The ABCs of CPE

What is CPE & How Do I Apply?



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The ABCs of CPE – What is CPE & How Do I Apply?

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What is CPE?

CPE stands for "Clinical Pastoral Education". CPE offers hands-on, interfaith chaplain experiences in a supervised setting like a hospital or other areas where clients can receive spiritual care. One unit of CPE is commonly 10-12 weeks long and includes 300 hours of clinical work with patients/clients and 100 hours of continuing education, which includes self-study, one-on-one sessions with your supervisor, and group work with your supervisor and cohort.

In CPE, chaplains deepen their ability to listen and support patients and families in crisis. Chaplains also learn to investigate their own beliefs, emotions, and spiritual formation in a supportive group setting.

* **Note:** Different organizations accredit CPE programs. If you need only one unit of CPE, it may not matter which organization accredits your CPE program.

However, if you eventually want to apply for **Chaplain Board Certification** through **APC** (Association for Professional Chaplains), at least 3 of your CPE units must come from an **ACPE** (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education) accredited CPE program (For more information, see the section called *Does It Matter Who Accredits My CPE Program?).*

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What Types of CPE Units Are There?

CPE units are offered as internships (1/2 to 1 unit at a time) and as residencies (3-4 consecutive CPE units, working full time at a hospital or other approved organization).

Most chaplain jobs and board certification organizations require 2-4 units of CPE. If, for example, a job or organization requires you to have 4 units of CPE, you could either do a traditional full-time residency (1 year) or 4 individual CPE internships.

COST - Students pay to participate in each CPE unit. Prices vary greatly by program. Chaplain residents also pay for each unit of CPE, but additionally, they are paid a salary by the hospital/hospice to work as a chaplain 30 or more hours a week.

Types of CPE Units:

TRADITIONAL CPE INTERNSHIP

1 Unit of CPE. This type of CPE lasts 10 – 12 weeks. During that time, you would work as a chaplain for a total of 300 clinical hours and spend an additional 100 hours doing group, supervision, and academic work. You would work at the same place (hospital/hospice) where your cohort and your supervisor work.

EXTENDED CPE INTERNSHIP

1 Unit of CPE. This type of CPE generally lasts 6, 9, or 12 months. You would do the same number of on-the-job and group hours as in a traditional CPE, but they would be spread over more time. This is for people who cannot quit their jobs or other obligations to do a full-time CPE. There may be less interaction with your cohort on the job, but you would still meet with them and your supervisor in person. Most extended CPE internships are at hospitals and hospices.

ONLINE CPE INTERNSHIP

There are a few places offering online CPE internships. Each is different and may be full-time or extended units of CPE. Some programs require you to meet in person at a weekend retreat before the program starts.

Generally, you would find your own place to do your 300 hours of hands-on clinical work. You would then meet with your supervisor and cohort online via an online video conferencing platform each 1-2 weeks for 1-on-1 and group work.

It may be more difficult to find a place to get your 300 hours of clinical work, but you may have more freedom to find a place related to your passion such as hospice work, prison work, working with people recovering from addiction, working at a women's shelter, or working at a Buddhist temple that offers a lot of counseling, emotional support, or care for under-served populations. Each clinical site must be approved by the supervisor.

NON-TRADITIONAL CPE INTERNSHIP

There are several other less common types of CPE programs.

- Half Units - Some CPE programs offer ½ unit internships, which means a *very* extended CPE unit for people who have very little time to do CPE. ½ unit might take 9 months to finish, so it could take at least 6 years to have the equivalent of a 1-year, 4-unit residency. But if you want to be a chaplain at a hospice requiring only 1 unit of CPE, that would only take 1.5 years while you maintained your current life of work and family.

- Off-site CPE Supervision. A few CPE internships are run by CPE supervisors who meet with students in person, but they are not connected to a traditional clinical site such as a hospital. The CPE internship could be full-time or extended. Students find their own place to do 300 hours of clinical work (see the description under "Online CPE"), but they would meet in person as a group once a week, twice a month during a weekend, or once a month for a full weekend, depending on the program. This allows a lot of flexibility and gives students and the supervisor the chance to bond as a group in person.

CPE RESIDENCY

A CPE residency allows chaplains to experience being full-time chaplains for a year, while working weekly with a CPE supervisor in one-on-one and groups settings. Each residency is different and has different requirements. Many require 1 unit of CPE before applying. Others don't. Many residencies are 4 units long, but others are 3 or even 5 units. Most residencies are at hospitals, but a few are at hospices or in other settings.

Students pay for each CPE unit, but they are also paid a salary (and sometimes benefits) by the hospital, hospice, etc. Currently, salaries may range from $25,000 to more than $35,000/year depending on the hospital and cost of living for the area.

NOTE: A CPE residency is only for a year; it is not a permanent job at the hospital/hospice. Some CPE residency programs will let you apply for a second year of CPE. There is usually not a 3rd year option. After residency, you must look for your own chaplain job or you could apply for CPE supervisor training.

MILITARY CHAPLAIN TRAINING

Each branch of the military has its own requirements and processes for chaplain training and service. They will not be addressed in this document. For more information, contact the branch of the military that you are most interested in.

NOTE: *Before signing a military contract* (or any contract) make sure you read the fine print *very* carefully. Make sure the documents clearly state that you are signing up to train and serve as a chaplain. *Do not* rely solely on what the recruiter tells you or you could mistakenly end up serving in a very different capacity.

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How Do I Find a CPE Site and Apply?

Unfortunately, there is not one easy way to find and apply for a CPE program. Each program has its own application deadlines, costs, and requirements which vary greatly.

The easiest place to start is by going to the website of a CPE accrediting body like ACPE or ICPT (for a list, see the section called *Does It Matter Who Accredits My CPE Program?*).

Since CPE programs accredited by ACPE (Association for Professional Chaplains) are some of the most widely accepted, this section will focus on finding an ACPE accredited CPE site.

- If you know you want to do CPE at a particular hospital, hospice, or other agency which uses chaplains, go to that organization's website to see if they already have a CPE program. If they do, apply based on their requirements. If not, see if they would be willing to let you volunteer there for 300 hours per CPE unit, then find a non-traditional or on-line CPE program that lets you choose your own site (see the section called *Types of CPE Units*).

- If you do not know where you want to do your CPE, go to the website of a CPE accrediting organization like ACPE.

  For example: At ACPE.edu go to "Directory" then "Accredited CPE Centers."
  - This page will let you choose which state you want to do the CPE in (like California), the type of units offered (summer, extended, online, residency), and the center type (hospital, hospice).

  - Once the website gives you a list of places that meet your requirements, go to **each** CPE program's website (or call them) to find out what their requirements are. If you still cannot find a list of CPE sites, change or expand the requirements you are looking for (for example instead of looking only for hospices look at hospitals too).

- Residency - If you want to do a CPE Residency, in addition to the previous steps at ACPE.edu, you can also find residency programs that still have openings by going to ACPE.edu, then scrolling down to "Residency Openings". Select the Residency programs you are most interested in, then go to each website to learn more about the program and requirements before applying.

Apply to Multiple CPE Sites:

- It is safest to apply to more than one CPE site. You will be interviewing your CPE supervisor, and they will be interviewing you. It is better to choose from several options than to apply to only one program and then not get accepted or decide the program is not for you.

- Different CPE programs have different application deadlines. Follow them! But, sometimes, even at the last minute, people drop out of CPE programs, so even if you miss a deadline, apply and keep in touch with the program just in case they have a last-minute opening.

- ACPE CPE sites all use the same application, so once you have filled that out, you can send the same application to each ACPE accredited CPE site.

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How Do I Fill Out My CPE Application?

Give yourself a lot of time over several days to reflect, write, and edit your application. The ACPE CPE application is long, and some sections do not indicate page limits for essays. Hints for essay page length are below.

- One of the most important things to show in your essays is that you are willing to learn new things; you are introspective; you have thought about how your life and family

have affected you, and that you understand how your ethics and spiritual beliefs have developed and deepened over time.

NOTE: See the section called ***What Qualities Do CPE Supervisors Look For?*** This section contains a list of qualities most CPE Supervisors look for in a candidate. Select several of them to highlight by giving examples in your essays. Be prepared to talk about these and other qualities during your interview.

- If you have had issues/events in your life that could make chaplain work even more challenging (addiction, deep tragedy, prejudice towards certain groups of people, etc.), write about how you have received support and are overcoming the issues with things like counseling, AA meetings, grief groups, close family relationships, meditation, etc.

- If you have beliefs that are not traditionally Western/Christian such as believing in ghosts, devas, or "magic", and you include them in your essays, make sure you also write that these are normal beliefs for people in your culture/religion. Supervisors may not be familiar with your culture/religion and may have a different understanding about people who talk about ghost or angels as part of normal life.

- Often supervisors complain that applications are too long, but the application does not give a page limit.

  One CPE supervisor from Kettering Health Network offered the follow suggestions for page length. Other supervisors have made similar suggestions. This is just a general guideline.
  - For students applying for their first unit of CPE, an application should be about 8-10 pages in total length for all required written essays.
  - For students applying for additional CPE units after the first one or applying for a CPE residency, individual essays should be a minimum of 3 pages each, but not more than 5 pages each.

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Does It Matter Who Accredits My CPE Program?

Yes, it might. Several different organizations accredit CPE internships and residencies to make sure each CPE program maintains high standards.

While you may learn a lot from any CPE program, **not all universities, organizations, or chaplain board certification agencies accept units from every CPE program**.

- Before applying to a CPE program
  - check to see which organization runs the program (it will not be the hospital's name). Examples: **ACPE accredited CPE** or **ICPT accredited CPE**.

- check with your university, employer, potential employer, or the board certification program you might be interested in, to see which CPE accrediting organizations they will accept. Currently almost everyone will accept ACPE accredited CPE programs, but other programs are growing in popularity and professionalism.

The following is a list of the most well-known CPE accrediting organizations.

ACPE – Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. ACPE accredited, interfaith CPE programs are currently the most widely accepted CPE programs by universities, hospitals, and board certification agencies. They are recognized as an accrediting CPE agency by the U.S. Secretary of Education through the U.S. Department of Education.

- **NOTE**: **For chaplain board certification by APC** *(Association of Professional Chaplains – currently one of the most widely accepted board certification organization)*, APC requires either
  - 4 CPE units from an **ACPE** accredited site [or the Catholic NACC or Canadian CASC].
  - Or 3 CPE units from an **ACPE** accredited site [or the Catholic NACC or Canadian CASC] plus 1 unit from another CPE organization, *but only if you fill out an equivalency form and it is approved.*

ICPT – Institute for Clinical Pastoral Training. ICPT is another well-recognized interfaith CPE accrediting body that is accredited by ACCET (Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training), which is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education through the U.S. Department of Education. ICPT primarily works with HCCN (Healthcare Chaplaincy Network) and its affiliate SCA (Spiritual Care Association). **SCA also offers Chaplain Board Certification**.

There are several other organizations offering CPE including:

CACS – Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (interfaith)

CPSP – College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (interfaith)

CSCPF – Center for Spiritual Care and Pastoral Formation (interfaith)

HCMA – Healthcare Chaplains Ministry Association (primarily Christian)

NACC – National Association of Catholic Chaplains (primarily Catholic)

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What Is the Difference Between CPE and Board Certification (BCC)?

CPE is just one part of becoming a board-certified chaplain (BCC). To become a board-certified chaplain, you need 2-4 unites of CPE (depending on the type of certification and organization who certifies you).

But to be board-certified, besides CPE units, you also need an undergraduate degree, graduate education (usually an MDiv or an MA related to religion), endorsement from your religious organization (this is not needed for SCA BCC), and 2000 hours of hands-on chaplain work in addition to your CPE. These requirements may vary some based on which board-certification organization you choose.

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Do I Need Board Certification?

Maybe/Maybe Not

If you plan to work in a hospital -

Board certification has traditionally applied to hospital chaplains. Most hospitals will require you to have board certification or to work toward getting board certification.

If you are not board certified yet, a hospital may hire you if you are eligible for board-certification, meaning you have all the requirements for board certification but have not applied for it yet, or you have all the requirements except for the 2000 work hours.

If you *do not* plan to work in a hospital -

Currently, in many parts of the U.S.A., if you are *not* planning to be a *hospital* chaplain, you probably won't need board certification.

However, if you have already met the BCC requirements, you may decide to get board certified any way since you have already done the work. This may give you an advantage in the future if your job requirements change or you wish to switch to hospital chaplaincy.

NOTE: In some cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and New York, there is a lot of competition for chaplain jobs. In areas like these, you may be more competitive in the job market if you have 4 units of CPE *and* Board Certification even for hospice or non-medical chaplain positions.

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What Organizations Board Certify Chaplains?

Several organizations offer board certification. Each has its own requirements and application process. The two most recognized interfaith Board Certification organizations are APC (Association of Professional Chaplains) and SCA (Spiritual Care Association)

APC (Association of Professional Chaplains).

This is the first organization to open the door to certifying chaplains who are not Christian or Jewish. For over 2 decades, APC has worked with different Buddhist organizations to find a way to board certify Buddhist chaplains who did not or could not take the same educational paths that most Christian chaplains did. At this time, APC is the most widely recognized organization to board certify chaplains.

SCA (Spiritual Care Association)

This is the second most widely accepted interfaith board certifying organization. SCA is becoming more well-known and is accepted by many major hospitals.

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What Are the Qualifications for Board Certification?

Organizations are developing more types of certification with different requirements, but for full board certification, the following are the primary requirements expected from both APC and SCA.

1. A bachelors/undergraduate degree from an accredited university.
2. An MDiv degree of at least 72 credit hours from an accredited university (if you do not have a traditional MDiv, you can apply for an equivalency based on your training and education). [SCA will accept other master's degrees in related fields, plus additional classes]
3. Endorsement from your religious organization allowing you to be a spiritual leader and chaplain. [SCA does not require this for BCC].
4. Completion of 4 units of CPE from the accrediting bodies the organization recognizes.
    - SCA may only require 2 units
    - APC requires that at least 3 of the 4 units come from an ACPE accredited site.
5. Completion of 2000 hours of documented, professional work as a chaplain.
6. Completion of the applications, exams, essays, interviews, etc., that are required to assess whether you have mastery of the chaplain skills needed for board certification.

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What Qualities Do CPE Supervisors Look For?

At a CPE Fair, CPE Supervisors listed the top qualities they are looking for in a CPE intern or resident. Review this list and give examples in your CPE application essays and during your interviews to show how you embody many of these qualities.

Qualities CPE Supervisors look for:

- Can you stand in the unknown?
- Have you had experience accompanying another person through a difficult time?
- Do you accept that, as a chaplain, proselytizing is unethical?
- Can you listen silently to capture another person's story?
- Can you conduct yourself in a professional manner?
- Are you "called to serve"?
- Are you open to learning?
- Are you self-aware?
- Are you willing to un-learn old, unskillful habits?
- Can you find meaning in your own life?
- Can you reflect on what you've learned in life and apply that to new situations?
- Can you express compassion and empathy toward yourself and others?
- Can you tell your own story in a self-reflective manner?
- Do you let yourself express vulnerability?
- Can you handle a crisis well?
- Are you honest and humble?
- Can you build bridges among people?
- Are you willing to uncover your own hidden agendas?
- Do you have deep, interpersonal connections in your life?
- Can you critique yourself? Can you receive criticism well? Can you critique others compassionately?
- Are there times when you've been courageous and taken risks?
- Can you be respectful of others' beliefs and open to differences?
- Do you have a high level of ethics?
- Are you curious?
- Do you have a sense of humor?
- Can you step out of your comfort zone?
- Can you explore and face your fears?

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What Websites Will Help Me?

The Most Recognized Chaplain Board Certification Associations:

- **APC** (Association of Professional Chaplains) http://www.professionalchaplains.org/
- **APC Board Certification** Standards http://bcci.professionalchaplains.org/
- **SCA** (Spiritual Care Association) https://www.spiritualcareassociation.org/
- **SCA Board Certification** Standards https://www.spiritualcareassociation.org/certification.html

The Most Common CPE Program Accreditation Agencies

- **ACPE** (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education – Affiliated with APC) https://www.acpe.edu/
- **ICPT** (Institute for Clinical Pastoral Training – Affiliated with SCA) http://www.clinicalpastoraled.org/

Other Recognized CPE Program Accreditation Agencies (this list is not all-inclusive)

- **CACS** (Canadian Association for Spiritual Care) https://spiritualcare.ca/
- **CPSP** (College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy) https://www.cpsp.org/
- **CSCPF** (Center for Spiritual Care and Pastoral Formation) https://www.cscpf.org/
- **HCMA** (Healthcare Chaplains Ministry Association) https://www.hcmachaplains.org/
- **NACC** (National Association of Catholic Chaplains) https://spiritualcare.ca/

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Good luck on your journey and don't hesitate to ask questions or ask for a little help!

