

Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam Policy

After passing the Doctoral Core Comprehensive Exam paper and completing all or a substantial amount of the specialization credits, students prepare a paper that frames the issue to be investigated in the dissertation. The paper is a substantive review of the theoretical/conceptual, historical, and empirical literature a student will use (and expand as necessary) in the process of developing a full dissertation proposal. The subject to be addressed is developed by the student in consultation with the student's advisor or prospective dissertation chair.

Purpose. The purpose of the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam paper is to enable the student to make clear progress toward the development of the full dissertation proposal and to demonstrate proficiency within the student's area of specialization. A secondary purpose of this specialty exam paper is to provide students with feedback from faculty early in the process of dissertation proposal development that should prove useful in writing the final proposal.

Dissertation Focus Determined with Advisor. Prior to the development of the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam paper and appointment of the exam committee, the student consults informally with his or her advisor, other members of the faculty within the area of specialization, and with student colleagues about possible dissertation topics. The formal identification and delineation of a question or focus for this Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty paper begins with an initial conference between the student and the student's advisor and/or prospective dissertation chair; the dissertation issue to be explored in the Specialty paper will be agreed upon by both the advisor and the student. (The prospective dissertation chair may or may not be serving concurrently as the student's doctoral advisor and, while it is preferred, the eventual dissertation chair need not be a member of the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam Committee.)

Elements of the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Paper. After the identification of a potential question or focus for the dissertation, the student then proceeds to develop the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam paper. This exam paper situates the anticipated dissertation issue within the broader specialization context. The paper must discuss three critical elements:

The Issue: This element of the paper deals with matters such as the:

- Background, definitions, and significance of the issue to be studied
- Significance of the proposed project for improving the field's understanding of educational practice
- Student's interests relevant to this issue
- Broad research and/or study questions to be addressed

The Literature: The student should critically review and synthesize the theoretical/conceptual, historical, and empirical literature relevant to the dissertation issue or question so as to frame the question or issue by:

- Describing and discussing what is known and not known about the issue, as well as how it has been studied
- Identifying gaps, disagreements, or conflicts in understanding in the literature
- Making clear the student's position relative to and in the context of the literature in the field.

The Preliminary Research Approach: The student should identify a general, preliminary, and tentative research approach appropriate to the study of the proposed issue or question. The discussion of the research approach should include identification of the appropriate research paradigm and general methods being proposed to investigate the issue, as well as the rationale to support these choices.

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 issue of educational significance within the specialty area.

Committee. The advisor, with the student, then submits a formal request for appointment of the Dissertation Pre-Proposal Specialty Exam Committee to the Doctoral Program Coordinator (through the Doctoral Program Secretary). Committee membership consists of three Graduate School of Education faculty: the student's advisor and two other faculty, typically (although not necessarily) with expertise in the student's area of specialization. Normally, the Doctoral Specialty 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 dissertation issue or focus). 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 the advisor's responsibility to document the rationale for this request to the Doctoral Program Council.

Oral Examination. The day and time of the oral presentation and examination should be scheduled at least two weeks in advance (excluding university breaks and holidays) through the Doctoral Program Secretary by the student's advisor, in consultation with the student and other committee members. 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 a copy of the full paper (including abstract, table of contents, and references) at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. The advisor and all other committee members must be in attendance for the full committee meeting in order for the oral examination to be valid.

This meeting is scheduled for two hours and typically consists of:

- 1) 5 minutes for introductions and review of the process (Advisor);
- 2) 20-25 minutes for paper presentation (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 (student and audience excused) concerning student's paper, its presentation, and oral examination.
- 5) Announcement of Committee's decision to student and discussion with student concerning next steps.