

Teaching and Curriculum Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

Our doctoral program comprehensive examination has the following purposes:

- For students to demonstrate a broad grasp of their academic fields (where they intend their future research project to be situated) and to do so using well-crafted and supported arguments.
- For students to establish that they have achieved some necessary prerequisites to undertaking the independent work required for the dissertation.
- To provide a "check point" that would enable both student and faculty to decide whether it is worth the student continuing in the doctoral program, before entering its most demanding and time-consuming stage.

The comprehensive examination requirement for Ph.D. and Ed.D. students specializing in Teaching and Curriculum is intended to fulfill the functions articulated above. At the same time, the diverse and applied nature of our field makes it difficult to determine the prerequisites necessary to engage successfully in dissertation work. For this reason, the Warner School faculty long ago decided that a "sit-in" written examination is not appropriate for our goals, and instead that program areas should determine the form of examination within the following guidelines: "The comprehensive exam comes at the point in the student's program when he/she has completed the portfolio assessment with approval and completed most of the coursework for the degree. ... This examination should test the student's general and specialized knowledge of his/her field(s) in preparation for writing the dissertation proposal. ... The nature of the examination will be decided by the student and a committee of three faculty, usually composed of the advisor and at least one member from outside the program or cluster. ... [A]t least one component of the examination should be written. ... The committee chair files a plan for the examination which will be signed by the committee members and the student, approved by the Associate Dean, and filed in the Office of the Associate Dean. ... [T]hat plan has to be carried out within six months of the date of filing." (excerpts from current Warner School program descriptions).

In the remaining part of this document, the Teaching & Curriculum faculty has articulated more specific guidelines to operationalize this structure for doctoral students within its programs. First of all, with respect to the process, we expect that:

- Before beginning the comprehensive exam process, the student will have successfully completed the portfolio requirement as well as most of the doctoral coursework as agreed with the advisor (exclusive of credits in the "Dissertation Research" section of the Program of Study) at the Warner School.
- The student must submit the exam a minimum of eight weeks before the six-month deadline (or any interim deadlines established by the committee) so as to give faculty adequate time to review the exam and provide a response.
- If the student fails the exam, he/she has one chance to resubmit it, but the resubmission must also take place within the six-month deadline.

- Each completed question will be read and evaluated by two members of the committee according to the attached criteria established by the T&C faculty.
- Each reader will review the exam, sending written comments to the student's advisor (within two weeks of receiving the paper) who will compile responses and give the student a written response within three weeks of each submission.
- In the event that two readers disagree, the third committee member will read the exam to break the tie.

We also expect that personalized comprehensive exam questions should be designed in each case so as to enable the committee to determine:

- the student's ability to write in a coherent, clear and scholarly way;
- the student's ability to clearly articulate a research question of interest and argue convincingly about its interest and significance for the field of education;
- the student's ability to write a literature review within his/her area of specialization, which is informed by a specific question, theoretical position/s, and research methodologies, and reflects knowledge of important theories and issues within that area of specialization.

Comprehensive Exam Format: In order to benefit most from the comprehensive exam as an opportunity to prepare the groundwork for one's dissertation, we strongly recommend that the student and the committee construct the comps so as to provide a general outline of problem and theory with goal of fine tuning a research question by finding the "hole" in the literature by writing two extensive literature reviews along the following lines:

OPTION ONE:

- Educational Problem: Student identifies an educational problem and articulates its significance. The comp question should prompt a literature review that analyzes other research, including relevant methodologies, which has investigated this problem and finds what remains to be investigated.
- Theoretical Framework: This literature review should point to the theoretical framework, including relevant discussion of research methodologies, the student will likely use in the dissertation proposal by analyzing the frameworks that have been used to research the problem of focus.

OPTION TWO:

- A single paper of 40-50 pages that consists of a comprehensive analysis of the problem, theory, and methodology related to the student's future dissertation research. The student will identify an educational problem and articulate its significance in the context of the research literature. A thorough discussion of the theoretical frameworks that have been used to investigate this problem is also expected. Discussion of relevant methodologies will also be needed to give context to the reviewed studies' findings. The student should also clearly identify gaps in the literature that remain to be studied.

All comps will be in written form. Papers in option one should be no longer than 25 pages plus references. All papers should follow APA format. Specific questions that

ought to be considered as the comps are prepared are:

Describe the problem, reviewing the relevant literature. Why is this problem worth studying? What do we know already that is relevant to the problem in question? What research methodologies have been used to analyze this problem? What gaps in current knowledge need to be filled in order to shed light on the problem? What is the larger theoretical context that frames this problem? What theories might be newly brought to bear on the problem?

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF T&C COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS:

The student's ability to write in a coherent, clear and scholarly way:

- the reader can understand the points the student is trying to convey;
- the arguments are logical and well constructed;
- the ideas are well conceived and appropriate evidence is provided in support of claims made;
- material is well organized, the writing flows well, transitions are used appropriately quality and style of writing is appropriate for a scholarly paper;
- format and references follow APA 6th edition guidelines;
- document is free of grammatical and mechanical errors.

The student's ability to clearly articulate a research question and to argue convincingly about its interest and significance for the field of education:

- a research question is clearly stated and is grounded in the relevant literature;
- why the question is worth studying is made explicit, and justifications are provided in support to the claim made;
- its major implications are articulated;
- its relationship with other relevant problems/topics is made explicit;
- the theoretical/conceptual framework informing that question is made explicit;
- question/s is appropriate given the fields investigated.

The student's ability to write a literature review within an area of specialization, which is informed by a specific question, theoretical position/s, and research methodologies, and reflects knowledge of important theories and issues within that area of specialization:

- the literature review is not simply a list summarizing research studies of a given topic, but rather is clearly informed by a specific question;
- the literature review addresses what significant prior research has been done to address the chosen question (and/or closely related problems);
- research relevant to the chosen question has been examined (i.e., the literature review is sufficiently thorough and deep);
- the literature review provides a frame to make sense of the chosen question;
- the contributions of specific studies to making sense of the chosen question are made explicit, and these claims are appropriately supported and contextualized with respect to the theoretical framework assumed by these studies;
- understanding of key relevant theories in the field of specialization is evident;
- conclusions are drawn about the state of the art on the chosen question;

- implications are drawn about areas where further research seems needed;
- appropriate method(s) to approach a chosen research question have been identified, described, and justified.

Plan to implement new comprehensive examination process

The new process will begin with students admitted in the November 2013 admissions cycle. Students admitted after November 1, 2013 will follow the new process. Students who have already filed their forms to begin the comprehensive examinations will follow the old process. Students admitted before November 1, 2013 but have not begun the comprehensive examination can choose to follow the old or new process.

Timeline:

Comps will be submitted on a rolling basis after students meet with their committee to approve the questions. Comps can be started up to May 25th each year but not turned in between May 25th and August 25. Each committee will set its own timeline for turning in and providing feedback as long as all comps are approved within six months of the start date. The last comp must be turned in at least eight weeks before the end of the six months.