

# POST Exam Questionnaire

(Spring 2004 Exam)

Feel free to either answer these questions (by filling in answers on this page) as listed, or just use my questions for ideas as you give me your overall impressions:

**1. What did you think of the Exam Experience – any comments about:**

- The facility?

*I thought the facility was fine. The staff was very nice and professional.*

It was great. The Staff in Mountlake Terrace was very professional, friendly and helpful.

- The test-taking environment?

**Facility and Environment:**

*I took the test at Spokane center. The facility was satisfactory. They asked me to leave my jacket outside in a closet before entering into the test taking room. But in the middle of the test, I felt cold and had to go unlock the closet to get the jacket. That was wasting a few minutes due to their suggestion.*

*I was very distracted by other people taking different tests. The man next to me typed non-stop for 2 hours. It was very distracting even with the headphones. Other than that, it was a comfortable environment.*

Great. There were different tests being conducted for different organizations, but silence was maintained and I never felt distracted.

- The ease of taking the exam on the computer? Ease of using the note-taking function on the exam?

**Computer**

*Taking the exam in computer was great. It saved time in selecting the right answers or changing the answer. I could click or unclick several times which could have been time-consuming in pencil-paper system.*

*One major problem was reading from the monitor screen, especially long paragraph statements with 2 or 3 questions afterwards. One can't view both the paragraph and the question at the same time without scrolling up and down.*

**Note-taking**

*Extra paper, pencil and calculator were helpful to take notes, do simple math.*

*I thought the computer format was fine. (Maybe a little hard on the eyes after a few hours – the monitors weren't of the best quality)*

The facility was fine and people were nice. The silence earphones in the test taking room were great. The computer exam was easy to navigate.

The exam environment seemed fine to me. I had some trepidation about doing the exam online, but there were good methods of marking answers you wanted to go back to, etc.

It worked very well. Very user-friendly.

## 2. **The Exam – what did you think about:**

- The exam content? Were there any topics you didn't expect or prepare for? Did the content seem balanced by topic or did it seem weighted toward one specific area (e.g., management? transportation? etc.)

### ***Exam content***

*There was one question related to the state legislature, the process of a bill being approved, which I didn't expect. Didn't expect conflict resolution/ negotiation related questions. Didn't expect question from 1990 census, although later I found it was covered in the CPC manual. Otherwise, the content seemed balanced.*

***There seemed to be an abundance of Comprehensive Planning questions. I was disappointed that there weren't more history or law questions. I was under the impression that those were important topics to "memorize", which I did. There seemed to only be 2-3 history/law questions total on the entire exam. I feel like I wasted a lot of time memorizing topics that weren't covered.***

- The format of the questions – Was it clear what was being asked? Confusing? Misleading?

*Some questions were ambiguous, and could be argued between two options based on what the person's focus was.*

***For the most part the format was easy to follow. Although some of the questions seemed too "wordy" as I had to re-read them a couple of times to understand what was being asked.***

My one plea, choose words carefully in the questions. My advice to those studying for the test is to take each word seriously. My most aggravating question (which I'm sure I missed) had to do with MPOs. Among the answers were:

1. Monitor air quality in the region
2. Provide development dollars for major projects

One interpretation of "2" is that development means private and major projects means private. Could have been a development grant program, tax increment financing, or some other type of development financing. If so, then 2 is not the right answer. If the word transportation is added then it becomes clearer. Also, MPOs don't provide dollars, they coordinate the dispersal of dollars.

I chose "1" assuming that MPOs coordinate the air quality impacts of transportation projects as part of their project review. Obviously the Air Quality Authority does the physical monitoring.

*There are arguments for each interpretation, but since only one can be right, it's important that accurate wording is used to convey what is intended.*

- **Was the time allotted enough? Too much?**

*Allotted time would have been perfect for me if I didn't go outside at all, but it gave time to finish and review (well, I didn't get to review them all!).*

***I had enough time. I finished the exam in about 3 ½ hours.***

Had enough time.

- **Was it easy? Hard? Do you think you passed?**

*It was hard; I assumed a 50-50 chance, and I was hoping to pass marginally.*

***It was not an easy exam, but I wouldn't say it was too hard. There were no surprises. A lot of the questions were very vague, with more than one right answer. Seemed very subjective. I left feeling a little frustrated. I hope I passed.***

Was hard. Think I passed.

- **Overall comments about the exam?**

***Overall comment: Exam was very exhaustive!***

My exam was heavily weighted towards participation processes. I felt that I had studied for most of the topics on the exam. However, one outlying topic that was not reviewed in the study session, and that I had trouble finding study materials on was survey land divisions. (eg. Township, Section etc.) Maybe Rick Sepler could add some basic info about this in his prep session. Most of the questions were clear and not misleading. There was plenty of time. I finished about an hour early. Overall, it was a good exam.

I did not study very hard for this exam. I did some re-reading of planning texts and other books - including a new read on AICP ethics. The one thing I had not done which I wished that I had was to go into the 2000 census. There were some questions on that which I just had to take an educated guess on. I thought it was a hard exam, and wish I had the wherewithall to study harder - but I changed jobs in the middle of the time when I should have been concentrating on this exam, and I suddenly had to devote more time to the new job.

***I felt like many of the questions were too vague – with no “one right answer”. I was also very frustrated that I studied a lot of topics that weren't even covered on the exam.***

### 3. **The Resources you had for Studying –**

- **What did you use to study from? Did you use a Chapter President's Council manual, which year, and what did you think of it?**

***No, I did not.***

Used the most recent edition sent to us after the Saturday work session. If I have a criticism of resources, its that there were several 2000 Census questions on the test, but I'm not aware of any study materials or work session emphasis on Census. I'm guessing this comment will be offered by others as well.

- **Did you purchase/acquire any additional resources and what did you think of them?**

#### ***Study resource***

*CPC manual 2004, Mike's manual 2003 and 2004, the green bible (1st edition for history and 3rd edition overall), AICP code of ethics, Carol Barrett's ethics book, Barclay Hudson's planning theory.*

*In addition, demography and statistics notes from grad school, online notes from Nevada chapter at <http://www.nvapa.org/AICP/>, APA planning magazines, and resources from the Internet. Also the handouts and material from the WA-APA chapter study session.*

***I took Michael Waiszcs study session in February. I used all of his recommended resources, read the "Green Bible", and studied the APA Policy Guides and AICP Code of Ethics. That class emphasized memorizing law and history topics.***

Signed up for [planningprep.com](http://planningprep.com). Very helpful. I would recommend.

- **Do you think you studied enough (how much did you study?)**

*Another month of study would have been helpful to be entirely confident given that I seriously started studying in late February.*

***I probably should have studied a little bit more. I studied about 50-60 hours total. I've been working for a private planning firm for the last 6 years and felt as if I should have studied more public planning topics.***

Including the Saturday seminar, spent probably about 100 hours. To me, this should be the amount of time people spend preparing, at a minimum.

- **Did you or your employer pay for you to take the exam? (just out of curiosity)**

*My employer reimbursed me for the exam fees.*

***My employer paid for the exam.***

Yes, he's really a nice guy (me).

- Any recommendations for future test-takers?

***Recommendations***

*OVERLEARN the study material, read the basic ideas and processes of planning; answer to "what and why"s.*

I used this year's Chapter President's manual and manuals from two previous years. I also had some privately prepared study materials available, that had example questions. I studied a total of about 10 hours per week for about 4 weeks. That was probably enough. Yes my employer payed for me to take the exam. This is a relatively easy exam if you know what to study for. Study the basic topics that recur on the exam every year extensively and you will be fine. None of the material on the exam is difficult to grasp – it just takes a lot of memorization.

I studied from the the AICP ethics book from APA Planning press, "The Green Book", and I looked over old planning texts and articles that I saved.

I think that it is important to study ethics - since that is not always something that is emphasized in planning jobs. I probably put in 2-4 hours of studying per week for 2 months prior to the test. I do not think I studied enough for the test. I paid for the exam - not my employer.

***Be prepared for vague questions. Don't spend time memorizing facts... focus on knowing the overall concepts. Know the AICP Code of Ethics.***

1) Understand the essence of the Code of Ethics. The situations posed in the exam are pretty clear if you understand what ethical behavior is. Learning the words won't cut it. 2) Focus on more recent court cases (70's - 90"s) plus Ambler, Hadachek and Munn.

**4. The Chapter Study Session**

- Did you attend the study session?

***No, I'm from Vancouver and studied with folks from the Oregon Chapter.***

Yes

- What did you think about the cost? The facility – access, accommodations? The food? The length of the day – should it be longer? Shorter? Any other comments?

Everything was fine. The presenters on legal issues need to hone their presentation. They breezed through countless cases and should have concentrated on the fundamentals: dual nexus, levels of scrutiny, takings, etc. We can study the case law later. There's lots of literature.

- What did you think about the various sessions offered? Were they useful? Not useful? We added GIS this year ... any comments about the appropriateness of that topic (did it show up on the exam)?

Believe there were GIS questions, but not many. A few would be good. No need to over-emphasize.

■ **Do you have any suggestions for improving the class?**

*Yes, I did attend the study session. The cost, accommodation, access, food, timing everything seemed great to me. Sessions were helpful. A little bit explanation on the exam scoring method would be helpful. Also a little focus on conflict resolution, recreation planning would be helpful. GIS session was good. Since I had GIS as one of my specialization in grad school, I already knew a lot about it; therefore, can't judge how helpful they really were for first time learners.*

I attended the study session. The cost of the session was great, facility was wonderful, access no problem. Most of the sessions were good. I would recommend an overall summary session summarizing the topics that most frequently recur on the exam. Pulling from a wide range of study materials I was able to glean this, and it made the test relatively easy. If the study session can point test-takers in the direction of what is most likely to be on the exam it will be most helpful. Though a very informative session, the GIS lecture was not very helpful for the AICP exam. The presentation was too detailed and targeted for the scope of exam questions. A future GIS session should be an overview of basic GIS facts.

I did attend the Chapter study session and found it very useful for telling the breadth of topics covered by the exam. It was also helpful for telling me what I needed to study more and what I really knew pretty well.

**5. Any other comments??? Complaints?**

*Overlearn, read, read and read.*

Thank you for putting all of this together in such an organized fashion. The professionalism of this process really makes me think highly of our APA Chapter.

No other comments.

*Overall, my compliments to you and those who volunteer their time to assist. Should I pass (knock on wood), I would be happy to assist in the future as a private sector type with 36 years experience. Again, Win or Lose, it was a good, well-handled experience.*

**COMMENTS FROM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS  
WHO TOOK THE EXAM**  
(sent to PDO list serve)

From: MA PDO

I just audited the AICP exam on May 17, 2004. For one who was skeptical about the computer-based testing, I have to say that it was a very good experience. The system was easy to use and it was not difficult to use the scrap paper for notes. However, I did learn more about the actual system than you could from taking the on-line tutorial. If there were a way for candidates to take a mock exam where their complete, incomplete and marked answers are recorded, with the opportunity to review each category, it would be very helpful. I think it would also be helpful if Stephen Johnston, or someone else, provided some suggestions to candidates at the National AICP exam session on how best to use the ability to "mark" a question.

I thought that the exam on the whole was reasonable.

The Parametrics people were very helpful. I cannot speak for all the testing centers, but where I took the test was much nicer than where I had taken it previously. I was early, but once I was checked in, which only took a few minutes, I was allowed to start the exam. Since everyone was on a different schedule and taking different exams, it was not distracting when people finished early and left.

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From: MA PDO

I wanted to add these additional comments about the AICP exam on using scrap paper and "marking" the questions.

I used the "marking" option the first time through the exam to identify the questions where I had narrowed down the answers, but wasn't sure enough to complete. I used the scrap paper to note the remaining possible answers. The questions "marked" then corresponded to my scrap paper. These were the questions that I wanted to review my second time through the exam.

For example: If on Question #2 I had narrowed the answer down to A or C, I would note "(2) A or C" on the scrap paper and "mark" the question. This meant that when I went back the second time through to review "marked" questions that I only had to evaluate answer A and C for question #2.

I go through the exam several times, answering those questions that are easiest for me. The second time through I also "marked" questions for the next "round" of review. At this point I may or may not have narrowed down the answers. When I finally forced myself to answer questions that I was unsure of, I marked completed questions that I wanted to review again if I finished early and had available time.

I experimented with the system and found that if you mark an incomplete question, that question will show up when you review either incomplete or "marked" questions. This was one thing that you cannot tell from the on-line tutorial.

I can envision other ways to use the marking option. For example, one could mark the most difficult questions, leaving those for last.

My main message is that it is important for each candidate to decide how they are going to use the marking option in advance of the exam.

Hope this is helpful. If anything was unclear, let me know.

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From: CO PDO

I also audited the exam and to my surprise found the computer exam a pretty positive experience. I went through it pretty quick and tried out all the different navigation options as far as marking and reviewing and found it pretty easy. I think some people will need tips on how to use the scratch paper most effectively. I did not use it so any input from others with a strategy would be helpful for me to pass on.

The computers were fast enough that it does not take long for questions to appear on the screen and thus I think it is easier/ quicker for people to go back and review the test if they want.

The added benefit is the test takers are separated by cube like dividers (at least in my test center) and this makes it much easier to concentrate.

I agree with Jerry that it would be helpful if someone could come up with tips on marking the questions.... There were also a number of questions I wanted to "argue" but also know not to argue, and really did not care how I scored.

My experience with the Parametrics people was also positive although I was not given a calculator and had to ask for one (for the one question that required it).

...And the sad part is this is the 3rd time I have gotten to take the exam and I have had fun every time.

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From: MS PDO

I also took the AICP exam late last week. It was a good experience. Be sure to dress warmly because the room was cold even to me (and I'm hardly ever cold).

There is a bit of a transition from taking notes on the test itself to notes on the scratch sheet, but it is a small thing that can be practiced for....

The question of how to handle the "marking" of questions is something that needs to have some tips suggested. I ended up not using this option, but in retrospect I would suggest "marking" the questions that give you the most problems---you know the answer is one of two choices for example... the ones where you will just have to guess. Alternatively, "mark" the ones that you want to "argue" although we all know not to argue with the test....

I would recommend to all PDOs that you take the exam if it's been more than 3 or 4 years since you passed ... it's a different exam than when I took it 8 years ago...!