MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HIGHER, ADULT,
AND LIFELONG EDUCATION (HALE)

PhD COMPREHENSIVE EXAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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See Instructions for Exam Registration (p. 2)

Department of Educational Administration
Graduate Program in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education (HALE)

PhD Comprehensive Examination
Policies and Procedures

Format, Purposes, and Timetable

The HALE Comprehensive Exam is made up of two parts:

Part One is a written exam designed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate integration of knowledge of topics, issues, and resources in postsecondary education. This part focuses on and reflects completion of the courses in the HALE PhD Core Curriculum. Students are expected to take Part One of the Comprehensive Exam within one year of completing the HALE Core Curriculum. Part One is offered twice annually, at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. More about Part One of the Comprehensive Exam can be found on the pages that follow (see Comprehensive Exam, Part One). Note: The University requires that students be enrolled at the time they are meeting any exam requirement.

Part Two is successful completion of EAD 995 ("Research Practicum") or a successful dissertation proposal defense. In order to enroll in EAD 995 students must pass the written Exam and have the approval of their advisor. The Research Practicum, required of all doctoral students in the College of Education, is the final course in the research sequence. The purposes of the Research Practicum are: (a) to guide students toward preparation of a dissertation proposal and (b) to enable students to engage in a research experience within a community of scholars. Considered as part of the HALE Comprehensive Exam, EAD 995 is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability to complete the HALE PhD Program. Students typically enroll in EAD 995 near or at the end of their course work, which is usually Year Three for full-time students but may be later for those enrolled part-time. EAD 995 is also offered twice annually, every fall and spring semester. Approval to enroll in EAD 995 requires that the student provide evidence to the advisor of sufficient preparation for the course and the opportunity to make significant progress on a dissertation proposal. More about Part Two of the Comprehensive Exam can be found on the pages that follow (see Comprehensive Exam, Part Two).

Upon successful completion of Parts One and Two, students will have completed the HALE PhD Comprehensive Exam and advanced to candidacy for the PhD.

Comprehensive Exam, Part One

Exam Registration: Registration for the Exam requires the permission of the student's advisor in writing (via e-mail) to the HALE secretary. Advisors will provide permission once students have discussed with them their understanding of Exam policies and procedures and their plans for preparation. Students will register at haleadm@msu.edu. To provide anonymity in Exam submission students will be assigned an Exam number following registration and before the Exam is posted.

Preparation: Students may work together and on their own in preparing for Part One of the Exam. During the Exam period all work must be done individually. Exam takers will be asked to verify a statement certifying that they had no assistance (regarding content or editing) during the Exam period.

Petitions for Additional Time to Write the Exam Essays*:* Students who wish to request additional time to write the Exam essay must petition the HALE faculty. The faculty will consider requests for accommodations from: (a) Students who are non-native speakers of English; or (b) Students who are registered with MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. Requests should include a brief account of the reasons additional time is needed and should be sent to the HALE secretary at haleadm@msu.edu no later than 21 days before the Exam period. Earlier requests are welcome. Students who request additional time can expect a prompt response from the HALE faculty.

Duration and Location: Students have three days to write their Part One essay. The Exam will be posted at the Desire2Learn (D2L) course management system and be available on a Friday at 8:00 a.m., with the Exam essay to be uploaded to D2L by 8:00 a.m. on the following Monday. The Exam may be written anywhere. Note: Students who encounter unexpected problems during the days specified for writing the Exam should contact the HALE unit coordinator about approval for arrangements for additional time.

Materials Permitted: Students are permitted the use of any materials in writing their Part One essay. The essay should not include work previously submitted for academic credit or published work.

Sample Exam Essays: Recent successful Exam essays are posted at the HALE website.
Exam Questions and Essays: In Part One of the Exam, students choose one question from two or more options based primarily on topics and materials from the courses of the HALE Core Curriculum. The focus is on integration of knowledge of postsecondary education.

Essay Length and Format: The Exam essay should be 10-12 typewritten double-spaced pages. The essay should begin with identification of the question being answered. The Bibliography, reflecting all sources cited (and only those), is to be attached to the Exam. The Exam should be written in a 12 pt. font and with 1-inch wide margins. Faculty readers are not told the names of Exam writers and do not read the essays of their advisees.

Submission of Exam Essay: Students should upload their essays to the Desire2Learn course management system and keep a copy for their records. The student's assigned HALE Exam number should appear in the upper right corner of the first page of the Exam essay. The name is not to appear anywhere on the file document itself in order to guarantee anonymity when the essays are evaluated.

Evaluation: The Exam essay is read, without knowledge of who wrote it, by three HALE faculty members and evaluated according to these criteria: (a) Relevance of the Exam essay to the question; (b) Organization, presentation, and completeness of the argument; (c) Clarity of the writing; and (d) Appropriate and sufficient scholarly and other citations.

A Note on Arguments:

Simply defined, an argument is a formal presentation of evidence or reasons supporting a particular claim or position on an issue of interest to a specific audience.

Two widely used books addressing the composition and evaluation of arguments are: Wayne Booth, Gregory Columb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research* (3rd Edition; University of Chicago Press, 2008) and Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *"They Say/I Say": The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (3nd Edition; W.W. Norton, 2014).

Two widely used university-based websites (at Colorado State and Purdue) devoted to writing offer accounts of the making and uses of arguments. Both reflect the "Toulmin Method" reflecting the work of the influential philosopher Stephen Toulmin (in *The Uses of Argument* [1964]).

http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/index.cfm?guides_active=argument&category1=31
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/

Sample Exam Essays: Recent exam essays evaluated as outstanding by faculty readers are posted at the HALE website. Students can prepare for the exam by "reverse engineering" (in the vocabulary of technology) the samples according to the evaluation criteria. Thus, a student can observe how an essay is organized with the exam question always in mind. Then, "How is the argument constructed?" can be asked about a sample essay. The samples also represent expectations for "clarity of writing," or prose that is precise, understandable, and free of errors (that is, carefully proofread). "Appropriate and sufficient scholarly citations" are, of course, defined by the subject of an essay. The sample essays offer guidance in the most appropriate kinds of citations--from what kinds of journals and other scholarly resources--and how many are necessary in mounting a convincing argument. Attentive sample exam reading is a valuable resource for successful exam writing.

Results: Exam results will be made known about five weeks after the Exam period. Students earn a pass for the Exam.

Re-taking the Exam: Failing Part One of the Exam requires re-taking it. Gaining approval to re-take the Exam requires these steps:

1. Students who fail the Exam must present to their advisor by the end of the semester in which the failed Exam was taken a written plan for preparing to re-take it. It must specify preparations--e.g., writing practice Exam essays, reviewing exemplary Exam essays, seeking help with writing, including opportunities at the MSU Writing Center--and a timetable for completing them. The plan must also identify the semester in which the student intends to re-take the Exam. The plan must first be approved by the advisor, who then submits the plan for review to the HALE faculty who must also approve it for the student to proceed.

2. Students wishing to register to re-take the Exam must first report to their advisor in writing on the results of preparations according to the plan. The advisor presents the report to the HALE faculty for approval.

At each step, first the plan and then the report on preparations, approval is required by the student's advisor and the HALE faculty.

Students who do not earn a pass after taking he Exam a second time will not be permitted to continue in the HALE Program. Under exceptional circumstances students may, after consulting with their advisor, petition the HALE faculty for a third opportunity to take the Exam. The petition, explaining why a third attempt at the Exam is merited, must be submitted to the student's advisor before the end of the semester in which the failed Exam was taken. The petition must include a written plan for re-taking the Exam as above, with details about preparation and identification of the semester in which the Exam will be taken. Should the petition be approved, by the advisor and the faculty, the student then must proceed according to Step 2 before registering to take the Exam. Submitting a petition to take the Exam a third time carries no guarantee of approval.

Comprehensive Exam, Part Two

Enrollment in EAD 995: Students must have approval of their advisor to enroll in EAD 995. As explained below, approval is contingent on providing evidence to the advisor of sufficient preparation for EAD 995 to enable the student to use the course to make significant progress on a dissertation proposal. Students who successfully defend their proposal while enrolled in EAD 995 are exempt from attending class if they have a successful defense propose before the 7th week of the semester.

Syllabi: Sample syllabi for EAD 995 are available at the HALE website.

Preparing for EAD 995: "Sufficient preparation" for EAD 995 might have begun with work done in other HALE courses—or courses in other College or University departments--reflecting development of a specific interest and research question, and encounters with methods of educational research. But permission to enroll in EAD 995 requires more than having taken courses, or experience as a practitioner. The "What, Why, and How?" statement (as below) is a place for students to demonstrate that they are prepared for EAD 995, with a base to work from in the knowledge necessary for framing a potential dissertation topic.

In order to build a foundation for EAD 995 some students engage in independent study, informally or formally, with supervision by a HALE faculty member. The outcome of such

independent work should be at least preliminary understanding of how others have studied a particular problem of interest which, for some students, could be in the form of a literature review on which work in EAD 995 might build.

The "What, Why, and How?" Statement: Whatever students have done to prepare themseves for EAD 995—via courses or independent study, or in professional practice—the faculty advisor will expect a statement from students planning to take the course of approximately 1,000 words that addresses these questions: *What do you want to study? What have you done (in reading, writing, or professional experience) that represents what you already know about the topic? Why is the topic significant and of potential interest to others? How do you anticipate doing the work?*

Needless to say, the statement doesn't commit a student to a topic and method. The idea is to provide a point of departure for EAD 995, making it likely that a student will use the course to advance an idea for a dissertation, sometimes in a manner that reflects departures from the statement of "What, Why, and How?" Research questions often change as a dissertation proposal is prepared, along with how their significance may be understood. And students generally refine their understanding of research methods as their work evolves. The statement of *"What, Why, and How?"* is simply a sign of having some initial direction in formulating a dissertation proposal.

Expectations in EAD 995: As noted above, sample syllabi posted on the HALE website offer details about the course. While faculty members may differ some in how they conduct the course there is agreement about the final product: Each student will be expected to submit a draft of a dissertation proposal at the end of the course of at least 7,000 words. The draft of the proposal is a provisional statement, likely to be amended, in consultation with an advisor in advance of presentation for approval to a dissertation committee, and then again in response to suggestions from committee members.

Student performance in EAD 995 will be evaluated jointly by the instructor of record and the student's advisor. See the Appendix (p. 8) to the *Policies and Procedures* for a statement of "Guidelines for the Evaluation of Student Performance."

Students who successfully complete EAD 995 have passed the HALE Comprehensive Exam. But the goal of the process of which the course is a part—from the *"What, Why, and How"* statement through EAD 995 itself, and then formal dissertation proposal approval by the students Dissertation Committee--is an increasing level of precision and confidence in thinking about a topic, its significance, and the best way to do the research.

Timetable: Students typically enroll in EAD 995 during the third year in the PhD program. The course is offered every fall and spring semester. The HALE Comprehensive Exam Part Two requirement must be met within five years from the time a student begins the first class that appears on their doctoral program of study. Note: All requirements must be completed within eight years from the time a student begins the first class in their doctoral program of study.

APPENDIX

EAD 995 Research Practicum
Guidelines for Evaluation of Student Performance

This Appendix to the *HALE Comprehensive Exam Policies and Procedures* addresses these matters in the evaluation of student performance in EAD 995:

1. Criteria for grading and a rubric
2. Role of the advisor in evaluation of student performance

1. Criteria for Grading and a Rubric

To successfully complete this course, all students must submit an acceptable statement of their research problem. An acceptable statement of the research problem is defined as a clear and coherent statement of the research problem that is grounded in the appropriate literature.

Students will also be expected to actively participate in the review and feedback of the work of fellow students in the class, as per guidelines provided by the instructor of record. The instructor of record will be responsible for assessing acceptable levels of participation, in line with the rubric provided below.

Students performing at a 4.0 level:

- Provides a clear and coherent statement of the problem that is grounded in the appropriate literature.
- Submits a systematic and coherent review of the literature that supports a clear statement of the problem and identifies and describes a conceptual or theoretical framework, when appropriate.
- Outlines a research design that aligns with the statement of the problem, including attention to context, research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis.
- Actively participates in the review and feedback of the work of fellow students in the class.

Students performing at a 3.5 level

- Provides a clear and coherent statement of the problem that is grounded in the appropriate literature and at least one of the following:
    - Submits a systematic and coherent review of the literature that supports a clear statement of the problem and identifies and describes a conceptual or theoretical framework, when appropriate.
    - Outlines a research design that aligns with the statement of the problem, including attention to context, research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis.
- Participates in the review and feedback of the work of fellow students in the class in a limited way in either amount of feedback provided or the number of students provided with feedback.

Students performing at a 3.0 level:

- All students must provide a clear and coherent statement of the problem that is grounded in the appropriate literature, and has elements of both of the following but both require further development to be acceptable within an approved proposal:
    - A systematic and coherent review of the literature that supports a clear statement of the problem and identifies and describes a conceptual or theoretical framework, when appropriate.
    - A research design that aligns with the statement of the problem, including attention to context, research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis.
- Participates in a very limited way in the review and feedback of the work of fellow students in the class.

< 3.0 No Pass

- Does not provide a clear and coherent statement of the problem that is grounded in the appropriate literature.
- Demonstrates little evidence of a systematic and coherent review of the literature that supports a clear statement of the problem.
- Provides little or no evidence of a research design that aligns with the statement of the problem
- Demonstrates little or no active participation in review and feedback of the work of other students in the class.

2. Role of the Advisor in Evaluation of Student Performance

During the semester the student is enrolled in EAD 995, the student's faculty advisor will consult periodically with the student regarding the student's research topic and progress in the course. At the end of the semester, the advisor will review the proposal the student is developing in EAD 995 using the grading rubric for the course. The EAD 995 instructor of record will consult with the student's advisor regarding alignment of the proposal with the rubric.

3. Role of the Third Reader

The HALE Program Coordinator or a designee will review the assessments of the EAD 995 instructor and the student's advisor.