

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN COUNSELING, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

University regulations require that all doctoral candidates take comprehensive examinations. The Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education faculty believe that it is essential that students receiving Ph.D. degrees from the Department have an understanding of their field beyond that gained in separate courses. The comprehensive exams give students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to integrate and use information acquired from various readings or courses, as well as to demonstrate their ability to clearly communicate ideas in an acceptable writing style, which reflects good grammar, organization, and composition.

The exams are not meant to measure all of the many qualities that are important requisites of an educator, researcher, or psychologist. The exam is an assessment of each candidate's understanding of areas of knowledge thought to be important for doctoral level scholarship.

### **I. GENERAL POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. Policies and Procedures**

1. Comprehensive examinations are required of all doctoral students after eighty percent of the prescribed coursework has been completed, but within five years from the date the student was admitted to the program.
2. The examinations may not be taken until the candidate's academic program has been approved and filed with the Student Affairs Office. Failure to do so renders the exam invalid.
3. Students planning to take the comprehensive examination(s) must apply in writing before the end of the registration period. Both new candidates and those retaking part or all of the examination must file the Application for Comprehensive Examination with the Student Progress Review Committee (SPRC) Administrator.
4. Candidates may count courses taken during the term immediately preceding the examination as meeting the requirements that 80% of coursework be completed before taking the exam(s).
5. All examinees are required to attempt all designated exams on the first attempt.
6. All examinees must have submitted the research apprenticeship (Practicum) paper to their committee before taking the comprehensive examinations. Advisor approval of the submission must be received by the SPRC Administrator by August 1 prior to the fall comprehensive exam date; or by December 1 prior to the Spring Comprehensive exam date.
7. Students must be registered for classes during the semester in which the exam is given. Waivers to this policy will only be given on a special case by case basis.

## **II. COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **A. Content Areas and Length**

Content areas and length of exams are determined at the program level.

### **B. Examination Procedure**

Examinations in each area are written and evaluated by the faculty of the interest area. When there are few regular faculty available or an unusually large number of candidates to be examined, one or more qualified faculty from other areas may be added to the area faculty.

The Student Progress Review Committee (SPRC) and the coordinators of each area will review all questions.

The preparation of final copies of examination questions and the administration of the examination will be coordinated by the SPRC Chairperson, appointed by the Department Chairperson.

## **III. ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. Scheduling of Examinations**

Fall comprehensive exams are given during the week *before* classes begin. Spring comprehensive exams are given *during the week in which classes begin*.

### **B. Procedures for On-Site Exams**

If the student comes into the examination room and receives a copy of the examination and then leaves without answering the exam question, he/she will be considered to have failed that part of the examination, and this attempt will be recorded and counted.

Once students enter the designated exam room, they will only be permitted to leave for lavatory needs, until the exam session has been completed. Students must consult the room proctor for other needs/arrangements.

Foreign-language dictionaries are permitted. Unless special arrangements have been made in advance and in writing with the SPRC chair at the time of application, no other books, notes, resources or personal effects are permitted. Consult your individual program comprehensive exam policy for additional regulations.

The purpose of this procedure is to minimize distractions in the testing room. The proctor has the authorization to request the removal of any items.

Students with special needs requiring special arrangements should see the SPRC Chair at the time of application for the exam.

## **IV. STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES**

To ensure the security and integrity of the examination process, it is expected that students and faculty will abide by the procedures in Attachment 1: Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices.

## **V. SCORING AND EVALUATION**

### **A. Scoring**

Scoring procedures are set at the program level.

### **B. Reporting and Interpreting Results**

The SPRC Chairperson reports examination results to a meeting of the faculty, following which results are available from the advisor. It is the responsibility of the advisor to go over student responses and the raters' comments with students requesting such a review.

Comprehensive results will be reported not later than 30 days following the last day of the examination period.

### **C. Retakes** (revised 1/26/2004)

A student who fails the comprehensive examination or part of the examination, must develop a written plan of study that details the steps to be taken to prepare for the retake of the comprehensive exam. This plan must be approved by the advisor and the student's Guidance Committee in consultation with faculty who represent the failed areas of the examination. Such a plan might include additional coursework, guided readings, tutoring, and practice in writing answers to previous exams, and must include a time line for completion. The plan must then be filed with SPRC. Successful execution of the approved Study Plan is a matter of shared responsibility between the student, the advisor, and the Guidance Committee. The Guidance Committee must attest to the completion of the Study Plan three weeks prior to the retake attempt (see Study Plan Chronology below). No more than two retakes will be allowed unless the retake and the plan of study are authorized by a vote of 80% of the faculty present and voting at a CEPSE Department meeting.

#### Study Plan Chronology

*Weeks Prior To Intended  
Retake Examination Date*

*Action*

11 weeks	Study plan developed with and approved by Guidance Committee
3 weeks	Guidance Committee reviews and endorses study plan completion and sends a copy to SPRC

## **VI. STUDY AIDS**

### **A. Reading Lists**

Reading lists are developed and distributed at the **program level**. The reading lists are not prescriptive, but the books and articles listed represent, in the faculty's judgment, the breadth and content of the area.

### **B. Coursework**

Questions on the exam are not limited to the content of particular courses. The student's understanding of an examination area is expected to be greater in breadth and depth than that generally required of a particular course in that area.

### **C. Sample Questions**

Copies of old comprehensive exam questions may be borrowed from the SPRC Secretary.

### **D. Individual Preparation**

The coursework and reading throughout the doctoral program provide general preparation for comprehensive examinations. It is also expected that students will reduce their coursework prior to and during comprehensives, allowing three to six months for more intensive, critical study.

### **E. Study Groups**

Informal study groups, arranged by the candidates themselves, are considered to be the most efficient and pleasurable means of preparation. The methods of these groups vary, but critical discussion of concepts, methods, applications, and issues encountered in reading is often profitable. Posing questions to one another to be answered in writing and critically reviewing the answers is another technique that some groups have found useful in preparation for comprehensive exams. The SPRC Secretary maintains a list of students who have expressed an interest in forming a study group.

### **F. Writing Hints**

There are no infallible guides to good writing; however, students taking comprehensive examinations are expected to demonstrate sufficient mastery of language and writing skills to communicate intelligently and effectively with other professionals. Answers to the comprehensive examination questions should model the organization, directness, clarity of expression, and quality of analysis that one typically expects from an educated and disciplined person.

Students may want to review the following five suggestions before taking comprehensive exams.

1. Answer the question that is asked. It is crucial that one carefully reads the verb in the instruction.

Students under stress will sometimes try to write down everything they know in a general subject area rather than addressing themselves directly to the specific question asked in the examination. While evaluators are concerned with assessing the extent of a student's knowledge in a particular content area, they are more concerned with the student's capacity to use, focus, and manipulate that knowledge to respond directly to the specific question asked.

2. Work from a suitable design.

Timing: Since students taking comprehensive exams are subject to time limitations in devising their answers, students should attempt to plan for the most effective utilization of the time available. Such planning requires that the students make some assessment of the task before them, break the task down into its component parts, and make appropriate time allocations for each component.

Structure, Organization, and Strategy: If the student is writing an essay, it should have a clear beginning, middle and end. In order to give answers coherence, students should advance some single dominant strategy or organizational pattern and stick to it.

3. Support your ideas with the best possible evidence, but avoid unnecessary repetition.

Students should develop their ideas and demonstrate the depth of their understanding of a content area by providing supporting data, details, examples, other evidence, and by citing expert opinion; however, students should be alert to the danger of adding words without adding meaning.

4. Be as clear and concise as possible, and use standard English.

Evaluators of answers to comprehensive examinations cannot help but be influenced by the writer's communication skills; therefore, students should make every effort to conform to the standard conventions of good writing: parallel structure, appropriate punctuation, fully developed paragraphs, complete sentences, transition between paragraphs, etc.

5. Use orthodox spelling.

If the answer contains many misspelled words, these words will distract the readers' attention, exhaust their patience and eventually create a general negative bias against the writer.

6. The demonstration of good writing skills (grammar, spelling, organization of answers) is considered essential for passing the comprehensive exams, and evidence of poor writing is a basis for failing the exams. You are encouraged to proofread, and may make the necessary grammatical and typographical corrections in pen or pencil.

## **VII. FURTHER INFORMATION**

The SPRC Chairperson is available to advise students who have procedural questions about the examination.

Adopted September 15, 1997  
Retake Policy revised 4/26/1999; 1/27/2004  
Revisions March 25, 2002

## Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices

The faculty recognizes its role in supporting the learning and professional development of each student and in doing everything legitimately possible to help the student pass the comprehensive examinations. In recognition of this responsibility, the faculty will make every effort to ensure that the examination questions, examination procedures, evaluation of responses, and reporting of results and recommendations for improvement will be done in a fair and timely manner.

In a community of scholarship and practice, students share the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the comprehensive examination. Students are therefore expected to prepare thoroughly for the examination and to follow established procedures for registering for the examination, taking the examination, and seeking results of the examination. At all times throughout this process, students, as well as faculty, are expected to conduct themselves with the highest character and integrity.

The comprehensive exam is based on an honor system. The completed exam represents the work, understandings, and knowledge of the student, without assistance from other individuals to complete the exam. Completion of the exam means that the student agrees to comply with these policies and represents the work solely as their own.

To ensure the security and integrity of the examination process, it is expected that:

- No faculty or staff member shall give any student information about the comprehensive exams that would give the student an unfair advantage over other students.
- Any faculty or staff member having knowledge of any student or students receiving information about the content of any exam that gives that student an unfair advantage over others, must report that knowledge to the Department Chairperson and/or SPRC Chairperson.
- No student shall accept exam information if it is suspected that the information is about the content of the comprehensive exam.
- Students shall report to the Department Chairperson any knowledge they have of other students or faculty giving or receiving information about the content of any examination.

Source: Comprehensive Examinations for Doctoral Students in Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education (9/15/97)

### Academic Honesty, Michigan State University

*Academic honesty is central to the educational process and acts of academic dishonesty are serious offenses within the University community. Suspension from the University could be the consequence for acts of academic dishonesty. (Spartan Information and Services, p. 78)*

### General Student Regulations

#### 1.00 Protection of Scholarship and Grades,

The principles of truth and honesty are fundamental to the educational process and the academic integrity of the University; therefore, no student shall:

1.01 claim or submit the academic work of another as one's own.

1.02 procure, provide, accept or use any materials containing questions or answers to any examination or assignment without proper authorization.

1.03 complete or attempt to complete any assignment or examination for another individual without proper authorization.

1.04 allow any examination or assignment to be completed for oneself in part or in total, by another without proper authorization.

1.05 alter, tamper with, appropriate, destroy or otherwise interfere with the research, resources, or other academic work of another person.

Source: MSU, General Student Regulations, 1989, p. 79

#### Integrity of Scholarships and Grades

1. The principles of truth and honesty are recognized as fundamental to a community of teachers and scholars. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor these principles and in so doing protect the validity of University grades. This means that all academic work will be done by the student to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in the planning and supervision of academic work, so that honest effort will be positively encouraged.

2. If any instance academic dishonesty is discovered by an instructor, it is his or her responsibility to take appropriate action. Depending on his or her judgment of the particular case, he or she may give a failing grade to the student on the assignment or for the course.

(All-University Policy, November 18, 1969, revised July, 1990, 1993)

Violation of these ethical principles and policies may result in automatically failing the exam.

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the ethical principles and honor code described above. I understand that the work on the exam must represent my own work without the assistance of others.

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Student's Name (print)

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Student's Signature

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Source: Comprehensive Examinations for Doctoral Students in Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education (9/15/97)