Purpose: The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to bring closure to degree coursework by assessing the competence and readiness levels of students prior to the commencement of their career plans or further formal education. Students must successfully complete comprehensive examinations prior to graduation.

Objective: Students are asked to respond to critical questions that engage them in the process of synthesizing core bodies of knowledge and articulating a logical argument in response to the question.

When: Students must successfully complete comprehensive examinations no later than after all coursework has been completed or the semester that all coursework will be completed. Students who take the exam and do not pass during the semester of anticipated graduation will not be allowed to graduate, as they will be required to retake the exam the following semester.

How do students sign-up for the examination?
Hattiesburg students should contact Ms. Ruth Jones at 601.266.4580 or ruth.jones@usm.edu Gulf Coast students should contact Mrs. Shanna Bordelon at 228.865.4512 or shanna.bordelon@usm.edu

What are the possible comprehensive examination scores?
Students will receive one of three: Pass; Rewrite; or Fail.

Can examination be repeated?
Students will receive one of three scores: Pass; Rewrite; or Fail. Students must successfully pass all comprehensive examination questions. The student taking the examination for the second time must pass all questions in order to complete degree requirements. A rewrite will be given to students who have not demonstrated mastery level but do not merit a failing score. Rewrites will be scheduled the same semester as the comprehensive exam. Students who fail the exam must return the next semester to retake the exam.

Examination format:

Day One – Specialist Candidates and all Doctoral candidates
Day Two – All Doctoral Candidates only

Testing Time: 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Examination process: All examinations will be completed on the designated date. The examination will be evaluated by faculty readers. After reviewing the written portions of the examination, an oral review may be scheduled if clarification (as determined by faculty readers) is needed. If an oral review is scheduled, the original and second reader will be present, plus any additional faculty as deemed appropriate by the department chair.

Exam preparation: The comprehensive examination assumes as common background the material covered in core courses. Successful exams will contain well-written, well argued essays in which the student is able to cite important work, as well as synthesize, analyze, and draw independent conclusions about the work in question. Students should review course texts and notes along with any posted readings in preparation for the exam. Students may also contact The University of Southern Mississippi Writing Center at 601.266.4821 or http://www.usm.edu/writingcenter/ for writing assistance.

Scoring the comprehensive examination: Readers will rate examination responses based on scholarship and written expression. Passing scores will be earned by students who complete responses that
adequately address the topic, demonstrate expert knowledge of the topic and do not contain any major aberrations. (See scoring rubrics for additional information.)

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION GENERAL INFORMATION

Your response must address the following program components: Organizational Theory, Leadership, School Law, School/Community Relations, Curriculum, Supervision, School Finance, Research and Statistics. The comprehensive exam is based on a series of vignettes. Your response to each vignette should demonstrate your knowledge of best practices, the ISLLC Standards, and mastery of the coursework in your degree plan. Where appropriate, you should refer to key studies/literature, authors, laws, cases, policies, etc. that support your assertions; i.e., you should demonstrate your knowledge of the field of educational administration and your familiarity with key leaders, works, and laws related to the field. Responses must be grounded in research.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION SAMPLE VIGNETTE

(Example only) The Situation:
The federal No Child Left Behind legislation requires not only that students make academic progress as a whole, but also that subgroups of students make sufficient yearly progress, such that performance gaps close over a twelve-year period.

You are the new superintendent of a small municipal school district. The school district is part of an affluent community, and parents are active in the schools. They have high expectations for the academic reputation of the school district, and expect their students to be among the state’s top performers.

It is early summer, and you are reviewing last year’s test data. The overall averages on the annual reading and math tests for the school are fairly impressive. However, disaggregated data indicates that there are significant gaps in the performance of students by race and ethnicity. In fact, the difference in grade level proficiency rates between some subgroups is as much as 27 percentage points.

You and the school district’s improvement team have to make some decisions about scheduling staff, organizing resources, and planning professional development for the year.

Your analysis, please …
In what ways might the constructs of excellence and equity influence the planning decisions of the team? What potential conflicts with parent groups might have to be resolved as you make and implement these plans?

Essential Components: Your response must integrate information from the following program components: Leadership, School Law, School/Community Relations, and School Finance. Responses must be grounded in a theory and connected to application. Responses containing only application will not merit a passing score.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Your exam will also include a set of multiple choice questions. These questions will be drawn from the content in EDA 700 and EDA 710 and will count towards your final score.