

Doctoral Core Exam Policy

Comprehensive Examination

Before doctoral students prepare their dissertation proposal and are advanced to candidacy, they must pass a two-part comprehensive examination: (1) one examination focused on the Doctoral Core and (2) another examination focused on the student's Specialization. Both the Core Exam and the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam include an oral presentation and defense of a written paper before an appointed examination committee. The Doctoral Core Exam is completed prior to the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam. The time period between defense of the Core and defense of the Specialty Exam/Paper must be at least 21 days. Both examinations are open to the public. Forms for appointing examination committees and for reporting results of the exams can be obtained from the Doctoral Program Secretary, 608D.

Doctoral Core Exam

After completing the Doctoral Core, students prepare a paper addressing an issue of importance to the field of education and in which the student has particular interest at the time. The problem or issue should be broad enough so that the writer and reader can come to think differently or in more complex ways as a result of looking at it through the lenses of the core curriculum. The subject and scope of the paper is to be developed by the student in consultation with the student's advisor; the student and the advisor should continue to communicate regularly about the progress of the paper.

The purpose of the paper is for students to demonstrate their ability to extend and deepen their understanding of a significant educational problem or issue through the analysis and synthesis of concepts and frameworks from the core curriculum that they have studied. That is, the paper should build upon the doctoral core curriculum and address specific implications associated with the four core curriculum areas: (1) principles and practices of learning, (2) organizational leadership, (3) educational policy and political processes, and (4) educational research. These four areas of core curriculum inform and provide perspectives on the central problem or issue. Thus, the paper is about the central problem or issue, as seen through the four areas, which offer lenses to understand the problem or issue and which lead to new ways of thinking and/or action.

This paper is not meant to simply chronicle the content of the core curriculum. It is intended to provide the student with an opportunity to: (a) demonstrate the ability to apply foundational concepts and skills gained through the doctoral core to the critical examination of a significant educational problem or issue, and (b) based upon that an investigation and analysis, to synthesize what has been learned about the problem or issue, concluding with specific recommendations for further research, practice, and/or for policy development or implementation.

This paper typically will contain the following elements, although not necessarily in this order:

- a) identification of the problem or issue, including relevant definitions;

- b) discussion of the problem's or issue's educational significance and its context (e.g., brief discussion of historical, social, and/or cultural, etc., contexts)
- c) analysis of each core area relative to the problem or issue, demonstrating a broad understanding of each core area in terms of the problem or issue; this analysis is not merely a repetition of what scholars have said, but uses appropriate concepts, frameworks, and theories from each core area to investigate the problem or issue, to compare and contrast perspectives, and to question assumptions of those concepts, frameworks, and theories and/or of the issue itself;
- d) conclusions that synthesize and discuss the preceding analysis and application into a new, more complex understanding of the problem or issue or a reframing of it; and
- e) recommended actions in professional or community settings related to leadership practice, teaching, policy, and research.

You may want to think about parts (a) and (b) as the “what.” Parts (c) and (d) could be seen as viewed as the “so whats” and part (e) then will be the “now what.” Some papers may treat the analysis of the four core areas separately; others may integrate the analysis of the four core areas.

The paper is to be 30-35 double-spaced pages (7500-8750 words) plus reference list, have an abstract, follow current American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for preparing a manuscript, and be written to a wide readership of educators as it may be later disseminated to inform the broader professional community about this particular problem or issue of educational significance.

A formal request for appointing the Doctoral Core Exam Committee is submitted to the Doctoral Program Coordinator (through the Doctoral Program Secretary) by the student's advisor in consultation with the student. Committee membership consists of three Graduate School of Education faculty (the student's advisor and two other faculty), each representing a different area of the core—that is (1) principles and practices of learning, (2) organizational leadership, (3) educational policy and political processes, and (4) educational research. Normally, the Doctoral Core Exam Committee consists of tenure-track faculty. However, a student may request the Doctoral Program Council to include a non-tenure track faculty member who meets established guidelines (possesses a terminal degree and evidences expertise related to the core curriculum. For example, one GSE emeritus, fixed-term or adjunct faculty member may be requested for consideration for Committee membership. It is the student's and advisor's responsibility to document the rationale for this request to the Doctoral Program Council. One of the three Doctoral Core Exam Committee members must have taught one or more courses offered as part of the doctoral core curriculum. The student's advisor will serve as the chair of the core committee unless the student and advisor agree to ask another approved committee member to serve in that role for the presentation and defense of the core paper.

The day and time of the public presentation of the paper and the oral examination of the student should be scheduled through the Doctoral Program Secretary by the student with the approval of the advisor and in consultation with other committee members at

least two weeks in advance excluding university breaks and holidays. At this time, the student also provides an abstract of the paper to the Doctoral Program Secretary for public distribution. The presenting student must also distribute to Committee members copy of the full paper at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. This meeting is scheduled for two hours and typically consists of:

- 1) introductions and review of the process;
- 2) 20-25 minutes for paper presentation by authoring student;
- 3) 60-75 minutes for oral examination (Committee questions and presenter responses, followed if time by questions from the audience);
- 4) 20-30 minutes for Committee discussion and decision in separate, closed session concerning student's paper, its presentation, and oral examination.
- 5) discussion with student of Committee's decision and next steps.