

**Educational Leadership Program Comprehensive  
Exam Information for the Ph.D. (Educational  
Policy and Theory, Higher Education) (updated  
Spring 2019)**

Note: Ph.D. students in Educational Leadership who have not initiated the comprehensive exam process by March 1, 2015 will be subject to the revised process described herein.

**I. The comprehensive examination serves the following purposes:**

1. It provides evidence that the student has the prerequisites necessary to undertake successfully the independent work required for the dissertation. (See criteria for evaluating the comprehensive examination.) Successful completion of the comprehensive examination is a necessary requirement for advancement to the writing of the dissertation.
2. The comprehensive exam also serves as a transitional step toward the dissertation.

**II. Prerequisites to the Comprehensive Examination**

The comprehensive examination may only be undertaken after the student has completed the Portfolio Evaluation and most course work (Course work officially listed as part of the dissertation in the individual student's program of study need not be completed prior to undertaking the comprehensive examination). The student may not proceed to comprehensive exam with any incompletes in coursework.

**III. Components of the Comprehensive Examination**

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

1. The first paper will address the field in which the student will be writing the dissertation. 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. 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), while the annotated syllabus will be a defined page range agreed upon by the student and committee members.
3. As discussed more fully below, students must complete each paper within one month.
4. The papers will follow APA style unless a different style is agreed upon by the committee.

**IV. Planning Process**

It is the student's responsibility to let his or her advisor know when all of his or her coursework has been completed and he/she is ready to sit for comprehensive exams. This involves forming

his or her comprehensive exam committee in consultation with his or her advisor and the chair of the comprehensive exam committee, if the chair is not the advisor.

The examination committee is composed of three faculty members. At least two of the three committee members must be from the Warner School's Educational Leadership Department and must be tenure-track or clinical faculty to a maximum of one clinical faculty member on the committee. The third committee member may be a faculty member from any department within the Warner School, but also may be a faculty member from another school/college in the University.

After formation of the committee, the student and committee members will meet and reach an agreement in writing on the topic/question and start and end dates of the first paper. The student will not proceed to the second paper until the first paper has been completed successfully. If the student passes the first paper, the student and committee members will meet again to determine the topic/question and start and end dates of the second paper.

The student and committee members must reach agreement, within the parameters listed above, regarding the topic/question of the two papers. It is the student's responsibility to take the initiative in proposing to the committee the topic/question of each paper or for the course syllabus. A student may consult with the chair of the committee in formulating this proposal, but the chair is to serve only as advisor and consultant, with the responsibility remaining the student's to develop the specifications.

The student must complete and submit the Warner School Comprehensive Examination Form with all required signatures. The form is best submitted to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies only after the student and committee have agreed upon the start date of the first paper and the first question upon which the student will be examined.

From the time of submittal of the required form the student has six months to complete the comprehensive examination including submission and review of each exam question. The student must pass both exams to pass the comprehensive exam and successfully move on to the dissertation stage of his or her program. If a student has not submitted both exams during this six-month period, the student will fail the comprehensive examination. The start date of the first question will be used as the start of the six-month examination period.

Only because of the most unusual and compelling exigencies, for example, health problems certified by a physician, may a student be granted, with permission of the committee, an extension regarding either the timeframe allotted for a question or the overall limitation of six months to complete the entire examination. If an extension is granted, the student will be required to take a medical leave of absence for the remainder of the semester. Upon return from the leave, the student and committee will start the process again with a new exam question for the affected exam and a new timeframe for completion.

Note: The Associate Dean of Graduate Studies makes the final determination regarding extension of the six-month time limit for completing the entire comprehensive exam.

## **V. Writing the Papers**

While the comprehensive exam plan is being formulated, committee members may assist the student by providing suggestions regarding the writing of the paper, such as literature to review, etc. But the faculty will not consult or advise the student during the writing of the papers. Moreover, the student may not seek any outside support during the completion of the papers. The comprehensive examination is intended to be a demonstration of the student's capacity to undertake the independent work needed to successfully complete a dissertation.

## **VI. The Grading Process**

Two of the three committee members will read the first paper. Each reader will review the paper and provide written feedback to the student within three weeks upon receipt of the paper. Each reader will then determine whether the paper is a "pass" or "fail." Two passes will constitute successful completion of the paper. For instances where the paper requires minor revisions to attain a decision of "pass", students will have two weeks to revise and re-submit the paper for final review. 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." Lack of completion of the first paper within one month will result in automatic failure.

At least two of the three committee members will read the second paper. 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 one month of the paper's submission. Both readers and the third committee member (if available) will take part in the oral defense. 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. Lack of completion of the second paper within one month 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 manual.
- 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.
- j. 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 exam, 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.

### **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 Claire Urbanowicz 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. Claire Urbanowicz 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 Claire Urbanowicz 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\* \_\_\_\_\_

\* Claire Urbanowicz 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 Claire Urbanowicz at [curbanowicz@warner.rochester.edu](mailto:curbanowicz@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 Claire Urbanowicz, Office of Student Services, LeChase Hall 254. OR the candidate can ask each committee member to send an email approval to Claire at [curbanowicz@warner.rochester.edu](mailto:curbanowicz@warner.rochester.edu).