheet while they are out of the room. Violations of any of the above may lead to the disqualification of your exam.

DIRECT PRACTICE / CLINICAL Specialization STUDY GUIDE

The comprehensive examination, while primarily addressing Direct Practice content, draws on material studied in the Generalist Year(s) and basic policy principles and applications at the advanced year. The exam is, therefore, comprehensive in its scope.

Outcome Expectations - SW 744, 739, & 791

- 1. Demonstration of knowledge and skill in assessment, diagnosis, and intervention knowledge to specific cases, as evidenced by application to a variety of vignettes and stand-alone questions.
- 2. Demonstration of knowledge and skill in the application of specific interventions, modalities, and processes in the three phases of treatment, as evidenced by application to a variety of vignettes and stand-alone questions.
- 3. Demonstration of skill in the referral process of direct social work practice in preventive and adjunctive services, as evidenced by application to a variety of vignettes and stand-alone questions.
- 4. Demonstration of understanding one's scope of competency and ethical and legal issues related to confidentiality, professional conduct, and high-risk client situations (e.g., child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, suicide assessment, Tarasoff concerns) as evidenced by application to a variety of vignettes and standalone questions.
 - a. Conscious use of the NASW Code of Ethics in social work practice
 - b. Conscious use of self in demonstrating cultural humility, providing culturally relevant, sensitive, and competent services at the individual, family, and community level
- 5. Demonstration of knowledge and skill in applying evidence-based practice (EBP) processes to guide the selection of interventions
- 6. Demonstration of knowledge and skill in formulating a relevant evaluation plan (including but not limited to the use of assessment instruments and measurement tools), implementing an appropriate evaluation design and data analysis plan (visual and statistical procedures)

Format of Questions

A series of vignettes will be presented which vary in length and detail. Following each vignette, a number of questions will be posed that address some or all of the following areas. The "stand-alone" questions that do not relate to a specific vignette are also based on these areas.

The following are suggested topics and a selected bibliography to guide preparation for the comprehensive examination taken by students in the Direct Practice /Clinical Area of Specialization.

1. SW 744 – ADVANCED SEMINAR IN DIRECT PRACTICE WITH INDIVIDUALS

General Area	Specific Content
I. Biopsychosocial assessment	A. Impact of current environmental and social issues; gathering developmental and social history; mental status exam; assessing biological and psychological functioning; assessing risk factors; health and safety issues; assessing the presenting problem(s) and underlying individual and/or family issues; identifying client strengths
	B. Using a Social Work Practice Framework to Guide Clinical Interventions with Individual Clients
	 Selection Criteria: What Works for Whom: Application of EBP Principles regarding efficacy with specific populations Short-term vs. Long-term Treatment Approaches Cultural issues; Context of treatment – how could interventions be tailored to different cultures Clinical Social Work settings in Social Work Practice
II. Assessment and Diagnosis	A. Diagnostic Impressions
	 Developing a diagnostic impression or problem description Knowledge, purpose, and application of the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual (DSM-5) Implementation of DSM-5 skills in assessment; cultural impact of diagnosis Exploring and analyzing relevant biological, psychological, ecological, and high-risk factors for clients Mental Status Examination (MSE); content and use of the MSE
	 B. Diversity and Culture Cultural humility with diversity issues (i.e., race, ethnicity, immigration, refugee and asylum seekers, religion, spirituality, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression) Mental health disparities for ethnic minorities Culturagram assessment
III. Practice theories/models: Under each practice	 A. Systems/Ecological: Practice Models: Generalist Intervention Model (problem-solving), Clinical Case Management, Multisystemic Therapy, Family Systems approaches
theory are listed practice models that are primarily based on that particular	 B. Psychodynamic - Major Developmental Theories: Psychoanalysis, Ego Psychology (Erikson), Attachment

General Area	Specific Content	
theory. Content to be covered in each theory or model may include: major theorist; major concepts explicated by the theory/model; how the concepts are used to	 (Bowlby), Object Relations (Winnicott, Main), Self-Psychology (Kohut) Practice Models: Ego Supportive Therapy (Goldstein), Interpersonal Psychotherapy, Short-term Psychodynamic Therapy C. Behavioral/Social Learning: 	
understand client functioning and applied; strengths and limitations in terms of demonstrated efficacy, appropriateness with diverse populations	 Practice Models: Behavior Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Prolonged Exposure Therapy, Exposure Therapy/Exposure and Response Prevention Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization Therapy (EMDR), Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Psychoeducation 	
	 D. Cognitive Theory: Practice Models: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy, Motivational 	
	Interviewing, Solution-Focused Therapy/Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, Trauma Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy	
	 E. Humanistic Theory: Practice Models: Crisis theory/Crisis Intervention, Client Centered Therapy 	
IV. Clinical case management:	 A. Coordination of adjunctive resources, client advocacy and support, basic knowledge and the role of the social worker regarding the use of psychotropic medications in treatment B. Person-In-Environment – intervention planning, appropriate referrals to other resources and services, and advocacy for clients. 	
V. Therapeutic Intervention and Techniques	 A. Working with Individuals: Children and Adolescents, Adults, and Elderly B. Crisis intervention and support (support systems and service delivery) 	
	C. Skills and Interventions: Supportive and Facilitative Skills, Cognitive Behavioral Skills, Case Management, Therapeutic Communication Skills	
	D. Therapeutic alliance/relationship, Transference/Countertransference, Secondary Trauma	
VI. Human diversity	Issues of culture, race, ethnicity, immigration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, spirituality, age, or disability; appropriate professional conduct and response in the context of culturally sensitive practice	

VII. Legal and Ethical Issues Impacting Social Work Practice	 A. Confidentiality, privileged communication and exceptions, high-risk assessments and interventions with dangerous client situations (danger to self/suicide assessments, others [Tarasoff], gravely disabled, mandated laws, scope of practice, California laws and mental health practice, minors and treatment, involuntary hospitalization [5150], HIPAA, record keeping, and documentation B. Professional conduct, professional boundaries/dual relationships, disciplinary action, scope of competence, informed consent, ethical dilemmas, ethical decision-making, and NASW Code of Ethics, Telehealth
VIII. Evaluation	Evidence-based practice issues, research designs, research strategies, instruments, and tools; advantages and limitations of using evidence-based interventions

2. SW 739 - ADVANCED SEMINAR IN DIRECT PRACTICE WITH FAMILIES

General Area	Specific Content
Practice Theories/Models	 A. Family Systems Concepts B. Structural Family Therapy C. Bowenian Family Systems Therapy D. Experiential Family Therapy E. Strategic Family Therapy F. Solution-Focused Family Therapy G. Narrative Family Therapy
The Family Context	 A. Comprehensive and ongoing assessment of the individual within the context of the family, and of the family within larger systems B. Individual and family high-risk and underlying issues C. Genograms, Ecomaps, and Culturegrams D. Communication E. Boundaries, structure, roles and rules F. Family of origin issues G. Parents use of children as objects through parentification H. Identified patient's symptoms (i.e., acting out behavior, depression) and their relationship to family system dynamics, roles, structure, etc. I. Individual and family separation and differentiation issues J. Ethnocultural, racial, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, immigration, disability, and socioeconomic contexts K. Strengths, social support, cultural and other emotional and instrumental resources at the individual, family, and community level

3. SW 791 - EVALUATION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

General Area	Specific Content
Evaluation in Social Work Practice	 A. Using the EBP process and critical thinking to guide the choice of interventions and program evaluation efforts 1. Apply practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research in intervention/program evaluation. 2. Use the literature review process to identify empirical literature in the selection and evaluation of interventions/programs
	B. Use of appropriate research design, measurement tools, and sampling procedures to evaluate program effectiveness and guide choice of intervention/programs, based on the goals and objectives (outcome/process) of the program.
	 C. Research Plan Formulation and implementation of a relevant program evaluation plan (including but not limited to using instruments and measurement tools) The use of observation, self-report, and collateral information to collect data to understand/evaluate program effectiveness Identify an appropriate data analysis plan based on the available data type (visual and statistical procedures) Strengths and limitations of using evidence-based interventions, based on external/internal validity risks
	 D. Ethical and Professional Behavior 1. Understand the importance of protecting human subjects in evaluation endeavors 2. Diversity Considerations

Bibliography

Direct Practice (744 & 739)

- 1. American Psychological Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (5th Ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- 2. Brandell, J. R. (Ed.) (2021). *Theory and Practice in Clinical Social Work (3rd ed.)*. San Diego, CA: Sage.
- 3. Gehart, D. R. (2023). *Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy: A Practical Approach to Theories and Clinical Case Documentation (4th ed.)*. Cengage Learning
- 4. National Association of Social Workers. (2021). *NASW Code of ethics.* Washington, D.C.: Author. <u>www.socialworkers.org</u>
- 5. O'Hare, T. (2021). *Evidence-based practices for social workers: An interdisciplinary approach.* (3rd Ed.). Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books/Oxford Publications.

Direct Practice Evaluation

Royse, D., Thyer, B., & Padgett, D. (2016). *Program evaluation: An introduction* to an evidence-based approach (6th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

<u>Recommended</u>

- 1. California Legislation, California Law: <u>www.leginfo.legislature.ca.gov</u>
- 2. Cournoyer, B. (2017). *The evidence based social worker skills book.* New York: Cengage Learning.
- 3. Tripodi, T. (1998). *A primer on single subject design for clinical social workers.* Washington, D.C.: NASW Press.

Or:

4. Bloom, M., Fisher, J., and Orme, J. (1999). *Evaluative practice: Guidelines for the accountable professional (* 3rd Ed). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Administration & Community Development Specialization STUDY GUIDE

The Comprehensive Exam, while primarily addressing content from SW 740 and SW 720 Civic Engagement, also draws on material studied in the Generalist Year(s) and basic policy principles and applications in the advanced year(s), as well as applied research. The exam is, therefore, comprehensive in its scope.

A series of vignettes will be presented which vary in length and detail. Following each vignette, several close-ended, multiple-choice questions will be posed, totaling 100. The questions will address all 9 EPAS competencies via Administration and Community Development content.

The following are suggested topics and selected bibliography to guide preparation for the Comprehensive Examination taken by students in the Administration and Community Development area of specialization.

General Area	Specific Content
Strategic Management	Mission, vision, & values Stakeholders SWOT analysis Strategy implementation
Marketing	4 P's: product, price, place, promotion Marketing audit Market niche, positioning Market mix
Social Enterprise and Innovation	Changing the way social workers do business Business planning for social workers Human-centered design thinking Change management
Finance	Financial management Financial leadership Direct and indirect costs Cost efficiency, cost-effectiveness Program structures, and responsibility centers Break-even analysis Revenue and expense analysis Cutback management
Governance and boards	Roles: Board, CEO Board functions, Board member criteria Board development

1. Social Work 740: ADVANCED SEMINAR IN SOCIAL WORK ADMINISTRATION

Performance Management	Management audits Performance measurement: outputs, outcomes Cost effectiveness
Diversity and discrimination	Diversity principles & practices Management of a multicultural workforce
Ethics & Values	Ethical issues & requirements Ethical dilemmas in administration
Anti-racist and anti-oppressive management approaches	Impact of white supremacy on organizational practices Neoliberal and Managerialist Ideologies

2. Social Work 720: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

General Area	Specific Content
Political Participation of Social Workers (Libby's Lobbying book)	Developing advocacy campaigns, e.g., understanding how a policy affects a community (e.g., Grand Challenges of Social Work or local/state/federal policies) Developing and Implementing a Plan for Advocacy and Lobbying (10 steps)
Cultural Responsiveness & Entering Communities	Understanding the contexts of historical community trauma and how it impacts communities
	Cultural humility; Entering & engaging diverse communities
	Interpersonal social work skills for community practice; Relational building, bridging, and establishing trust as an organizer; Finding gatekeepers
	Social and economic justice practice
Strategies/Tactics of Civic Engagement, Community Organizing,	Developing organizing capacity; Recognizing leadership and capacity in various communities
and Community Mobilization	Interviewing (one-on-one, online engagement, community events, forums, public hearings/meetings)
	Neighborhood and community organizing; Social, economic, & sustainable development; Social movements; social action

Evidence-based Community Practice	Community-based participatory research methods (steps of interviewing, use of community advisory boards, ongoing assessment of agreed upon change)
	Asset-based community development; asset mapping, identifying stakeholders, internal and external resources and social capital
Ethics in Community Practice	Ethical conduct of community practice and research: Empowering marginalized communities Sustainability, community ownership
Grantsmanship	Integrating civic engagement into grant proposals (engaging communities, stakeholders, and funders) Elements of a grant proposal (e.g., specific aims, letters of inquiry/intent, significance, innovation, methods, budgets)

3. Review of Social Work 632: ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

General Area	Specific Content
Program design & development (Kettner book)	Principles of program design Evidence-based practice in program design Goals, objectives, activities Logic Model
Management information systems	Inputs, throughputs, outputs, outcomes
Organizational Climate and Culture	Norms, values, and ethics
Diversity and Ethics	Creating diverse workplaces; cultural humility
Community Practice	Community change Power, coalitions Building the organizing effort Strategies and tactics (e.g., community organizing models, consensus organizing) Grand Challenges of Social Work Theory of Change Model (see link in the bibliography)
(Kania & Kramer article)	Collective Impact Model (5 conditions)

4. Social Work 791: RESEARCH

General Area	Specific Content
Qualitative and quantitative methods	Data collection methods, sampling
	participants, data sources
Program evaluation	Formative, process, and outcome
	evaluations
Client satisfaction and outcomes	Measures and measurement tools
Research and evaluation designs	Pre- and post-tests, randomized controlled trials
Data analysis	Descriptive, correlational, predictor and outcome (independent and dependent variables), qualitative, secondary data analyses

BIBLIOGRAPHY (On reserve or available at the library)

Organizations and Communities:

Kettner, P., Moroney, R., & Martin, L. (2017). *Designing and managing programs: An effectiveness-based approach*, 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9, 35-41. https://www.glc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Collective-Impact-Stanford.pdf

Theory of Change model

https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/how-does-theory-of-change-work /example/backwards-mapping/

Administrative/Community Development Practice:

Hoefer, R., & Watson, L.D. (2019). *Essentials of Social Work Management and Leadership.* Cognella.

Germak, A. (2015). *Essential Business Skills for Social Work Managers: Tools for Optimizing Programs and Organizations*. Philadelphia: Routledge. (Book used in 2020 for those who took the class then)

HBSE Civic Engagement:

Howlett, S. & Bourque, R. (2016). *Getting funded: the complete guide to writing grant proposals (6th Edition).* Seattle, WA: Word & Raby Publishing. **or**

Hoefer, R. (2023). Funded! Successful Grantwriting for your Nonprofit. San Diego, CA: Cognella Academic Publishing.

Hardina, D. (2013). *Interpersonal social work skills for community practice*. NY, NY: Springer Publishing Company, LLC. **(Free downloadable book at the SDSU library)**

Libby, P. & Associates (2020). The Lobbying Strategy Handbook: 10 Steps to Advancing

any Cause Effectively (2nd Edition). Oxford University Press. or

Libby, P. & Associates (2022). *The Empowered Citizen's Guide: 10 steps to passing a law that matters to you.* New York: Oxford University Press, 177 pages.

Evaluation Research:

Royse, D., Thyer, B., & Padgett, D. (2016). *Program evaluation: An introduction* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole. or most recent book used for 791