



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CERTIFIED LEGAL MANAGER (CLM)SM PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) Is there a single source I should use to prepare for the CLMSM Exam?

No single resource is adequate for preparing for the exam. The CLMSM Information and Application Packet (www.alanet.org/clm) lists some potential resources. The Barry University CLMSM Study Guide provides a solid framework of information, which may help in forming a structured approach for preparation, and includes an extensive bibliography. It should be used in conjunction with other study materials.

2) Is the Essential Competencies course a good way to prepare for the exam?

The Essential Competencies program is designed to provide foundational skills and knowledge required for successful law firm management. Those new to the profession, less experienced administrators, or functional specialists wishing to expand their knowledge in other areas, will benefit this foundation. It is NOT designed as a preparatory course for the CLMSM exam.

3) What does Competency mean?

In 1995, 2000, and again in 2007, ALA conducted the Competency-Based Education, Job and Needs Analysis. Through this extensive research project, ALA investigated the job of a legal administrator and identified the body of knowledge needed to perform the job successfully.

4) What is the most successful way to study for the CLMSM exam?

There is no one specific way to study for the exam. All adults learn in different ways. You need to analyze yourself to determine your best learning style. One good technique is to try to attend a session on adult study skills and exam preparation. Perhaps you can arrange for the chapter or local educational institution to provide such a course in their professional development and life skills program.

5) How many hours do I need to spend studying each week?

If you have an established study group in your chapter, you should add individual study time too. Depending upon the length of your study program – 12 weeks, 6 months, etc., you should plan to dedicate a fairly significant amount of time for self-study – between 5 and 15 hours a week is not unreasonable. Study consistently and commit to it as a routine habit each day.

6) Does attending local chapter educational events count toward the educational requirements to sit for the exam?

Yes, if it contains at least 60 minutes of educational content and covers one of the content areas listed on the application. Each 60 minutes of educational instruction can include no more than 10 minutes of introductory remarks, breaks or other non-instructional activity.

7) Does listening to conference tapes count toward the educational requirements to sit for the exam?

No, listening to conference tapes would be considered a form non-interactive self-study and does not fulfill the requirements on the initial application. 240 minutes of interactive technology-based self-study courses may be used to fulfill the requirements. (See pp 6- 7 of the CLMSM Information and Application packet for details).

8) What is the easiest way to obtain the 10 hours of course work in order to qualify for the CLMSM once experience requirement is achieved?

Review all of the educational sessions you have attended in the past 24 months including firm-sponsored education; chapter presentations; ALA annual and regional conferences, specialized programs and retreats, and Webinars; and college, university and other public courses. Presentations must contain at least 60 minutes of educational content. 240 minutes can be obtained through interactive self-study courses. See the Learning on Demand area of the ALA website for suggested online providers.

9) In completing the Application to sit for the exam, I am having difficulty determining which category many of the educational programs I have attended fit for the prerequisites - particularly non-ALA programs I have attended. What is the best way to make this determination?

We have instructions online “How to Determine What Qualifies for CLM Credit” at www.alanet.org/clm. You can also send Sue Powers or Pam Stong at ALA headquarters an email (spowers@alanet.org or pstong@alanet.org) with all of the pertinent information relating to the program, i.e. length, title, speaker, session description, etc. They should be able to tell you if it qualifies, and if so, in which category it belongs.

10) How do I keep track of my educational requirements of 120 minutes in each of the Management Categories?

Keep a file of all educational programs you attend. Include promotional information, course syllabuses, handouts, certificates, ALA Education Tracking Forms received at conferences, etc. It helps to keep a record using a spreadsheet or table to track dates, time, content area, etc.

11) Why are there prerequisites for taking the exam?

Some of the top-identified competencies are in what are considered "soft" skill areas, i.e. leadership, oral communications, interpersonal skills, etc. These soft skills are not conducive to a multiple choice test setting. Therefore, the prerequisite requirements validate the applicant's effort to be well rounded in the competencies that can't be effectively tested on the exam.

12) Are there specific types of programs (other than the core competency sessions) you would recommend to include in a chapter study program?

Many chapter study groups have begun to include a session on study skills, exam preparation, and reading through exam items.

13) I am the only one in my chapter preparing for the exam. How can I get the chapter - or vendors - to help educate me?

Since all of the information covered on the exam is also relevant to the effective execution of the daily responsibilities of legal administrators, request that your chapter education committee schedule some sessions that would assist you as well as be of interest to chapter members. In addition, once you determine the areas of knowledge you need help with, look for vendors or other educational resources in your area that could augment your written resources. You might set a breakfast meeting with a vendor that would be designed to educate you on some specific area, such as BOMA or insurance issues.

14) What can ALA do to assist in developing study groups?

ALA makes several resources available online including the CLMSM Information and Application Packet and the Guide to Developing a CLMSM Study Group. ALA Staff are also

available to answer questions about the application process, educational requirements, suggested speakers, etc.

15) What can ALA do to assist in any other way? What are their limitations?

ALA staff members are willing to provide guidance throughout the CLMSM application process. They are not at liberty to discuss the specific content of the exam, exam scores, or names of those who are registered to take the exam or those who have taken the exam and failed.

16) How can chapter leaders help chapters develop CLMSM Study Groups, or programs – especially when many of the members don't want to tell anyone they are going to sit for the exam?

Although it is difficult to develop a “formal study group” if members are reluctant to tell anyone that they plan to sit for the exam, chapters can take a pro-active approach in developing their educational programs to ensure that all chapter members who plan to sit for the exam have opportunities to participate in programs specifically developed around the body of knowledge necessary to pass the exam. Chapters must also take special precautions to ask speakers to delineate between state specific and federal laws – especially as they relate to human resources issues. Chapter leaders must continually promote and support the concept of the CLMSM program, the use of study groups and educational sessions with the chapter to help members obtain proper educational opportunities. Chapter leaders must assist in identifying members who can lead this charge to a successful CLMSM study group.

17) What can chapter leaders do to help generate excitement about the program?

Chapter leaders should use the experience of local chapter CLM's and the services of ALA HQ staff, directors, and regional officers to promote the CLMSM program. Chapter leaders should stress the importance of the program to committees and members at every opportunity.

18) How can chapters use vendors to assist in developing study groups?

Vendors are an excellent resource for speakers. They may either have speakers to offer, or know of speakers relevant to your topics. Additionally, vendors may be willing to sponsor programs or study groups, or provide the study group with a meeting location.

19) Why aren't there more sample questions?

ALA provides 10 sample questions in the Information and Application Packet. It also provides a 25 questions sample exam. All of these questions were actual exam questions. Once they are used as a sample they are not used on future exams. The Certification Committee reviews these questions annually, and from time to time will add new ones. The purpose is to give you an idea of the types of and style of the questions that are on the exam.

20) Why are there 125 questions if only 100 count?

The exam contains 125 questions, but your test score will be based on only 100 questions. The additional 25 questions are being validated for use on future exams.

21) I have been told by people who took the test that there is more than one correct answer to a lot of the questions. Is this true?

After taking the test, you may feel that some questions had more than one correct answer. This is not so - there is only one correct answer for each question.

22) Are the test questions the same from test to test?

Each exam is created by pulling questions from an “item bank”. They can appear on a future exam, but may or may not appear right away. Even within each testing session there are different test forms being utilized.

23) Who writes the exam?

The members of the Certification Committee, all of whom are ALA members and all CLMs, write the exam questions. Committee members are chosen for their expertise in the subjects of the body of knowledge (finance, human resources, legal industry & office operations).

24) Why isn't the exam set up like many state bars where you pass each section and you can re-take only the sections that were not passed?

It is common to think that it would be easier if one only had to retake sections of an exam that they had previously failed. In reality, setting up an exam with separately scored subsections creates a more difficult situation for the examinee. Each section would have to be longer to ensure a reliable subsection score. Statistically it is harder to pass several subsections than it is to pass one overall exam. This is because someone can score minimally well on one part of the test, but pass the test overall because they scored really well on another part. The CLMSM exam is designed to reflect the body of knowledge an administrator needs with appropriate emphasis placed on the subject areas research shows are of higher importance than others.

25) Why doesn't ALA sponsor a CLMSM test prep course?

ALA follows the standards and guidelines established by the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA). Their standards recommend that the certifying body of an organization be separate from the education function. ALA is not structured that way and since it is the certifying body, does not offer an exam preparation course.

26) Why does ALA seem to hide the pass rate?

In the first few years of the program, the number of people taking the exam was small. Therefore, some statistical numbers did not have much meaning. The average of the last 6 test cycles comes to about 63%.

27) What constitutes passing the exam?

The CLMSM program uses a modified Angoff strategy for scoring the exams. This is a standard approach in the certification testing industry. In this process, each question on a particular exam is reviewed and rated. The averages are tabulated and a passing score is determined. Because questions may vary in their level of difficulty, a passing score could vary slightly from one exam to another based on the difficulty level of the questions selected for each exam. The statistics are analyzed carefully to ensure that these slight fluctuations are within testing standards and that the passing score is an acceptable one for a 100 question exam. It might be of interest to read some information on this testing strategy.

28) Given my years of experience as an administrator, why can't I be grandfathered in as a CLMSM?

The certification process contains 4 parts; years of experience, education prerequisites, passing a 100 question exam, and endorsing the ALA Code of Ethics. It is designed to be a fair and rigorous assessment process. This program strategy is the most suitable or best measurement to ensure that successful candidates have the requisite knowledge and skills. Setting up a grandfathering system would be pretty subjective and does not fit in with the program strategy at this time.

29) Why do I have to have a certain number of years of experience? If I can pass the test, what difference does the amount of experience make?

A certification program validates mastery of a set of competencies. A principal administrator has to have the depth and breadth of knowledge and management skills to be conversant in a broad body of knowledge. Some of this skill comes with experience. Therefore, when the program was established, it was decided that a minimum of three years experience be required for a principal administrator and 5 years for a functional specialist.

30) Once certified, why do I have to pay an annual fee?

The nominal annual maintenance fee covers administrative costs in verifying and processing recertification applications.

31) Why does it cost so much to take the exam?

For a certification to have credibility and value, there are strict procedures and safeguards that must be followed. ALA contracts with the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) for the provision of consulting services, oversight of item writing, test preparation and security, scoring, and statistical analysis. Other program expenses include certification committee meetings and ALA staff who administer the exams. Based on research of other volunteer certification programs, the Board established this fee in 1997, and it has not been increased since that time. ALA does not make a profit on the CLM program. In fact, ALA invests money annually in it as part of its mission to promote and enhance the competence and professionalism of legal administrators and the profession.

32) How important is the issue of confidentiality, and what steps should chapter leaders take to help insure the confidentiality of their members – whether requested or not?

Confidentiality is extremely important. There are only two ALA staff members who handle the Certification applications. Electronic files are password protected. Paper files are listed by number, not name, and are locked. Test proctors do not know who is taking the exam until they arrive at the test site and sign people in. They are also trained not to discuss who took the exam with anyone. ALA makes every effort to ensure the confidentiality of our examinees and hopes that the chapters will do the same.

33) What can the CLMSM do for me? What are the benefits?

When you ask a mountain climber “why did you climb the mountain,” he tells you because the mountain was there. Besides taking the CLMSM exam purely for the challenge, most people feel that it will add to their professional portfolio and may enhance future career choices. After successful completion of the exam, many CLM’s have discovered new confidence in their abilities, and some have obtained exciting new positions with the CLMSM designation being a critical factor in the decision process.

34) Has having the designation made a difference in how you are perceived or how you do your job?

Once you pass the CLMSM exam, your mastery of the technical competencies to be a law firm administrator is validated. Moreover, many people have told us they obtained a great deal of valuable knowledge from just studying for the exam. We’ve also heard from many CLM’s that it was one of their most rewarding accomplishments, and that it shows you have the knowledge and dedication to the profession that employers are looking for, providing you with an important edge in the marketplace.

35) How does the CLMSM designation benefit my firm?

Preparing for and taking the test broadens one's view on structure, procedures and infrastructure issues in the firm, plus helps to identify weaknesses in current firm practices. Interaction with members in a study group provides understanding of the differences of other firms' structures, which you may be able to interpret and apply to your own firm. Additionally, some insurance companies are now offering discounts on liability insurance, if the firm's administrator is a CLM. This can amount to a substantial saving, depending on a firm's coverage. For example, SwissRe offers as much as a 7.5 percent discount.

To see if SwissRe has a discount in your state, visit:

http://www.alanet.org/education/clm_insurancediscounts.aspx.

36) Do you now have to be a CLMSM to be elected to the ALA Board of Directors or any other leadership position?

No, the CLMSM is not a requirement for future ALA leaders. The CLMSM process allows a person to grow, gain confidence and learn which are qualities that will enhance your chances of becoming a future leader in ALA. Attaining the CLMSM designation demonstrates a commitment to the profession and yourself, thereby garnering respect and recognition from ALA peers who nominate future ALA leaders.

Other tips and ideas:

- Talk to local colleges to assist in developing a study program.
- Add a section to the chapter website regarding the CLMSM – including sample questions.
- Create a CLMSM library for the chapter, with books, tapes and videos.
- Utilize How to Form a Study Group, ALA News & Legal Management as resources.
- Hold an Adult Learning Techniques program to assist your members in understanding how best they learn.
- Encourage CLM's to write articles for the Chapter newsletter about their experience, etc. This may help dissuade some of the fear of other chapter members.