

Tips for Passing the CIPP Exam

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In January 2015, over 20 Santa Clara Law students took the CIPP/US exam. Because this was our first time we held a CIPP exam on campus, we did not know how SCU students would do on the exam. About half of the students passed both portions of the exam and another quarter passed only the foundations portion. (Note: in June 2015, the IAPP will use a single integrated test, but I don't think the change affects these tips).

We'd like to boost those numbers. Thus, after the exam, we surveyed students about their preparation efforts. The survey results were inconclusive. Nevertheless, I offer some preliminary hypotheses about the data with the hope that limited and incomplete information is more helpful to you than no information.

Helpful Tactics

Sufficient Preparation Time. Many successful students devoted 30+ hours to preparing. In contrast, students who prepared less than 20 hours had lower passage rates.

Read the Books. The single most helpful item cited by students were the IAPP's test-specific books. Students weren't uniformly enthusiastic about the books, and they aren't cheap (\$65 each). Still, they appear to be the most helpful tool available.

Master the Minutiae. Many students commented on how the tests questions focused on seeming minutiae, such as the names and elements of specific statutes. Several students commented on how flash cards, reciting facts from the books, helped them memorize this minutiae.

Less Helpful Tactics

The Videos. We heard numerous complaints about the preparatory videos, including complaints that the videos didn't cover the tested subject material and contained errors. I doubt the videos are completely unhelpful. Still, at best, the videos are just a small part of a successful preparation strategy.

Taking Privacy Law. Our Privacy Law course wasn't designed as a prep class for the CIPP exam, so it's not surprising that I didn't see any clear correlations between taking the class (and even getting a good grade in the class) and passing the exam. The course provides students with a useful overview of the subject matter, but it's neither necessary nor sufficient for passage.

Law School GPA. I didn't see any clear correlation between law school GPA and passage rates.

Conclusion

The CIPP exam is definitely passable, but like any standardized test, you need to treat it with respect. We are here to help you pass the exam. Let us know what more we can do.