Educational Leadership
Comprehensive Exam Information for the PhD in Higher Education
and the PhD in Educational Policy and Theory
(revised March 2015)

Note: The comprehensive exam process described herein applies to candidates whose exam starts after March 1, 2015. Candidates who began their comprehensive prior to March 1, 2015 remain subject to the previous policy (available upon request).

The University of Rochester requires that all PhD programs administer a “qualifying examination” as part of the PhD program requirements. Warner’s qualifying examination is referred to as the Comprehensive Exam. Warner PhD candidates must complete the Comprehensive Exam prior to advancing to the dissertation stage of their program.

I. Purposes of the Comprehensive Exam

1. The comprehensive exam provides evidence that the candidate has the prerequisites necessary to undertake successfully the independent work required for the dissertation.

2. The comprehensive exam offers candidates a transitional step toward the dissertation.

II. Prerequisites to the Comprehensive Exam

1. Candidates may begin the comprehensive exam after they have completed the Portfolio Evaluation and most course work. Candidates need not complete course work listed on their program of study as dissertation credits.

2. Candidates may not proceed to comprehensive exam if they have incomplete course grades (i.e., I) outstanding.

III. Components of the Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive examination consists of two papers that meet the following general requirements:

1. **Paper One:** The first paper will address the candidate’s anticipated dissertation field/topic. The paper will consist of a discussion of methods, methodologies, and the use of theoretical frameworks within the student’s field. The paper shall be a maximum of 30 pages (exclusive of bibliography and notes).

2. **Paper Two:** The second paper will demonstrate the student’s familiarity and expertise in a second field, i.e., a field other than the field addressed by the first paper. This may take the form of: (a) a scholarly paper, the form/nature of which will be decided by the student and committee members; or (b) an annotated syllabus for a newly-developed, three-credit course with approximately 38 hours of class time spread over 14 weeks. The scholarly paper will be 12-15 pages (excluding references, tables, graphs, and other appendices),
IV. Comprehensive Exam Initiation Process

1. Candidates need to inform their advisor when they have met the prerequisites for the comprehensive exam. If the student does not initiate the comprehensive exam process within a reasonable time following completion of the prerequisites, the student’s advisor will initiate the process.

2. Candidates need to form a comprehensive exam committee. The exam committee is composed of three faculty members. At least two of the three committee members must be Educational Leadership Program tenure-track, tenured, or clinical faculty. The third committee member may be a faculty member from any program within the Warner School, or a faculty member from another school/college in the University. There may be no more than one clinical faculty member on the committee.

3. After the formation of the committee, the candidate and committee must reach agreement, within the parameters listed above, regarding the topic/question of the two papers. It is the candidate’s responsibility to take the initiative in proposing the topic/question of each paper. Candidates may consult with committee members when formulating their proposal, but the committee is to serve only as advisors and consultants. The responsibility remains with the candidate to develop the exam’s topics/questions.

4. The candidate and committee will meet to reach an agreement on the first paper’s topic/question and specify the paper’s start and due dates. The period between the start and due date may not exceed 30 days.

5. Candidates must complete and submit the attached “Filing the Comprehensive Examination Form” with the required signatures of committee members to Brenda Grosswirth in Warner’s Office of Student Services.

6. If the candidate passes the first paper, the candidate and committee will meet again to determine the second paper’s topic/question and specify the papers start and due dates. The period between the start and due date may not exceed 30 days. The start and end dates of the second paper must be added to the candidate’s and committee members’ copies of the “Filing the Comprehensive Examination Form”.

7. The candidate cannot proceed to the second paper until the first paper has been completed successfully.

8. Candidates have six months to complete the comprehensive exam. The start date of the first paper begins the six-month examination period.
9. Candidates who do not submit and pass both papers within this six-month period fail the comprehensive exam.

10. Candidates must pass both papers to complete the comprehensive exam.

Note: Warner’s Associate Dean of Graduate Studies can grant candidates an extension to complete a question, or the six-month time limit for completing the comprehensive exam. The Associate Dean will grant extensions only because of the most unusual and compelling exigencies (e.g., health problems certified by a physician). The candidate must make the request in writing, explaining the factors that prompted the request. The exam committee must approve the request in writing, and specify new due dates as needed.

If the Associate Dean grants an extension for a medical leave, the candidate must register for a medical leave of absence. Upon return, the candidate and committee will resume the process with a new timeframe for completion.

V. Writing the Papers

Committee members may assist the candidate during the development of the comprehensive exam questions (i.e., suggestions regarding the writing of the paper such as literature to review). The committee cannot consult or advise the candidate during the writing of the papers. The intent of the comprehensive exam is for candidates to demonstrate their capacity to undertake the independent work needed to successfully complete a dissertation.

VI. The Grading Process

Paper One

1. Two committee members will evaluate the first paper, and each reader will determine whether the paper is a “pass” or “fail.”
2. Each reader will provide written feedback to the candidate within three weeks upon receipt of the paper.
3. Two passes constitute successful completion of the paper.
4. If the paper is deemed a pass by one reader and a failure by the other reader, the paper will be read by the third member of the comprehensive examination committee. In this circumstance, a majority vote of the three committee members will determine if the paper is to be given a grade of “pass” or “fail.”
5. Lack of completion of the first paper within the established 30-day timeframe will result in automatic failure.

Paper Two

1. All three committee members will read the second paper.
2. A grade of “pass” or “fail” will be determined by the committee members and communicated to the student at the end of an oral defense, which will take place at an
agreed upon date within 30 days of the paper’s submission. All three committee members will take part in the oral defense.

3. The defense will not exceed one hour and will provide the student with an opportunity to address questions of the committee members regarding the second paper and to demonstrate expertise in the second field of interest.

4. A majority vote of the three committee members will determine if the paper is to be given a grade of “pass” or “fail.”

5. Lack of completion of the second paper within the established 30-day timeframe will result in automatic failure.

In evaluating the papers and oral defense, the faculty will take into consideration the following factors:
   a. The significance of the topic/field/question addressed.
   b. The quality of the writing (grammar, syntax, etc.).
   c. The correct use of the relevant style (APA 6th edition unless a different style is agreed upon by the committee).
   d. Clarity and precision of expression.
   e. The organization of the paper.
   f. The validity and soundness of an argument.
   g. The student’s ability to marshal, synthesize, analyze, and interpret relevant evidence.
   h. The range and appropriate selection of references.
   i. The originality of insights and analysis.
   j. The student’s ability to respond to questions during the oral defense.
   k. In the case of a literature review:
      1. Comprehension of the review.
      2. Whether the review is synthetic, analytical and critical.
      3. Whether the studies are appropriately grouped and related to each other.

VII. Successful Completion of the Comprehensive Examination
To successfully complete the comprehensive examination the student must pass both questions within the six-month time limit noted earlier. If the student does not pass the first paper, the student fails the comprehensive examination. If the student passes the first one but does not pass the second, the student fails the comprehensive examination.

Upon successful completion of the comprehensive examination, the candidate must submit the attached “Comprehensive Examination Faculty Sign-Off” form to Brenda Grosswirth in Warner’s Office of Student Services.
VIII. Filing the Comprehensive Examination Form

The comprehensive examination must be completed within six months of the start date of the first paper indicated on this form. Once completed by the candidate and committee members following agreement to the terms of the first paper, the form needs to be submitted to Brenda Grosswirth in the Office of Student Services.

The candidate and committee members’ signatures indicate that the topic of the first paper and its start and end dates have been approved. Brenda Grosswirth will obtain signatures of both the Program Chair and the Associate Dean. Subsequent agreement to the terms of the second paper is to be recorded by the candidate and committee members on their copies of this form (a second submission of this form to Brenda Grosswirth is not required).

Start date of first paper:_______________________
End date of first paper:_______________________

Start date of second paper (To be determined):_______________________
End date of second paper (To be determined):_______________________

Signatures:

Candidate_____________________________________________________________________
Advisor_____________________________________________________________________
Faculty Member 2_________________________________________________________________
Faculty Member 3_________________________________________________________________
Program Chair*___________________________________________________________
Associate Dean*__________________________________________________________

*Brenda Grosswirth will obtain these signatures for the student.
IX. Comprehensive Examination Faculty Sign-Off

I attest that the following candidate has successfully completed the comprehensive examination. (In lieu of signatures, each committee member may email approval to Brenda Grosswirth at bgrosswirth@warner.rochester.edu):

___________________________________  ______________________________________
Candidate’s Name (printed/typed)  Date Examination Completed

1. _______________________________________________________________
   Faculty Member Signature

2. _______________________________________________________________
   Faculty Member Signature

3. _______________________________________________________________
   Faculty Member Signature

4. _______________________________________________________________
   Faculty Member Signature (If necessary)

It is the candidate’s responsibility to complete the top of this page, obtain the required faculty signatures, and return this page to Brenda Grosswirth, Office of Student Services, LeChase Hall 248. OR the candidate can ask each committee member to send an email approval to Brenda at bgrosswirth@warner.rochester.edu.