

# CERTIFICATION PATHWAYS:

## A SIMPLE GUIDE TO GETTING CERTIFIED



### Before You Start...

This guide serves as a brief, step-by-step resource to getting certified. Whether you're just beginning to consider if certification is right for you or are ready to start your exam preparation, this guide is a roadmap to help you in your progress, addressing areas that tend to generate the most questions. Use this resource in whatever way is most helpful for your personal certification preparation - you don't need to do it all! Start by reviewing the parts of the guide that are relevant to you.

There are two general pathways to earn certification - a simplified and extended pathway. The steps are the same in each, and no pathway is better than the other. The time involved is the main difference between them. We encourage you to [review each pathway](#), read about the steps involved, and determine which works best for you.

Have a question or want to chat with someone? Drop us an email at [info@studentaffairscertification.org](mailto:info@studentaffairscertification.org).

## 1. Learn the Basics

What is Student Affairs Educator Certification and why should I pursue it?

- [Purpose and Benefits](#)
- [Eligibility Requirements](#)
- [Code of Ethics](#)
- [Virtual Q&A Sessions](#)
- [Certification Costs](#)
- [Pathways to Certification Infographic](#)

## 2. Determine an Approach

Reflect on your personal needs and preparation approach. Things to think about include:

- What are my professional goals and how does certification support them?
- Which [certification\(s\)](#) are right for me?
- Where can I access resources for free? (e.g., membership in associations, interlibrary loan options at campus or community library)
- How much time can I dedicate to studying?
- Are others at my institution/organization interested in applying at the same time? If so, what [group discounts](#) apply? How might the group benefit from studying together?

## 3. Create an Exam Plan

### *Learn about the Core Exam Content*

Review the eight certification [content domains](#), the [Core content outline](#), as well as [content outline\(s\)](#) for any specialty certifications you are pursuing. Compare them with your familiarity and current knowledge. Ask yourself which domains are more and less familiar? How does the answer to this question factor into what and how you study?

### *Set Goals and Timeline*

- Reference the [Pathways Infographic](#) and determine the cycle in which you want to apply and take your exam.
- Establish a timeline for preparation, including milestones and target dates.

### *Seek Financial Support*

Numerous financial resources are available to cover certification costs, including discounts for individuals who are members of Consortium [founding member organizations](#), [applying as a group](#) at the same institution/organization, as well as multiple [scholarships and access grants](#) from associations.

The Consortium also provides an [applicant support page](#) with resources for requesting support from your institution/organization. This includes an applicant worksheet, sample language for talking to a supervisor about certification, and a letter template for requesting financial support.

## 4. Gather and Use Study Resources

We all study and prepare differently. Consider your preferred study approach as you review the following resources and techniques and determine which works best for you. These are suggested ideas, not a list of required steps! Feel free to consider and use any and all that might work for your personal style.

### ***Suggested Resources for Core Exam***

In addition to the content outlines (the blueprints for each exam), the Consortium provides a list of recommended readings for the Core exam on its [website](#).

### ***Supplementary Resources***

While not required, multiple associations offer supplementary study resources. These include:

- [Core Exam \(Self Guided Preparation\)](#)
- [Core Exam \(Moderated Preparation\)](#)
- [Campus Housing & Residential Life Exam Preparation](#)
- [Campus Recreation Exam Preparation](#)
- [College Unions Exam Preparation](#)

Not seeing a resource listed? Always visit corresponding professional associations' websites for the most up-to-date information and resources on exam preparation.

### ***Learn from Certificants***

Talking with Certified Student Affairs Educators (CSAEs) can provide a first-hand experience of the entire experience including how they prepared and reflections on the exam process.

- [Access the Certificant Directory](#) to view a current list of CSAEds. Keep the fields blank under "Certificant Lookup" and click the "Search" button to generate a list of all active CSAEds in the directory. You might have colleagues and friends who are already certified!
- [Contact the Consortium](#) and ask to be connected with a CSAEd including those at an institution and/or functional area similar to yours.
- Read [advice from CSAEds](#) about taking the exam as well as advice for certificants of other programs with their own [tips about managing test anxiety](#).

### ***Study Groups***

Study groups provide benefits like motivation, support, accountability, and different perspectives on the material. NASPA and ACUI both offer study groups as part of their supplemental preparation materials for Core and College Unions Certifications respectively. If you're preparing for certification with others at your institution, consider creating your own study group to help each other prepare.

## 5. Application and Exam Registration

- [Review the application checklist.](#)
- [Create a profile; start and submit your online application.](#)
- Accommodations: Support exists for applicants requesting accommodations with an exam. Accommodations can be requested directly in the online application.
- You will be sent an email with instructions once your application has been approved. This includes details on how to schedule your online exam.
- [Familiarize yourself with the exam process.](#) Test anxiety is real! Certification applicants include skilled and seasoned professionals - but taking an online, proctored, timed exam is new for many of these individuals. That's expected and ok! This brief resource addresses exam technical requirements and processes to help you feel confident and ready for exam day.

## Now You're Ready to Take the Exam and Get Certified!

You have completed the exam preparation process and are ready to take the exam. On exam day, remember to take a deep breath, take your time, read each question carefully, and trust both your preparation work and your experience in the field as you take the final step toward becoming certified. You've got this!