



National Commission for Certifying Agencies

The Accreditation Body of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence

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NCCA STANDARD INTERPRETATION MEMO

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NCCA Standard **3: Education, Training, and Certification**

Appropriate separation must exist between certification and any education or training functions to avoid conflicts of interest and to protect the integrity of the certification program.

Essential Element **A**

Clearly delineated policies and procedures, with defined roles and responsibilities, must demonstrate that all functions performed by the certification board, its certification staff, certification committee members, and all subject-matter experts (SMEs) are impartial related to education/training leading to initial certification.

Background

The main issue raised by one of NCCA's accredited certification programs regards the interpretation of Standard 3 as it relates to the involvement of a staff psychometrician in the development of practice examinations, in parallel to involvement in all other certification exam development activities.

Interpretation

Although various definitions are available, note that for the purpose of the Commission interpretation, there is an important distinction that is established in this document as to what is meant by **sample questions**, **practice examination**, and **preparatory examination**.

- **Sample questions:** The purpose of **sample questions** is to provide information to candidates as to the structure and format of the questions to expect on the examination. These **sample questions** may be found on a program's websites or



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candidate handbooks. Considering this purpose, certification program resources may be used in the development of **sample questions**.

- **Practice Examination:** The purpose of a **practice examination** is to minimize the impact of construct irrelevant test administration effects (e.g., test format, software, modality or interface) on test performance by familiarizing candidates with the examination experience. **Practice examinations** may provide a raw number or percentage correct scores and/or subscores; however, they do not provide candidates with a pass/fail status, diagnostic information or predictive interpretation of performance or success. Considering this purpose, certification program resources may be used in the development and administration of **practice examinations**.
- **Preparatory Examination:** The purpose of a **preparatory examination** is to provide information on a candidate's knowledge, skills, and abilities as it relates to the certification they are preparing to obtain. As opposed to **practice examinations**, **preparatory examinations** can provide diagnostic information on performance to indicate readiness or provide a prediction of performance or success. Certification program resources such as program staff and subject matter experts involved in the development of the actual certification examination may not be used in the development and administration of **preparatory examinations**.

Certification programs providing **sample questions, practice examinations or preparatory examinations** must clearly communicate the purpose of these tools and the information that they provide to candidates.