



Exam Content vs. Courseware

Some APICS exam candidates think that they see a difference in the exam content and what they learned during their class. Often, the reason for this apparent difference is due to APICS courseware being designed as a REVIEW course and not for education. A significant number of people who take a certification review course think that they are getting certification education. In other words, take the course and pass the test. This leads to an unmet expectation, and may be the cause of their perception of a mismatch between the exam and the courseware.

APICS uses a very rigorous process for creating its Certification exams and courseware. Exam and courseware responsibilities are separate to maintain the integrity of the exam process. The exam committees define the contents of the Exam Content Manual (ECM), which determines the areas that will be tested in certification exams. The ECM defines the body of knowledge that can be tested during the year – every exam question is tied to the ECM every year. The exam committees also select the references that will be used for exam development during the year, and they develop and maintain the exams. A separate courseware committee creates the courseware using the ECM and the recommended references.

The purpose of education is first, to convey knowledge, and second, to give the learner a chance to apply that knowledge. For that reason, exercises and quizzes associated with courses typically focus on testing the student's understanding of the knowledge that was to be learned.

Certification has a very different purpose than education. It is to determine whether the candidate meets a minimum set of requirements in relation to the Operations Management Body of Knowledge (OMBOK) as outlined in the ECM. Certification examinations test both the individual's knowledge and his or her ability to apply that knowledge to specific situations. Certification exam items frequently require the candidate to select the best of the four choices based on the information given, and may require him or her to make finer distinctions than the exercises or items presented in a course.

Course developers and/or instructors may believe that additional material needs to be taught or included in the glossary and flash cards to ensure understanding of the body of knowledge that can be tested. They also may decide that a concept or term is adequately



covered by the definitions in the APICS Dictionary or the CPIM ECM Glossary and not cover it in the course. These differences sometime lead candidates to perceive a disconnect between the courseware and the exam, when in fact they are both covering the same body of knowledge.

The raw items (question and answer sets) for the APICS exams are written by volunteers who have earned the CPIM and/or CSCP designations. They must identify the specific entry in the ECM that is being tested and one or more of the references listed in the ECM that supports the indicated correct answer. The items are reviewed and typically revised by exam committee members. APICS and the exam development contractor review the items for correctness of form, spelling, and grammar.

An item may be reviewed several times before it actually appears on an examination. Items initially appear on exams in what is referred to as “pre-test” status. Pre-test items are not scored on the exam. Statistics are collected on the item while it is in pre-test status. If there are problems with the performance statistics of an item, it is returned to the committee for review and revision. When a pre-determined number of candidates have seen the item and it has performed well, it is changed to operational status and can be selected for a test form in accordance with the distribution of items specified in the current ECM. The committee then reviews the test form one last time to ensure that the indicated correct answers are indeed the only correct choices and to eliminate any overlap of items.

At any given time, there are multiple test forms in use. Because each form has a limited number of questions, it samples representative areas of the body of knowledge as defined by the ECM. While each test form is different, all areas tested are contained within the body of knowledge as defined by the ECM.

The following graphic is a visual representation of the relationship between the OMBOK, certification scope, courseware, exam specification and different examinations.

