

Doctorate in Developmental Education Comprehensive Exam

All students in the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education are required to pass a Comprehensive Examination at the conclusion of coursework, prior to moving into the dissertation phase of the program. This webpage includes details and guidelines related to that exam process. Note that this website reflects the current exam process as of November 1, 2018. Students may elect to adopt this exam protocol at any point for exams following November 1, 2018. Students who have already begun this process may elect to adopt the previous exam protocol (One-Part or Two-Part options), and should consult with their adviser for direction. Students entering the program in the 2018 cohort and later will be expected to follow this process.

Purpose

Following completion of coursework in the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education, students are required to pass a comprehensive exam. The purposes of this exam are to demonstrate mastery of the coursework content and preparation for independent research. Ideally, this process will begin during students' last semester of coursework, and will be completed before the conclusion of the semester following.

Please keep in mind that the expectations for the comprehensive exam are different from expectations for the dissertation. Indeed, it is important to remember that the dissertation as an assessment has vastly different purposes than the comprehensive exam.

Process Overview

Given the nature of the exam to assess both mastery and preparation, both of which are student- and topic/issue-specific, the exam process becomes highly individualized, so standardization is neither a goal nor a possibility. However, there are several commonalities within the process. What follows is a brief overview of the general stages of the process, followed by a narrative explanation:

- Discuss possible focus and guiding question with adviser
- Form exam committee (complete Comprehensive Exam Committee Request Form)
- Draft and distribute prospectus to committee
- Present prospectus (Chair will complete appropriate form) (MEETING #1)
- Draft and distribute the exam to committee
- Defend exam ([complete Form GC-C](#)) (MEETING #2)

First, ideally, the first four stages of this process will begin during students' last semester of coursework, and the last two will be completed within one semester. Students will first discuss an overall problem or issue and focus with their adviser for initial approval. Students will then form a comprehensive exam committee that is comprised of, at least, their adviser (as Chair) and two other faculty members from the Developmental Education program. Students should

intentionally seek out program faculty who have expertise in some aspect of their intended focus. Once the committee is formed, students will complete a prospectus comprised of a one-page overview and a presentation (can be a PowerPoint or Prezi or outline). Once completed, students should send these two items to the entire committee and arrange a prospectus meeting; **these two items should be sent to the committee no later than two weeks in advance of the prospectus meeting.**

The prospectus meeting will consist of a brief oral presentation (student) and questions posed by committee members. The prospectus will be evaluated in terms of its appropriateness for the comprehensive exam and the feasibility of the proposed work. Students will either be granted approval to proceed with the exam or will be asked to revise and resubmit at the conclusion of the prospectus meeting. Once the prospectus is approved, students are cleared to begin working on the entire exam. When the exam is complete, students will distribute the finished product to the entire committee all at once and schedule an exam oral defense. In summary, the exam process generally will entail two meetings (one for the presentation of the prospectus, and another for the defense of the finished exam).

Committee

Students will first discuss an overall problem, question, or issue with their adviser for initial approval. Students will then form a comprehensive exam committee that is comprised of, at least, their adviser (as Chair) and two other faculty members from the Developmental Education program. Students should intentionally seek out program faculty who have expertise in some aspect of their intended focus. It is important to recognize that because this is an exam, in-depth and explicit feedback on content throughout the process is not possible. Students can ask general questions of their committee Chair about process, timing, protocol, and expectations, but in general, content should not be discussed.

The comprehensive exam committee will be disbanded upon successful completion of the exam. At that point, a new committee will be created for the dissertation.

Prospectus

The prospectus is a general overview of the intended exam focus, content, and scope. It is intended to provide the committee with enough information to determine the feasibility of the project. The prospectus has two components: a one-page overview of the proposed project and a presentation. The one-page overview should address, explicitly, at least the following essential aspects:

- A working title
- Problem statement
- Purpose statement
- Guiding question(s) (not a research question, just a focal question to drive the literature review)
- An explicit connection to the student's coursework experience and the field of Developmental Education

- Fields/disciplines/areas to be included in the literature review, including a few select sources that demonstrate a familiarity with the topic or key scholars
- Theoretical areas that may inform the perspective, including a few select sources that demonstrate a familiarity with the topic or key scholars

Note: The prospectus should be one page double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins all around.

The presentation (PowerPoint slides, a Prezi, an outline, etc.) should include the aspects above, but will provide more depth to each. The presentation should also include information about the impetus for the project, any existing experience with the issue, and its connections to the program coursework. These two documents should be submitted to the entire committee at least two weeks in advance of the prospectus meeting.

Exam

The exam itself involves two parts: a literature review and a research proposal. These two parts should be integrated into a single document and distributed to the entire committee no later than two weeks before the defense meeting. Both parts must be based on a specific guiding question that stems directly from the student's coursework experience. Part I is a formal, structured, critical review of the evidence-based literature appropriate and relevant to the guiding question from the prospectus. In addition to a complete review of the appropriate research literature, Part I should also include a clear purpose statement, an explicit problem statement, an explicit connection to coursework, an articulated theoretical framework (these should reflect the issue/focus from the prospectus, but should be more refined or clarified), and a synthesis of the extant scholarship. The culmination of the review should include an explicit discussion of the gap(s) to be addressed in Part II, which is a formal research proposal for an empirical study. Parts I and II must be completed and successfully defended (orally) together.

Throughout all aspects of the exam, students should aim toward demonstrating a command of DE course content (including core, research, and specialization courses), appropriate to the purpose, focus, and scope. In addition, throughout all aspects of the exam, students should aim toward demonstrating publishable-quality academic writing conventions appropriate to the genres of a literature review and a research proposal. Students should rely on APA (7th ed.) in organizing, structuring, and formatting the exam document. Although there is no prescribed length, the completed comprehensive exam, in full, will likely range from about 40-60 pages, excluding references. It is important to recognize that this exam is not intended as a draft of the dissertation proposal or any part of it; in fact, those are two very different assessment types.

Evaluation

The written and oral aspects of the completed exam will be considered together, with possible outcomes at the conclusion as follows:

- Pass
- Pass with Contingencies
- Revise and Resubmit without a Second Defense

Revise and Resubmit with a Second Defense
Not passing

Students who receive an outcome of “Not Passing” may start the process all over again with a new committee and new topic; students will be given two attempts to pass the exam.

Meeting Planning

In general, students should plan to submit any drafts of exam-related documents to the entire committee all at once.

A good rule of thumb is to plan for a two-week turnaround each time any document or draft is sent to the committee for review.

Students are responsible for meeting-scheduling, including submitting a formal request ([via the web form](#)) for a room.

Students are responsible for completing and printing the appropriate form (as applicable--some are web forms) for each meeting and for submitting the form to the Program Administrative Assistant after all signatures are obtained.