

THE ARKANSAS STATE-SPECIFIC EXAMS

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Professional Surveyor Licensing is a Tripod

Becoming a licensed Arkansas Professional Surveyor requires a tripod of effort: 1.) Education. 2.) Passing the required exams, the NCEES FS and PS Exams and passing the Arkansas State-Specific Exams. 3.) Mentored experience. All three legs are required and are important to professional licensure. The Board is the licensure gatekeeper, charged with the important task of protecting the public from those not qualified to establish the boundaries of real property. It is an important responsibility because the improper establishment of those boundaries can bring consequences that are usually very difficult to correct. The Board takes its responsibility seriously to make sure each license issued is built upon a strong tripod.

This article concerns the Arkansas State-Specific Exams.

State-Specific Survey Exam Workshop

Every five years, the Board will select members and conduct the State-Specific Survey Exam Workshop to work on the Arkansas State-Specific Exam's bank of questions. The members of the workshop represent a broad geographical and practice cross-section of Arkansas Professional Surveyors. Members are from urban and rural practice backgrounds; federal, state and local jurisdictions and the private sector; "senior" surveyors and those newly licensed are represented. The committee is a purposeful blend of Professional Surveyors, providing a broad range of perspectives on exam content.

Exam Content

The State-Specific Exams are given in two parts: Part I, General (1.0 hour) and Part II, The USPLSS (1.50 hours). The Part I topics and their percent of the exam content are: 1.) State Surveying Standards (33%). 2.) Board Rules and State Statutes (37%). 3.) The Arkansas Coordinate System (17%). 4.) Arkansas riparian boundaries (13%). The Part II topics and their percent of the exam are: 1.) Calculation problems to reestablish lost corners on the USPLSS in Arkansas (40%). 2.) The original GLO system as applied in Arkansas (28%). 3.) Resurveys of the USPLSS for Arkansas (32%). These topics and percentages listed are current but are discussed and considered for revision each time the State-Specific Survey Exam Workshop meets.

To assist examinees in their studies and exam preparation for the State-Specific Exams, the Board has published on its website a set of example problems and a list of recommended exam reference materials.

Exam Format and the Pass-Fail Line

All the exam questions are multiple-choice, with one exception. On Part II, the USPLSS calculation problems require a solution (the examinee using their Board-approved handheld calculator). For the calculation problems, partial credit is given (when warranted) based on a pre-determined grading scheme. Both exams are open book (for bound material). After scoring the exam, results are ranked (for both Parts) and the Pass/Fail line is determined. The Pass/Fail line is set by reviewing the ranked scores, seeking a significant gap in scores at about 70 percent. Historically about 70 percent of the total points has been the Pass/Fail line.

Exam Trends

For many years, all exam aspects have remained constant: Two-part exams, number of questions, the seven exam topics, the number and type of USPLSS calculation problems. A couple of years ago the Board extended the time allowed on the Part II Exam to 1.50 hours without adding questions. Generally, the “degree of difficulty” or the exam “bar” has remained the same for at least 20 years.

The Board has noticed a trend toward a decreased pass rate for Arkansas “first time takers.” That is, recent Arkansas applicants have been less successful in passing the standard Arkansas State-Specific Exam. It is concerning that some applicants seem to be struggling to pass the State-Specific Exams. It seems surveying education or mentored experience (or both) are not as robust as they once were and should be.

Future Board Efforts

The Board will continue its efforts to be a responsible gatekeeper. Through its exam workshop, the Board will continue to ensure the State-Specific Exams are applicable, discerning, comprehensive and fair. Along with licensed professionals and surveying educators, the Board will work to build a strong licensure tripod.