Comprehensive Exams for the ITD Ph.D. Program

Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive examination should be successfully completed before the first formal prospectus for the dissertation is presented and within six (6) calendar years from initial enrollment. Students must register for three (3) hours of coursework during the semester in which they take their comprehensive examinations.

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is for students to demonstrate their ability to synthesize content knowledge across the curriculum, including research/inquiry, and instructional systems content knowledge. Comprehensive written examinations are prepared by the doctoral advisory committee members and are taken at or near the conclusion of course work. In preparing for comprehensive exams, students must have their four member committee in place and have completed their major coursework, excluding credits for dissertation, internship, and/or fieldwork. This means that the earliest students can take their comprehensive exams is in the semester in which they will have completed the required coursework. In addition, students must comply with University requirements regarding GPA. Students must sign-up one month in advance and be enrolled as a student the semester they wish to take their comprehensive exams. Students can, of course, work on their dissertation pre-proposal during this time if they wish. However, their committee will not consider it until after they have successfully passed their comprehensive exams.

The comprehensive exams are based on material from the overall program. In preparing for the comprehensive exam, students should review material from previous courses and reading lists.

A typical comprehensive examination includes two parts: written and oral. Question(s) will be proposed by each committee member in relation to his/her areas of interests, the student’s specialization, and area of synthesis. The purpose of the comprehensive exam is for the student to demonstrate integration and synthesis of what has been learned in prior coursework. The questions are designed around three central synthesis areas: (1) research area, (2) program core, and (3) electives. The format of the actual exam will occur within a twelve-hour setting dispersed across two days. Students must complete the exam by answering all the questions given by the committee members. The committee members will then review the written answers and grade them accordingly. The student is also required to satisfactorily complete and pass an oral examination.

The committee then has a range of choices of either passing the student, failing the student, or requiring additional study and writing by the student. Each question will receive one of three possible grades: (1) pass, (2) pass with conditions, or (2) not pass. Students who receive a majority of “not pass” for the written examination will have to retake the examination in the following semester (see doctoral student policies). Students will be provided feedback for each section they do not pass.
The oral examination is normally given after satisfactorily passing the written exam. The oral exam is assessed in the same way in that all the committee members must agree that the student has successfully completed the oral examinations. If a student fails to successfully pass both the written and oral examinations, they will be terminated from the ITD program.

When a student passes the examination, the completed form indicating passage of the examination constitutes "advancement to candidacy." Signatures must be obtained from all committee members to pass the comprehensive exams. The Results of Comprehensive or Qualifying Exam form (http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/degree-and-graduation-information) located under the Progress to Degree link needs to be completed and approved before the Dissertation Proposal.

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