

ELOD Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

Overview

The comprehensive examination is designed to provide an integrative and summative evaluation of a student’s progress in developing knowledge of conceptual, theoretical, and empirical research in the student’s chosen field of study. The comprehensive examination seeks to verify that the student has sufficient understanding of and competence in his/her field to become a candidate for the degree.

Comprehensive Examination Timeframe

	Activity	Fall	Spring	Summer
1	Deadline to sign up for examination for upcoming semester	July	December	March
2	Comprehensive examination Start Date	October 1	March 1	June 1
3	Comprehensive examination End Date	October 30	March 30	June 30
4	Program Committee members grade examination and submit results to the student’s Committee Chair and the Ph.D. Program Director	Within 3 weeks of the examination end date	Within 3 weeks of the examination end date	Within 3 weeks of the examination end date
5	Program Committee Chair notifies the student of the results	1 week after responses received from Program Committee	1 week after responses received from Program Committee	1 week after responses received from Program Committee

Applying for the Comprehensive Examination

Students will take the comprehensive examination no earlier than the last semester of coursework. Students must be actively enrolled in classes to register for and take the comprehensive examination.

Students must inform their Program Committee Chair of their intent to sit for their comprehensive examination the semester prior to their chosen examination start date. This advanced communication helps facilitate an adequate timeline for student preparation. The doctoral student completes the Comprehensive Examination Declaration Form, collecting signatures from the faculty members that will serve on his/her dissertation committee. It is the student’s responsibility to complete this form, collect signatures, and submit this form to the Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development (ELEOD) office in the semester prior to sitting for examination within the deadlines stated above.

Completing the Comprehensive Examination

Students are provided **30 calendar days** to complete the written comprehensive examination. Once the examination period has commenced, students cannot consult other students, faculty or other individuals on the content or style of their writing.

Content/Focus

The examination is typically related to the student's proposed dissertation study, which may serve as the student's preliminary work feeding into the dissertation prospectus. A student's program committee chair will work with the student to shape the scope and focus of the question. In addition to touching on the student's proposed dissertation topic, the examination should encompass the key content fields (e.g., relevant organizational theories, leadership theories, historical contexts) of the student's concentration, as determined by the student and his/her chair.

Formatting Responses

Students must submit one typewritten, Word document. The document must be double-spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins, and adhere to current APA formatting standards. The final product should be between 25-30 pages in length, not including the Reference Section.

Submitting Responses

Upon completion of the comprehensive examination, each student will submit the examination via Blackboard and run it through *Safe Assign*.

Reporting Results and Possible Outcomes of Comprehensive Examinations

Once the examination period has ended, faculty members have three weeks to assess the student's performance and to report the results to the student's Program Committee Chair. Only after the entire committee reaches a decision should the Program Committee Chair notify the student and the Ph.D. Program Director of the outcome.

All committee members should treat the examination outcomes in the strictest confidence. If the student has questions about results, the other faculty members should refer the student to the Program Committee Chair. Consensus among the Program Committee members is optimal, but a simple majority will suffice with the Program Committee Chair approval. Students will receive one of three potential outcomes as explained below:

- a. **Pass with honors** is defined as exceeding minimal standards. No minor deficiencies need to be addressed.
- b. **Pass** is defined as meeting minimal standards with minor deficiencies that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the Committee members. The minor deficiencies must be addressed within two weeks. If the deficiencies are not addressed within two weeks the outcome converts to a fail.
- c. **Fail** would require the student to retake the examination within an agreed deadline set by the Program Committee. The student cannot retake the examination in the same semester in which they initially failed the examination.

After a student completes the Comprehensive Examination, the Ph.D. Program Director submits the examination results to the designated staff person in the College of Education and Human

Development's (CEHD) Associate Dean of Education Student Services who in turn forwards the results to the Dean of the Graduate School. The Graduate School will note the student's admission to candidacy in the student's records (e.g., transcripts).

Rewrite/Retaking Comprehensive Examinations

Students receiving a fail on the first attempt would need to address all deficiencies within an agreed timeline set by the Program Committee but it must take place no more than one year after the initial fail. Students may retake the comprehensive examination only once (See <http://louisville.edu/graduatecatalog/degree-requirements/>).

It is the responsibility of the student's Program Committee to provide critical feedback and identify deficiencies in need of improvement in the re-take. **The retake for the comprehensive examination may be in the same format as the original.** Except under extraordinary circumstances, the student has one year from date of notification to complete the retake. Students are not allowed to take dissertation hours (ELFH 795) or doctoral candidacy hours (DOCT 600) until they have passed the comprehensive examination.

Failing twice will result in dismissal from the ELEOD Ph.D. program. Students who receive a fail in their second attempt would be required to meet with the Program Committee. Please refer the Graduate Student Handbook for details (See <http://louisville.edu/graduate/current-students>).

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GUIDELINES RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The comprehensive examination revolves around a research question(s). Students will develop a paper around an area of study in which they are interested. Ideally, students will write their comprehensive examination on their research topic of interest, which will serve as preliminary work towards their dissertation prospectus, but they are not limited to only that topic. Response to the comprehensive examination must include the following sections:

- I. Introduction
- II. Literature Review
- III. Research Design / Methodology
- IV. Potential Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice
- V. Summary/Statement of Significance
- VI. References

The final product should be between 25-30 pages in length, not including the Reference section.

I. Introduction

The introduction should include an overview of the problem and situate the research topic within the current (field-specific) literature. This section should build toward a case for the research and lead up to a problem statement. Relevant research should be used as a means to frame the issue/challenge/opportunity the student is proposing to investigate.

In this section, students must: (a) state the significance of the question(s) in terms of their specific field; (b) provide a relevant context for the study; (c) provide a clear purpose statement for the research; and (d) outline the research questions/hypothesis/objectives (if applicable).

II. Literature Review

The literature review must be connected to the purpose statement and provide an overview of variables/constructs the student is proposing to explore in their research. The review of the literature need not be comprehensive, given the shortened length of the proposal, but it should identify relevant bodies of literature and include key studies on the subject, as well as integrate and synthesize of the prominent literature. Students must highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the works cited and explain how the literature builds the case for the study.

Additionally, this section should outline the major theoretical or conceptual framework(s) that ground the specific research within the student's field of study. Remember that a theoretical or conceptual framework provides the explicit lens to view the wholeness of the work.

III. Research Design / Methodology

The research design/methodology portion must discuss how the student plans to examine and answer the research question(s)/hypothesis(es)/objective(s) by explaining the following:

- **Methods:** Discuss the proposed plan for carrying out the study. Start with identifying a broad methodological approach (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, action research). Then add details, becoming as specific as possible. For example, if using a regression analysis, then write out the equation(s) that will be used to estimate and clearly identify the coefficients of interest. Or, if using a qualitative approach, explain the choice for the particular methodology (i.e., ethnography, case study) and discuss relevant issues related to the chosen approach.
- **Sources of Data:** Discuss the data to use in the study. If doing a quantitative study, include a description of the constructs or variables that operationalize the conceptual framework. If collecting data, describe how to go about doing so and provide a short list of key survey/protocol items. If qualitative, describe the data to collect and why. If pertinent, provide a sample protocol.
- **Sample:** Identify the sample of interest. Discuss why this sample was chosen, how to select the sample and what size it will be. If using the entire population, state it. If not, explain the rationale behind the sample and the sampling procedure. Regardless of which approach is chosen, be clear about its strengths, weaknesses, and limitations for the given research question.

IV. Potential Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

This section will detail specific implications of the research for advancing research, theory building, and practice. For example, what does the research proposal suggest for impacting practice, or further theory building in a particular field? Ultimately, this section should address the “so what” question (e.g., how would the results of the study be used to help promote best practices in your discipline’s industry?). If conducting research relevant to other fields, this inquiry should be articulated in terms of significance in this section as well.

V. Summary/ Statement of Significance

The summary/statement of significance portion should provide an overall summary of the research proposal.

VI. Reference List (not included or counted in the 25-30 page limit)

All sources used must be parenthetically referenced in the text of the proposal and fully cited in a reference list. The in-text citations and reference list must follow current APA format.

Comprehensive Examination Scoring Rubric – Ph.D. Program in Educational Leadership & Organizational Development

Category/Area	Criterion	FAIL Does not meet minimal standards; major deficiencies identified	PASS Meets minimal standards; minor deficiencies identified	PASS WITH HONORS Exceeds minimal standards; no deficiencies identified
1. Introduction	Provides background narrative, citing literature as appropriate, which directs the reader’s attention to the study’s purpose on a relevant and meaningful educational issue.			
	Clearly states the research question(s) that the study seeks to address.			
	Rationalizes the practical significance (e.g. for practitioners and policymakers) of your research question(s).			
	Rationalizes the scholarly significance of the research question(s)			
Overall Assessment - Introduction				
2. Literature Review	Places the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature.			
	Distinguishes what has been done in the field from what needs to be done.			
	Identifies the main research methodologies/ techniques that have been used in the field of research on your topic.			
	Articulates important variables and phenomena relevant to the topic, citing existing research.			
Overall Assessment – Literature Review				
	Starts with identifying the broad research design that will be used in the proposed study (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods).			
	Discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the possible research methodologies/techniques and justifies			

3. Research Design/ Methodology	the selection of methodology that will be used in the proposed study.			
	Data collection procedures (i.e., interview protocols, survey instruments, gaining access to existing panel data), and variable operationalization (if quantitative) are described with adequate detail such that another researcher could replicate the study.			
	Data analysis procedures are described with adequate detail such that another researcher could replicate the study.			
Overall Assessment – Research Design/Methodology				
4. Potential Implications & Summary	Document details specific implications for advancing theory, research, and practice and articulates relevance to other fields (if any).			
	Document addresses what may be different in theory, research, and practice if the proposed research design was implemented.			
	Document provides a summary or statement of significance of the proposed research study.			
Overall Assessment – Potential Implications & Summary				
5. Academic Writing & Rhetoric	Document is written with a coherent and clear structure.			
	Document is in current APA format.			
	There is evidence that the author has acquired the vocabulary of the subject and topic.			
	Document is free of grammatical and spelling errors.			
Overall Assessment – Academic Writing & Rhetoric				
OVERALL ASSESSMENT –COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION		FAIL Does not meet minimal standards; major deficiencies identified	PASS Meets minimal standards; minor deficiencies identified	PASS WITH HONORS Exceeds minimal standards; no deficiencies identified