CDME FINAL EXAM INSTRUCTIONS – 2025

This final exam is released for use between December 15, 2024 – October 31, 2025

Please read this document in its entirety before starting your final exam.

Assignments that do not meet the guidelines outlined in this document will be sent back for revision or a complete redo.

DEADLINES

- The CDME program requires completion of four core courses (and respective take-home papers), two elective courses, and final exam within a four-year time frame.
- Final exams are accepted year-round.
- Once the submission is "accepted" by the review team, the candidate has completed the program requirements and is deemed certified.
- **Friday, January 15, 2025**: **Deadline to submit topic and draft abstract or outline for** *Assignment #3: Final Research Project*. **Research topic and draft abstract or outline must be submitted through this form for CDME Board review and approval.**
- **Saturday, March 15, 2025:** **Deadline to submit final exam in order to be considered for recognition during the 2025 Annual Convention.**
- **Sunday, June 1, 2025:** **Deadline for final exam to be approved in order to be recognized during the 2025 Annual Convention.**

CONTACT

- **Return all three assignments, labeled individually and saved as PDFs, in one email to cdme@destinationsinternational.org.**
- **Please include your name and organization in a header on each page of the document.**
- If files are too large to be sent via email, you may use a file-sharing link or application of your choice (Google Drive, Sharepoint, Dropbox, WeTransfer, etc.)

FINAL EXAM

The final exam provides the opportunity for the CDME candidate to demonstrate their ability to apply what was learned throughout their CDME experience, rather than the recall of specific items presented in the program. These questions are intentionally broad to encourage thought leadership and application of knowledge.

The final exam consists of three assignments (detailed instructions below):

- **Assignment #1:** *The Evolving Role of the Destination Organization* (essay format)
- **Assignment #2:** *Fostering Community Alignment and Engagement in the Destination* (essay format)
- **Assignment #3:** *Final Research Project* (written report *OR* creative format)

FINAL EXAM RATINGS

☐ Final Exam Accepted

☐ Final Exam Accepted – Exemplary Work/Content should be considered for Destinations International programming

    ☐ "Red-pen" review needed prior to consideration for publication.

☐ Final Exam NOT Accepted. Reviewer will provide significant commentary, with direction given to the applicant as to what is needed for the final exam to be resubmitted and accepted.

AI USAGE GUIDELINES AND POLICY

Candidates may use AI for research purposes; however, you MUST disclose in your papers and presentations when Chat GPT or any AI tool has been used. Utilizing AI to generate the entirety of your responses for any of the assignments is not allowed, and will require a complete redo of your submission.

- Always cite the use of AI tools appropriately, just as you would cite any other source or methodology.
- Clearly specify the extent to which AI was utilized and how it influenced the research outcomes.
- Respect intellectual property rights associated with the use of AI tools. Do not infringe upon copyrights or licenses when using third-party AI services.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENTS #1 AND #2

- Assignments 1 and 2 are designed to assess your grasp of essential elements of the broad CDME body of knowledge, including destination organization leadership and critical issues.
- Responses are expected to reflect insights gained during the program and as they relate to your current role.
- Responses are judged primarily on the application of knowledge as it relates to coursework and real-world work experience.
- Use specific examples from the courses you've taken or from your CDME peers.
- Be thoughtful and bring original thinking to your writing.

Assignment #1: *The Evolving Role of the Destination Organization*
Based on your destination organization experience and the discussions in your courses throughout the CDME program, how do you think your organization and your destination should evolve given the current state of the industry? In 750-1,000 words, define and discuss the principles and issues facing destination organization leaders and use examples from both your destination organization and your destination. For those working outside of a destination organization, how would you apply this to your client relationships?

Assignment #2: *Fostering Community Alignment and Engagement in the Destination*
Referring to the body of knowledge presented in the CDME courses, how can destination organizations foster greater industry, community and government alignment and engagement? Based upon your experience and what you have learned, how can your destination or organization better engage the community, while also ensuring an inclusive and welcoming environment for all? Explain the importance and impact of these proposed strategies and initiatives. Your response should consist of 750-1,000 words.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS
- Minimum of 750 words (3 pages double-spaced); do not exceed 1,000 words
- File Name: First Name, Last Name_CDME Final Exam_Assignment #1 (or #2)
  - Example: *Jane Smith_CDME Final Exam_Assignment #1*

GRADING RUBRIC (REVIEW CRITERIA)
Technical/Objective Criteria:
☐ Did the response consist of a minimum of 750 words (3 pages double-spaced), and not exceed approximately 1,000 words?

Subjective Criteria:
☐ Did the response identify and discuss fully the key components of the assignment, using illustrations from the destination, destination organization, and/or client situation?

☐ Did the response introduce any new and/or original ideas, concepts or approaches?

☐ Were ideas, concepts or approaches (new or otherwise) noted in the paper well thought out and appropriately researched?

☐ Did the author demonstrate strategic and critical thinking?

☐ Is the submission comprehensive and practice-oriented?

☐ Did the candidate illustrate the application of knowledge presented over the course of the CDME program?

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

For this assignment, we are looking for the application of knowledge gained during the program as it relates to the real-world current situation in your organization, destination, and/or another destination of your choice. In other words, how are you going to use the knowledge you've gained to enhance, change, grow and evolve the organization, destination, and/or industry?

- This is your chance to show that you have gained the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to manage and lead a destination successfully.
- Consider this assignment a capstone to the program; it is the most extensive piece of the final exam process. Don't be afraid to discuss your topic selection and the project with colleagues in the office or CDME instructors; they can be a powerful sounding board and may be helpful in providing insights and references. Your contacts can also test your assumptions.
- **The final research project should be completed in either a written or creative format:**

Assignment #3 Written Report:

Candidates can choose to write a report of a maximum of 12 pages double-spaced (3,000 words), which encompasses the concepts and theories from the program and adheres to the directions detailed below.

<div align="center">

OR

</div>

Assignment #3 Creative Option:

CDME candidates can instead opt for a creative option to complete their project. This should include a PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Canva presentation of at least 15 slides with supporting visual/graphic displays, short videos, etc. and must include a recorded presentation of at least 20 minutes in length. The creative option must be informative, address key points of the course content and equally adhere to the directions detailed below.

TOPIC SELECTION

- **You must submit your research topic for CDME Board review by completing the CDME Final Exam Research Topic Submission Form by the deadline. A sample list of previously approved topics is provided at the end of these instructions.**
- You can examine any issue that is relevant and meaningful to the destination organization profession.
- You are encouraged to think carefully about your topic selection before you begin the process.
- Select a topic of significant interest that excites you and about which you feel passionate. It will make developing the assignment more enjoyable and you will bring greater insights to the project.
- **You may NOT use an initiative from your organization's past, current or future business, master, or strategic plan as your research topic. You also may NOT repurpose a previous project or presentation for this assignment.**
- If you would like to focus on a topic not included in the list, and would like additional guidance prior to completing the submission form, please send an email with a brief description of your idea and the purpose for selecting it, to cdme@destinationsinternational.org.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

DEVELOPING THE PROJECT

You are strongly encouraged to start thinking about your research topic and project when you start the CDME program. Then, plan out your project, perhaps several months before you begin drafting it, so you can digest the material and bring your unique perspective and insight to the project, as well as gather sources for material.

- It is recommended to begin developing your project at least six weeks prior to submission, to allow yourself time to be thoughtful in the approach taken and to think critically.
- Begin drafting the project when you have plenty of time to think through the material, perhaps on a day off or during the weekend when you are uninterrupted.
- It can be extremely beneficial to create a draft and set it aside for a few days before continuing your work. It will look different to you than the day you drafted it.
- Review and organize your notes and references ahead of time so you can build the paper/presentation. If more research is required to validate your assumptions, you will have the time to do that without facing a deadline crunch.
- Plan on creating at least two or three drafts before you finalize your submission.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

The submission will be judged on the original, fresh thinking you bring to the subject, as well as critical thinking skills. Use the body of knowledge presented over the course of the program, as well as personal perspective and relevant readings or research on the subject. Stating the obvious and simply repeating what was said in class is not enough to qualify for successful completion of the final exam.

- **Maximum of 12 pages double-spaced (or 3000 words) for the written option, or at least 20 minutes of presentation time for the creative option.**
- Includes (please label all sections for both the written and creative options):
    - **Executive Summary** (abstract – approximately 150 words for written option and 150 words written in a separate slide or document for creative option)
    - **Introduction** (background and purpose – approximately 500 words for written option or at least 2-4 minutes for creative option)
    - **Main Findings/Viewpoints** (analysis – approximately 1,500 words for written option or at least 10-15 minutes for creative option)
    - **Conclusion** (application of findings/viewpoints – approximately 850 words for written option or at least 2-4 minutes for creative option)
    - **References** (please use current, outside sources of information, such as industry journals, online publications, videos, podcasts, Destinations International resources, etc.)
        - **References MUST be cited. We highly recommend using the American Psychological Association (APA) style: Purdue University Online Writing Lab APA Guidelines**
        - For the Written Report, please include a list of references at the end of the report. Include in-text citations where applicable.
        - For the Creative Option, please include a list of references at the end of the presentation on a separate slide. Include citations in the notes of each slide where applicable.
        - It is required to cite at least five (5) current, outside sources of information.

INSTRUCTIONS: ASSIGNMENT #3

GRADING RUBRIC (REVIEW CRITERIA) – Written Report

Technical/Objective Criteria:
Did the candidate include and label:

☐ Executive Summary (abstract, approximately 150 words)

☐ Introduction (background and purpose, approximately 500 words)

☐ Main Findings/Viewpoints (analysis, approximately 1,500 words)

☐ Conclusion (application of the findings/viewpoints, approximately 850 words)

☐ References (did the project properly cite at least five current, outside resources and include full list of references?)

Subjective Criteria:

☐ Did the project introduce any new and/or original ideas, concepts or approaches?

☐ Were ideas, concepts or approaches (new or otherwise) noted in the project well thought out and appropriately researched?

☐ Did the candidate demonstrate strategic and critical thinking?

☐ Is the submittal comprehensive and practice-oriented?

☐ Did the candidate illustrate the application of knowledge presented over the course of the CDME program?

GRADING RUBRIC (REVIEW CRITERIA) – Creative Option

Technical/Objective Criteria:
Did the candidate include and label:

☐ Executive Summary (abstract, approximately 150 words written in a separate slide or document)

☐ Introduction (background and purpose, at least 2-4 minutes of presentation)

☐ Main Findings/Viewpoints (analysis, at least10-15 minutes of presentation)

☐ Conclusion (application of the findings/viewpoints, at least 2-4 minutes of presentation)

☐ References (did the project properly cite at least five current, outside resources and include full list of references?)

Subjective Criteria:

☐ Did the project introduce any new and/or original ideas, concepts or approaches?

☐ Were ideas, concepts or approaches (new or otherwise) noted in the project well thought out and appropriately researched?

☐ Did the candidate demonstrate strategic and critical thinking?

☐ Is the submittal comprehensive and practice-oriented?

☐ Did the candidate illustrate the application of knowledge presented over the course of the CDME program?

Most Common Revision Requests for Research Project:

- References have not been properly cited, and/or at least five current, outside resources have not been used.
- Project did not include section labels or entire section is missing (such as Executive Summary, Conclusion, or References)
- Candidate did not illustrate the application of knowledge gained during the CDME program.
- Report or presentation focused on a past project, work or initiative; rather than enhancing, changing, growing and evolving the organization, destination, and/or industry.
- Research topic was not approved, or project was repurposed from a previous presentation, resulting in a complete rewrite.

For Additional Advice:

If you would like to be paired with a CDME graduate who can act as a resource throughout the process, we recommend engaging through our online Mentorship program here: https://community.destinationsinternational.org/participate/mentoring.

If you have any questions, please visit https://destinationsinternational.org/cdme-final-project-recognition or email cdme@destinationsinternational.org.

SAMPLE TOPICS: ASSIGNMENT #3

SAMPLE TOPICS FOR 2025*	
Destination organization careers and talent development	Destination product development
Destination regionalism	Destination organization board/CEO effective relations
Destination organization advocacy, government and/or community relations	Destination organization operational management
Reinventing the visitor center experience	Integrated destination promotions, sales and services
The evolving role of destination organizations	Identifying new performance metrics that matter
Destination social media and marketing	Destination sports tourism
Destination organization digital marketing strategies	Equity, diversity, and inclusion
Destination performance management	Destination partnership development
Destination and community branding	Destination organization visiting friends and relatives market development
Destination organization new funding initiatives / tourism improvement districts	Strategic and business planning for destination organizations
New technology in destination organizations	Research-based leadership / decision-making
The destination organization executive as the destination leader	Tourism master planning
Key challenges and directions in destination marketing and/or sales	Sustainable tourism management
The destination organization role in crisis management and preparedness – pre, during and post-event	Innovative marketing and organizational partnerships
Weaponization of travel and the destination organization role/response	Starting a new destination organization/starting over
International marketing and sales	Leadership succession planning for the destination organization
The destination organization role in community issues (i.e., homelessness, crime, etc.)	The destination organization role in economic development
Marketing and operations under severely reduced financial capacity	The evolving role of AI and its impacts on destinations / destination organizations

These topics are suggestions only. If the subject you wish to use for your final exam research project is not listed above, please indicate so in your research topic proposal submission to the CDME Board and provide additional details.