

**Educational Leadership and Policy Studies**  
**Ed.D. Program**  
**Comprehensive Examination**  
**Policy and Procedure Statement**

**Purpose**

The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to provide the doctoral candidate the opportunity to demonstrate a degree of mastery related to the salient leadership concepts, theories, and practices as pertaining to the selected topic. The doctoral candidate also has the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of research methodologies related to the selected topic.

In preparation to successfully complete the written and oral components of the comprehensive exam doctoral candidates are encouraged to submit a detailed outline to their advisors prior to beginning the exam. The advisor will offer feedback on the outline in the form of questions and suggestions. At the point of receiving feedback from an advisor, the doctoral candidate will typically take between four and six weeks to complete the exam.

**General Description**

Educational Leadership doctoral students are required to successfully complete a written and oral comprehensive examination before developing a dissertation proposal and conducting a research study. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to stimulate reflection on students' previous studies and experiences, while pushing them to look ahead to a possible area for conducting their research. In this sense, the comprehensive examination process is meant to be a "bridge" between the concepts, theories, and practices introduced in the program and a future researchable topic area.

To achieve this purpose, there are several guiding principles of the examination as pertaining to the doctoral student's selected topic:

- The exam is intended to allow students to apply relevant theories, concepts, and practices experienced during their doctoral program;
- The exam is intended to assist students in thinking about the most significant trends and problems facing leaders of educational organization;
- The exam is intended to promote students' creative thinking about future research studies; and
- Therefore, the exam is not a dissertation research proposal, but is intended to allow students to demonstrate a comprehensive and broad-based view of leadership practice and research.

To assist students in preparing for and thinking through the trends, issues, and problems they will explore in the comprehensive exam, the specific component of the exam will be provided to students early in their doctoral program. Our expectations, therefore, are that students will be better able to apply concepts from their courses, share ideas and insights with their peers, and clarify questions and issues with their Program Advisor and faculty throughout their program of studies as pertaining to the selected research topic.

Revised 2023

The Ed.D. Comprehensive Examination, as required by the Graduate School, consists of two portions, a written exam and an oral exam. The written examination is comprised of five sections (see actual exam at the end of this document):

1. Environmental Scan—A Macro Perspective
2. Literature Review and Problem Identification
3. Leadership and Organizational Implications
4. An Agenda for Research
5. Research Methodology

The oral portion of the exam is scheduled upon successful completion of the written exam. The major purpose of the oral exam are threefold: (1) to clarify and expand on responses given to the written question; (2) to demonstrate a workable knowledge and ability to interpret and critique salient ideas, concepts, and theories pertinent to educational leadership; and (3) to ascertain a student's readiness to carry out the tasks associated with the completion of the doctoral program.

### **Scheduling of Examination**

Once the student has fulfilled all the eligibility requirements to take the exam, the written exam is scheduled by the student's Ed.D. Program Advisor and may be taken at any time that is agreed upon by the student, Program Advisor, and Program Committee. The exam is completed in a take-home format and decisions about beginning and ending dates are determined between the student and Program Committee.

The oral exam is scheduled by the Program Advisor once the written exam has been successfully completed and a date, time and place has been arranged by the student and agreed to by all comprehensive committee members. The Graduate School must have at least three weeks notification prior to the examination date. The Graduate School will approve and publicize the oral examination date. All members of the faculty are invited to attend and graduate students may also attend with the permission of the chairperson of the committee.

### **Comprehensive Examination Committee (Oral Portion)**

Each student is assigned a Comprehensive Examination Committee composed of members of the student's Ed.D. Program Committee and a representative of the Graduate Faculty who is chosen in consultation with the Program Advisor and appointed by the Graduate School. The representative of the Graduate Faculty must be outside of the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS). This committee, chaired by the chair of the Program Committee, is responsible for evaluating the oral comprehensive examination.

### **Eligibility to Take Examination**

In order to take the written comprehensive examination, a student must: (1) have been granted regular admission to the program; (2) have filed an approved plan of study; (3) have completed at least 36 hours (including ELPS Doctoral Core Seminars, all required ELPS hours), 60 hours if baccalaureate only student, of work applicable toward the degree, and at least 24 hours on UNC campus; (4) have maintained a grade average of at least 3.0 in his/her degree program; (5) have

received a progress letter after a minimum of 10 hours (which must include ELPS Doctoral Core Seminar One); (6) have received a second progress letter from the Division and the Graduate School after a minimum of 20 semester hours (which must include completion of ELPS Doctoral Cores One and Two); (7) have had an oral comprehensive examination committee appointed; and (8) have obtained written approval from the program advisor.

A student must obtain and complete a form titled “Permit to Take Written Comprehensive Examination” from the ELPS Division office at least two weeks before the exams are scheduled to begin.

In order to take the oral examination the student must have successfully passed the written portion of the exam. As noted above, the Program Advisor will schedule this exam with the Graduate School by forwarding a completed “Request to Schedule Doctoral Examinations” form.

### **Criteria on Which the Examinations are Judged**

The general criteria for assessing the student’s performance on the Ed.D. Comprehensive Exam are as follows. The student will demonstrate:

1. A workable knowledge of salient ideas, concepts, and theories.
2. The ability to interpret and critique these ideas, concepts, and theories.
3. The ability to apply these ideas, concepts, and theories to practical settings and issues.
4. Evidence that the Ed.D. Program has contributed to your scholarly orientation.
5. Readiness to move ahead independently in conducting a dissertation study.

More specifically, the responses to the written examination will be judged by the following criteria:

1. Rationale and clarity of addressing a significant educational leadership, organizational, and/or policy issue;
2. Clarity and continuity of thinking based in concepts established in the literature;
3. Articulation of a rational case using relevant factors;
4. Clearly addressing all the parts and the parameters of the question; and
5. Writing must be well organized, concisely, and precisely written.
6. A 50-page maximum, exclusive of references and figures, is required.

The responses to the oral examination will be judged by the following criteria:

1. The responses must be well organized.
2. The responses must be clearly and precisely presented.
3. The responses must address all parts and the parameters of the question.
4. The responses must demonstrate a depth and breadth of content knowledge related to the question being asked.
5. The responses must be well grounded in appropriate literature.

### **Assessment and Evaluation of the Examination**

The written examination will be read and evaluated by all members of the student's Program Committee. The following assessment system will be used:

Honors Pass—The student has responded to all parts of the examination in an outstanding manner.

Pass—The student has responded to all parts of the examination in an acceptable manner.

Fail: Retake Permitted—The student has failed to respond in an acceptable manner to one or more of the parts asked and this is the first time the exam has been taken. The exam cannot be retaken until the next semester.

Fail—The student has failed to respond in an acceptable manner to one or more of the parts asked, no retake is permitted, and the student's program is terminated.

In keeping with the belief that doctoral students should demonstrate a high standard of professional academic writing, the following will serve as a guideline in judging the writing style and format in a written doctoral comprehensive exam: *If a student has five or more writing tip and/or APA manual violations, the ELPS faculty reserve the right to automatically fail the doctoral candidate.*

All but one of the Program Committee members must agree to a grade of Pass or Honors Pass for a student to successfully complete this exam. The chairperson of the committee will notify the Graduate School of the results of the exam.

The performance on the oral examination will be judged by the student's Comprehensive Examination Committee. The following evaluation system will be used:

Honors Pass—The student has responded to all questions on the examination in an outstanding manner.

Pass—The student has responded to all questions in an acceptable manner.

Will Pass if Meet Stated Conditions—Specific conditions must be met for the student to pass.

Unsatisfactory—A retake of the oral examination is permitted. The retake must be scheduled during a subsequent semester.

Fail—No retake is permitted, and student's program is terminated.

All but one of the Comprehensive Examination Committee members must agree to a grade of Pass or Honors Pass or that stated conditions have been met for a student to successfully

complete this exam. Again the chairperson of the committee will notify the Graduate School on the results of the exam on the “Report of the Oral Comprehensive Examination” form.

### **Written Examination Feedback System**

Once the written comprehensive examinations have been graded, students should meet with the chair of their committee (who normally is the Program Advisor) for the purposes of: (1) reviewing the feedback given on these exams; (2) preparing for the oral comprehensive examination; and/or (3) if the student has not passed the written portion of the exam, assisting in preparing for re-taking the written portion. The committee chair may request that students meet with other committee members as needed.

### **Examination Retake**

Students who fail the written comprehensive exam may be allowed to one retake of the exam. This retake will be scheduled by the chairperson of the Program Committee. A second permit is required for the retake. If a student fails the retake examination, his/her degree program will be terminated.

Students who receive an unsatisfactory grade on the oral comprehensive exam are allowed one retake of this exam. Again, this retake will be scheduled by the Program Advisor.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comprehensive Examination</b></p>
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*The purposes of this written comprehensive examination are for the student to demonstrate a broad knowledge of historical trends and current issues facing educators, to examine leadership theories and concepts, and to identify a research method that is appropriate for understanding a leadership problem.*

### **Part I. Environment Scan – A Macro Perspective**

Describe one or more significant educational leadership, organizational, or policy trends at a global, national, regional, and/or state level. Discuss these trends in terms of salient indicators from the past, occurring presently, and anticipated in the future. Provide a transition that connects the trends you identified to the focus of your literature review. [Caution: This macro view provides a broad perspective on trends rather than a narrow focus on a problem that you explore later in this examination.]

### **Part II. Literature Review and Problem Identification**

Provide a review of the literature that frames a clearly identified set of problems related to the trends noted in your environmental scan. In your review include significant theories and concepts from your doctoral studies, as well as findings of previous research related to the problems and these theories and concepts. At the conclusion of your analysis:

- Identify a problem you believe to be important for consideration by educational leaders today, and
- Provide a rationale as to why this is a significant problem.

### **Part III. Leadership and Organizational Implications**

Succinctly discuss the stakeholders impacted by the problem you identified in parts one and two. Briefly discuss how further research of this problem would be useful to educational leaders.

### **Part IV. An Agenda for Research**

This section is intended to assess the student's ability to examine research problems from a variety of perspectives and demonstrate an understanding of various research designs that are appropriate for different research questions.

Based on the problem that you have identified through an exploration of the research literature, develop three to five research questions. In a paragraph for each research question, discuss the appropriate research design that should be used to answer the research question and how the

Revised 2023

knowledge that would result from such a study would be useful to educational leaders in responding to or addressing the research problem.

### **Part V. Research Methodology**

Select **one** of your research questions or hypotheses and then describe and defend a methodology that could be used to study the problem. Include additional research questions or hypotheses related to this overarching question/hypothesis, the research setting(s), subjects, concepts or variables of interest, data collection and analysis methods, and such issues as reliability and validity (or trustworthiness of the data) as appropriate to the methodology.

## Writing Tips

The following are writing tips that the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) faculty have decided to emphasize in the grading practices and, ideally, instill in aspiring educational leaders. The ELPS faculty feels that aspiring educational leaders must be able to communicate clearly and accurately in order to have the necessary credibility to successfully lead schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For that reason, students are advised that excessive violations (five or more) of any combination of these writing tips may result in at least a .25 reduction in the final score assigned to each assignment. For that reason, students are encouraged to review these writing tips and apply them in all of their assignments.

1. Assume your reader knows nothing and everything needs to be explained at least once. You cannot use an acronym unless it is first written out and you identify the acronym in the text. Another example would be No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Once you identify the acronym, you are free to use it to your heart's content throughout the rest of the text.
2. Never forget what your 7<sup>th</sup>-grade English teacher taught you concerning writing. Every paper must have an introduction and a conclusion. We would also guess that this same teacher talked to you about transitions between paragraphs so that one thought connects to another.
3. In scholarly writing, one should not (as opposed to shouldn't) use contractions. Other examples would include not abbreviating. (I can't stand encountering abbreviations in scholarly writing. I wouldn't abbreviate in a paper for this course. Hopefully you get the idea of what not to do.)
4. "A quote without a citation will always have the period inside the quotation marks."
5. "A quote with a citation will always have the citation after the quote" (Raven, 1999, p. 3).
6. "A quote in the middle of the sentence will always have the comma inside the quotation marks," "then another quote," and "the final quote." If each quote had a citation, then refer to number seven.
7. Always refer to a published work in the past tense.
8. When listing three or more items, always include a comma after each item, as in the following example: The three professional teams I hate the most are the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Los Angeles Lakers, and the New York Yankees. (Notice the comma after the Lakers).
9. Keep an APA journal article close to your computer along with the *Publication Manual* as easy reference guides. When in doubt, look it up. A wonderful website that will answer many APA questions is <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
10. Get in the habit of writing in the plural to avoid having to assign gender and to mitigate agreement issues. For example, "The principal should always do what he or she thinks best" versus "Principals should always do what they think best."



11. If you are not familiar with the short book on the use of commas entitled *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*, and you have questions about the proper use of a comma, then take time to peruse this book. Suffice it to say, depending upon how you use the comma, the following phrase has a different meaning:

“The panda eats shoots and leaves” (a phrase from a nature show)

“The panda eats, shoots, and leaves” (call CSI)

12. If you are not certain when to use a semi-colon, then don't. A semi-colon is used to link two independent thoughts (or clauses) into one sentence. However, if you lack a comfort level with the use of semi-colons, then consider this guiding question: Do you have two independent thoughts or clauses in the sentence that are able to stand alone and are not fragment sentences? If so, why not just create two sentences?
13. Avoid sentences where you have two or more independent clauses connected only by a comma and lacking a conjunction or connecting word. For example, Greg works at the university, he is a friend of mine – BAD (meaning it is a run-on sentence). Greg works at the university, and he is a friend of mine – ACCEPTABLE. (Also note that a comma is needed in the last sentence before the conjunction because what is written on either side of the conjunction can stand alone.)
14. Be sure to include a comma after an introductory phrase. If you can move the phrase to the end of the sentence and it makes sense, you need a comma after it at the beginning of the sentence.
15. Write out all numbers less than 10.
16. “I plan on becoming a principal. In the next few years, anyway.” That second sentence is a fragment and is an incomplete thought that needs to be fully developed. It is NOT a sentence.
17. Before submitting any paper for assessment, READ IT OUT LOUD to ensure you are saying what you want or intend to say. As you do so, ask yourself, “Can I say what I am saying with fewer words?” and “Is the content clear?” Also, consider having a colleague (but not a spouse) read your paper as well.
18. Finally, remember that good writing is nothing more than re-writing. If you are turning in a first draft of a document, then it is more likely to have mistakes.