



CLMSM Exam - The Journey

It's human nature to be hesitant about taking an exam - anxious and preoccupied about whether we will pass or not. Questions ALA Certification Committee members are often asked in the CLMSM booth during the ALA Annual Conference & Exposition typically have to do with obtaining the suggested reference material, what to study when there are so many areas of knowledge to be tested, and how "hard" the questions are.

In reflecting on our own study journeys and sitting for the exam, we, the members of ALA's Certification Committee, completely understand and relate to why so many members ask these questions. *When the committee writes exam items, we use as a frame of reference what a principal administrator, upon visiting a 30-50 attorney firm and reading the firm's particular practices and procedures, would need to know to be able to offer advice in the many knowledge areas relevant to legal administration.*

Most of us spend a good part of our days fielding a wide variety of questions from lawyers and support staff. Isn't it interesting how, even though most of us are in defined roles, we are expected to know everything about everything? Quite frankly, the majority of what we do is not confined in the black and white box of a job description. We have to become comfortable working in a world of gray - thinking on our feet and adapting to the needs of the moment. It is in this world of gray that we discover the importance of widening and improving our skill sets, seeking more education in all areas of the legal profession. By continually building and improving our skills in law firm administration, we are able to appropriately handle the variety of questions we receive, from technology to insurance, accounting, human resources and business management.

The drive to improve our skills and seek continuing education to become more proficient in our jobs has motivated many of our members to seek certification. *While seeking certification is a big goal, the "journey" is what helps to improve our competency.* Many members have shared their journey with the committee, which often begins by navigating the vast set of reference materials listed in the CLMSM examination application packet that apply to the job of a legal administrator. Then they assess the areas where they are most comfortable and those where additional preparation is required. While everyone's journey will differ with respect to preparation, the *key for most is to focus on one's weak areas, reviewing reference materials, seeking outside resources such as articles in various legal management-related publications, and in some cases, joining a CLMSM Study Group.* Our diverse backgrounds and different strengths and weaknesses in the core areas of knowledge make Study Groups a great way to assist in the learning process and, in most cases, it can be a great deal of fun! Many have found that the Study

Groups and/or a combination of different preparation techniques, with regular repetition, have definitely improved their skills AND their confidence.

Exam preparation is a personal endeavor, and each person has his or her own comfort zone and learning preferences for how to prepare for the exam. Take the road that best works for you to become more comfortable with the material in each of the core areas. We are not expected to be "experts" in each area, but rather "conversant" in each area of knowledge. And while knowledge is important, applying the knowledge is essential. *Understanding how to apply what you have learned is the key ingredient to testing whether you have learned the material during your journey.*

When it comes time to sit for the exam, get a good night's sleep the night before and try to arrive relaxed. It is normal to be anxious, but the key is to stop worrying, calmly review each question, and let the knowledge come through.

Remember, your journey to sitting for the certification exam is just as important as taking the exam. Whether you pass or not, you have certainly improved your knowledge and skills that you can bring back to your law firms and put into practice. If you do not pass the exam, please don't give up! Your exam results will indicate the areas in which you need to improve. Go back and begin the journey again because it will be the best investment you will ever make in yourself.

Now, let your journey begin!

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