



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS™

**Higher Education Doctoral (Ed.D.) Program
University of Arkansas**

**Doctoral Written and Oral
Comprehensive
Examinations Guidelines**

Revised: October 12, 2015

Comprehensive Examination Purposes

All students in the Higher Education Doctoral Program are required to take the comprehensive examination “Comps,” which consists of a written and oral portion. The Comps are typically taken at the end of the student’s coursework *or* during the student’s last semester of coursework. Both the oral and written portions of the Comps should be successfully completed before the student is allowed to move to the candidacy phase of their program, students can, however, register for up to six hours of dissertation credit prior to or while taking “Comps.”

The purposes of the doctoral examination are to ensure that you are able to:

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of the field of higher education comparable to that expected of a doctoral student’s knowledge of their discipline in any other discipline.
- b. Write at a level expected of someone with a doctoral degree (to include editing and rewriting) and show you are familiar with the canons of writing expected in higher education.
- c. Demonstrate high level critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) in your writing.
- d. Determine, obtain, analyze, synthesize, and critically evaluate literature relevant to a given topic.
- e. Demonstrate knowledge of the literature, current practices, trends, issues, and problems in your area of higher education.
- f. Demonstrate an understanding of historical precedents as related to your comprehensive exam option choice.
- g. Show an ability to use and/or interpret basic concepts of research design and statistics as needed in comprehensive exam option choice.
- h. Make well organized presentations, “think on your feet,” and answer questions clearly and succinctly.
- i. Follow APA guidelines.
- j. Plan and use your time effectively so as to complete all assigned tasks on time.
- k. Complete all the above by yourself without help from anyone.

Procedural Guidelines for the Doctoral Examination

When Comps are Offered: The “Comps” will be administered when students meet the eligibility requirements listed below and upon the approval of the student’s Doctoral Advisory Committee (DAC).

Eligibility to Take Comps: Students are eligible to take the exam if they (1) have completed all Higher Education coursework or are in their last semester of coursework , (2) have a grade-point average of at least 3.25 on all coursework presented as part of the degree program, (3), have an approved DAC comprised of three members of the Higher Education program faculty, (4) have an updated program of study on file, approved by all members of the DAC; and (5) all official paperwork has been filed as per University of Arkansas Graduate School rules.

Application Process: Students must secure the approval of their doctoral program advisor for permission to take the examination and let him/her know which exam option the student intends to pursue (the student selects the “Comp” option). The advisory committee will verify that the student has met all the eligibility requirements. After receiving the advisor’s permission, the student should submit the HIED Doctoral Candidacy Exam Application to the HIED Program Coordinator.

Academic Integrity: Students must sign the Higher Education Program Honor Code Statement prior to beginning their written comps. The University of Arkansas Academic Integrity Policy and the honor code statement will apply to both the written and oral comprehensive examinations. Any act of academic dishonesty may result in dismissal from the program.

Initial Meeting with Doctoral Advisory Committee (DAC): Prior to beginning the written exam, the student must meet with their DAC. The student is responsible for arranging this meeting, which should last no longer than 30-45 minutes. Potential dates and time should first be set with the student’s advisor, then with the other members of the DAC. The meeting with the DAC should be scheduled as soon after the student has submitted his/her HIED Doctoral Candidacy Exam Application to the HIED Program Coordinator.

The student’s meeting with his/her DAC serves several purposes. (1) First, this meeting serves to inform the members of the DAC of which written “Comp” option the student has selected (the committee may not overrule the student’s choice of options). (2) The student should come prepared to provide a brief overview of the premise of their intended paper (a written overview is recommended but not required) and a proposed start date. (3) Finally, this is the only opportunity the student will have to obtain clarification of the “Comp” guidelines and to receive faculty input on the comp selection and intended paper.

Written Comprehensive Exam Options: Effective with students admitted in spring 2014, students in the Higher Education Doctoral Program will select one of three options: (1) a written proposal of a change initiative followed by an oral defense, (2) a conference paper followed by a presentation (oral defense), or (3) a scholarly paper followed by a presentation (oral defense).

Option I. Written proposal of a change initiative followed by an oral defense

In keeping with the practitioner focus of the program, students that select option I, will be asked to develop a written proposal for a major change in the goals, policies or practices at an institution of their choice and defend it to the faculty members of

their doctoral advisory committee who will act as a board of trustees or executive team. The written proposal will include a thorough review of appropriate literature and practice from the student's program of study. In other words, the change proposal should be grounded in an extensive review of the literature on the student's topic, in which the student must demonstrate that he/she is able to locate, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize relevant literature, analyze all relevant perspectives, and provide evidence of high level critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) in his/her writing. The written proposal is to be between 20-30 pages in length, excluding the cover page, references, and appendices. Examples of appropriate proposed changes are: A proposal to change the academic calendar; a proposal to establish a new governance system; a proposal to restructure the developmental studies program; or a proposal to establish a management/leadership program. A proposed new course or a proposed change in some minor policy or procedure would not qualify.

Option II. Conference paper followed by a presentation (oral defense)

The purpose of option II of the comprehensive exam is for students to prepare a research paper for a conference. The paper has to be 20-30 pages in length, double-spaced, excluding the cover page, references, and any appendices and should include a thorough review of relevant literature. The following guidelines for preparing the conference paper were adopted from the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference submission guidelines for research papers. Research papers should present the results of original research study using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs, and consist of, but not be limited to, the following sections: (1) statement of the problem; (2) objectives or purposes of the study; (3) thorough review of relevant literature and theoretical/conceptual frameworks/perspectives; (4) research methods/techniques, including data sources and analysis; (5) results of the study; and (6) discussion of the results and conclusions.

Option III. Scholarly paper followed by a presentation (oral defense)

The purpose of option III of the comprehensive exam is to prepare a scholarly paper that might be related to a potential dissertation topic. The scholarly paper option requires that the student conduct a comprehensive review of literature on the topic of their choice to illuminate a theoretical or practical problem in higher education. The paper should be 20-30 pages in length, double-spaced, excluding the cover page, references, and any appendices. Scholarly papers, which are essentially critical literature reviews, should consist of, but are not limited to, the following sections: (1) statement of the problem; (2) objectives or purposes of the paper; (3) thorough review of relevant literature; (4) conclusions and implications for policy and/or practice; and (5) future research directions or frameworks.

Timeline for the Written Comprehensive Exam: Students will have 45 days to research and compose their written comprehensive exam. The 45-day timeframe begins

on the designated start date agreed to by the student and his/her DAC. Students must submit their paper as a Microsoft Word document attachment sent by email to each member of the student's DAC. Day 46 will serve as the required submission date or if the 46th day is Saturday or Sunday, the paper may be submitted on the next business day. It is the student's responsibility to make sure he/she receives a confirmatory email from each DAC member indicating that they have received the written exam.

Grading of the Written Comprehensive Exam: The three faculty that comprise the student's DAC will grade the written exam. Members of the advisory committee have 10 to 14 days to assess the student's performance on the written exam (holidays and semester breaks may lengthen the assessment period). Each student's paper, regardless of the option selected, will be checked electronically for plagiarism. The Student will receive one of three scores on the written exam: "*pass*," "*remediate*," or "*fail*." A grade of "*pass*" must be received for the student to move to the oral part of the comprehensive exam. The chair of the DAC will inform the student of the results and the next step in the "comp" process.

In case of "*remediate*," the student will be provided with specific guidelines and a new timeline by their chair after consultation with the other members of the DAC. The guidelines will set forth the specific deficiencies in the student's written paper and what needs to be done to *remediate* the exam (in some instances this will involve writing an addendum to the paper). The student will be given a "*remediation*" timeframe for changes to the paper and a specific submission date. If the DAC determines that the student's *improved/remediated* paper is a "*pass*," he/she will be allowed to proceed to the oral defense. However, if the student's exam after remediation still does not result in a "*pass*," he/she will be deemed to have *failed* the exam and will be asked to complete a new exam (new application process and new topic).

If the DAC determines that the student has *failed* the written exam, he/she will be asked to complete a new exam the following semester. If the student does *not pass* the exam on the second attempt, the DAC will meet with the student to consider his/her performance and continuation status in the Higher Education Doctoral Program. At its sole discretion, the student's DAC reserves the right to require the student to complete additional course work and/or additional remediation activities before taking the written portion comps, or to dismiss the student from the Higher Education Doctoral Program.

Oral Defense Portion of the Comprehensive Exam: Students will receive notification from their DAC chair when they may schedule their oral defense. At the oral defense portion of the doctoral examination, the student will make a presentation to faculty who will act as a board of directors, campus executive team, or audience members, whichever is appropriate. The student will prepare any handouts/materials and/or incorporate audiovisual supplements, as they deem appropriate. The total time for the presentation will be 90 minutes. The student will have 20 minutes to make their presentation; the remaining time is reserved for questioning the student about the proposal. Members of the student's DAC will assess his/her presentation and ability to field questions. Faculty members that comprise your DAC will grade the oral defense; however, other higher education faculty members may also attend the presentation and ask questions. Within seven (7) days of the oral defense, the student will receive one of two scores on the oral

exam: “*pass*” or “*fail*.” Notification will come from the chair of the DAC after consulting with other committee members.

If the student receives a “*pass*” on both the written and oral portions of their comprehensive exam, he/she passes “comps” and will move to the dissertation (candidacy) phase of their program. If, however, the student receives a “*fail*” on the oral defense, he/she will be allowed to schedule a second oral defense. The date will be set in consultation with the advisor. If the student “*fails*” the second oral defense, the student’s DAC will meet to determine the student’s status in the Higher Education Doctoral Program. The DAC reserves the right to recommend to the full Higher Education program faculty that the student be dismissed from the Higher Education Doctoral Program.

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