

APA Ohio Survey of 2013 and 2014 AICP Exam Test Takers – Summary of Findings
3/1/15

Beginning in 2013, APA Ohio has been conducting a survey of Ohio members who have been approved to take the AICP test. Once the testing period is opened, APA Ohio sends out an invitation to take the survey to all those who have been approved to take the exam. Our hope is that we will develop a robust data base of information on how much time and effort it takes to both apply for and study for the AICP exam, and advice on the best study materials and test taking tips.

So far, a total of 27 members have participated in the survey, and the results to date are summarized below:

Pass Rate of Respondents: Of the 27 respondents, 25 had taken the test and 23 passed. Of those that passed the exam, three had taken the exam one time previously.

Application Preparation: On average, the respondents spent approximately 10 hours to prepare the application over a two and a half week period, though the median was 6 hours and the range was from a few as 3 hours to as many as 30.

Test Preparation: Of the 24 who responded, the **average number of hours spent studying was 62**, very close to the median of 60 hours. However, there was quite a range of responses, with one person studying about 3 hours and another studying over 100 hours. Of the 20 people who responded about the period over which they studied, the **average was about 10 weeks**, though the median was only about 6 weeks.

Advice for Future Test Takers: The survey provides respondents an opportunity to share their studying advice on what worked and didn't work for them. Not surprising, test takers have provided a wide range of tips to the open-ended question. A summary of recommendations and their frequency are highlighted in the table below, while the complete responses follow.

Frequency of Responses	
7	Use common sense/practical knowledge
6	Go beyond APA/AICP Review material
6	Purchase the Planetizen Course
6	Take Practice exams
5	Start early
4	Read Planning Magazine
4	Use Study Guides
3	Use Notecards
3	Ethics
3	Take a Pretest to identify weaknesses (see http://planningprep.com which offers a number of practice exams and feedback on your strengths and weaknesses)
2	Don't rely on APA's Planning Prep website
1	Know court cases
1	Purchase the AICP Exam Prep 3.0

Complete Responses to: What advice do you have regarding studying for the AICP exam for future exam takers?
1. Don't rely on planning prep website. Questions were not at all like the actual test. I found the planning prep website and the AICP guide to not provide the same information that was on the test. I was actually very surprised.
2. Don't obsess about the history/time line. Questions are mostly not that detailed.
3. Do not focus overly on any subject and start early to identify your deficiencies. Take practice exams and questions and do not rely on APA material, it does little to help. The exam is not comprehensive and you can be given a poor list of questions that heavily lean to one topic or another. Do not read into questions and expect ethics questions to be much more of the exam then stated.
4. You can't study for everything on the exam, so don't get hung up on getting comprehensive studying and memorization done.
5. If you are a practicing professional don't spend too much time studying. The bulk of the questions are common sense and are logic based.
6. Purchase the exam study guide
7. Focus on what is the best answer for the particular question. Knowing how to convert acres to square feet is a must.
8. Study more than the AICP review material
9. Many things are intuitive or logical enough to puzzle through. The two things that aren't are the ethical sections and the law sections. You simply have to know the cases by name and what they are for, and you have to know the ethics well, because it's not intuitive.
10. Notecards are immensely helpful. And focus on making connections between information versus memorizing it.
11. Planetizen course was the best resource.
12. I took the Planetizen AICP Exam Preparation Course, which organized the course according to the exam topics and the proportion of questions related to each topic, which was very helpful. It also had a pre-test that helped benchmark progress and identify areas of weakness. Also, it was very clear that the exam is really meant for public-sector planners who work in planning/zoning departments. I do not feel that I would have been prepared for the exam, had I not had experience in such a work environment. I do feel like my private-sector and non-profit planning experiences were sufficient to give me the practical experience needed for many of the judgement-based questions.
13. The Planetizen study course was helpful. Try to take as many practice tests/quizzes as you can.
14. Use planetizens online class for \$200
15. Study much more than the exam study guides that are provided by APA. Very few questions come from that material. Read Planning magazine and really understand the concepts. Take lots of practice exams. Many of the questions are worded very weird and you can tell they are trying to trick you.
16. I personally reviewed my old class notes and used both the 2.0 and 3.0 AICP exam prep produced by APA.
17. DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE!

<p>Complete Responses to: What advice do you have regarding studying for the AICP exam for future exam takers?</p>
<p>Read multiple sources multiple times; Make flashcards of key information (it is not so much the act of memorization, but the act of writing the info down on flashcards that helps ingrain the info);</p>
<p>18. Start earlier than you think you need to. I wish I would have begun about 12 weeks ahead so I could gather all the resources together and organize them ahead of time - I did do this about 10 weeks before - it may sound like a lot of time is still left, but there's so much information to look over that its best to start sooner than later. Lay out a rough timeline of how you're going to study - reading/making flashcards/taking practice exams, etc. Everyone has a different way of learning and remembering facts, so just do what works for you. Use the AICP exam study guide - I actually didn't look at this until about 4 days before the exam and wish I would have looked at it a little sooner. However, it was a good summary of all the things I had already studied from other resources (Planetizen, Georgia and North Carolina APA chapter ppts, etc). Make sure to look at budgeting and financial related information - luckily I looked over the AICP exam study guide the night before and happened to really study this section as I was not as familiar with some of the terms and processes. I ended up getting several questions related to this where I had to apply what I learned in order to answer the questions. So I guess just make sure to study the areas that you aren't as familiar with. The law and people portions don't come up very much during the exam, but those should be the easy questions you get right if you studied - just use the AICP exam study guide for this and then make flashcards.</p>
<p>19. Since there is such a broad range of information, study early and often but in small intervals. Keep up with current events in the planning world. The Planetizen online course really helped alot. Taking practice exams probably was the best preparation because it laid out how questions were asked. It seemed that knowing HOW to take the test was just as important as knowing the information that was on the test. Be prepared for things that come up that can take away time from studying (eg. work, sickness, a life event, etc.)</p>
<p>20. Four people from our office took it at the same time, so it was easier to hold each other accountable. Study your ethics, people, current trends, and Census data. I used planningprep.com to take a number of practice exams, and Planetizen has a nice course as well, but you have to pay for it. Georgia has a nice study guide and Pennsylvania does too. Most of the test is Plan Implementation and Functional Areas of Practice, but your experience will help you answer these questions. You cannot study for everything, so you just have to use your best answer. As far as the ethics section, think would would the APA do, and don't consider your actual situation (politics, etc.) when making your decision. As far as the actual test: Don't be nervous! The worst part about taking the actual test is at the end. The screen goes blank for a few seconds (that feels like an eternity) and then a survey pops up. Once you take the survey, the screen goes blank again for what seems like an eternity, and then you get your score. The test is written in a weird way. For example, you need to know your people, dates, etc., but it will ask you about them in a roundabout way. One question I remember asked which case was most likely to lose an eminent domain lawsuit in court, and listed four cases as choices. Use common sense, read each question carefully, and pay attention to every question. In my case, a question late in the test gave me the answer to a question early in the test. If you studied more than 30-40 hours, you'll do fine.</p>
<p>21. Start studying early so that you have enough time to study the latest trends.</p>
<p>22. I suggest taking a preparatory class to assist you with determining on which topics you need to focus your studying efforts.</p>
<p>23. A lot of the questions require basic reasoning, not specific knowledge of planning concepts.</p>
<p>24. Have multiple study guides available and make certain to take the practice exams.</p>
<p>25. Invest in study materials</p>

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