

**Comprehensive Examination Format
Ph.D. Program in Higher Education
January 2007**

The Ph.D. program in Higher Education requires students to complete a written comprehensive examination followed by an oral over the dissertation proposal. In the recent past, the written examination was a two-week, 75-page, take home essay in which students are asked to draw upon and integrate knowledge they have acquired in three of the program's core courses (ELPS 427, American Higher Education, ELPS 430, Curriculum in Higher Education; and ELPS 459, Organization and Governance in Higher Education). The higher education faculty evaluated the efficacy of the comprehensive examination structure; and, as a result, they decided to establish a new format for the Ph.D. comprehensive examination.

What is the new comprehensive examination format?

The new comprehensive examination requires students to complete an integrated literature review on a topic chosen by the student (and approved in advance by faculty) related to the field of higher education. The exam consists of separate reviews of the literature in three areas that shed light and promote an understanding of the topic selected. Each review may not exceed 15, double-spaced, typewritten pages, and the entire literature review may not exceed 45, double-spaced, typewritten pages.

The new format has three clearly delineated elements, each of which is described below.

Element 1: Prospectus

A written prospectus that clearly outlines the topic to be explored is required and must be approved by the Higher Education faculty before a student may move forward with writing his/her comprehensive examination on that topic. This narrative, which should not exceed 2 double-spaced pages in length, must respond to the following questions and its organization should clearly reflect these questions:

- What issue or topic is to be explored in the integrative literature review? What three specific areas will the review highlight and how does each relate to the broader topic?
- Why is it important to investigate this particular issue or topic? Provide a rationale to justify its selection.
- How does the literature proposed for review relate to the research and other literature examined in various higher education courses in the program? Offer a rationale for how the literature in these courses will, in part, inform the writing of each review (knowing, of course, that the review will not only include literature within the domain of these courses but also literature that extends beyond the actual literature read within the class), and why these courses help frame your reviews.
- Include as part of the prospectus a preliminary bibliography of at least 8 to 10 sources in appropriate APA format.

It is important to understand that the issue selected is very important and once the prospectus is approved a student will not be allowed to change the topic while completing the actual work of the written reviews. Consequently, students are asked to take great care in selecting a topic and to consider carefully their desire to follow through on the completion of the final product before asking faculty to read and approve a prospectus.

Note: At the time the prospectus is submitted to faculty, a formal application to undertake the Comprehensive Examination is to be submitted along with the prospectus. For Ph.D. students, this application can be downloaded from the Graduate School website (click on the link to 'forms').

Element 2: Integrative Literature Review

After the prospectus has been formally approved by faculty, students may begin writing the integrative literature review conforming to APA guidelines (5th Edition). This essay should consist of no more than 45 double-spaced,

typewritten pages and must contain three clearly defined reviews of literature (maximum of 15 pages each) pertinent to the student's selected topic/issue. When drafting each review, students would do well to select literature that enhances one's understanding of the topic chosen, focusing on (1) directly relevant research and (2) widely-cited essays, theories, or empirical studies that are germane to the topic. Students should strive to construct three synthetic reviews of the literature, culling out key themes and the research that supports them, rather than listing one study after another in an exhaustive attempt to "cover" the field.

When students complete their reviews, they are to submit one copy to each higher education faculty member. Generally speaking, students will have approximately 16 weeks to complete this assignment. Faculty will evaluate the reviews and record a grade of "Pass," "Conditional Pass," or "No Pass." Students who pass this element of the comprehensive examination may proceed to Element 3.

Element 3: Oral Presentation of Dissertation Proposal

Students must prepare and present a comprehensive dissertation proposal within one calendar year of successfully passing the written comprehensive examination. In some cases, the integrative literature review may provide the student with an excellent start on his or her dissertation proposal.

What deadlines are associated with the new comprehensive examination format?

Students may elect to write their comprehensive examination prospectus after they have successfully completed five higher education courses in the program. Key exam deadlines are as follows:

<u>Fall/Spring '07 deadline:</u>	September 3	Prospectus due
	October 1	Decision rendered by faculty (approve or resubmit)
	February 1	Integrative literature review due
<u>Spring/Summer '07 deadline:</u>	March 1	Prospectus due
	April 1	Decision rendered by faculty (approve or resubmit)
	August 1	Integrative literature review due

To whom does the new comprehensive examination policy apply?

Students who formally matriculate into the Ph.D. program in Higher Education prior to Summer or Fall, 2006 may complete either the former, two-week, take home comprehensive examination or the new format until March 1, 2007. Thereafter, all doctoral students, regardless of date of admission, will be required to conform to the new comprehensive examination format.

All newly admitted Ph.D. students in Summer or Fall, 2006 are required to complete their comprehensive examinations under the new format.