Comprehensive Exams  
Department of Educational Studies and Research

Purpose

Comprehensive examinations are a major milestone in the completion of students’ academic degree program. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is two-fold. First, the exam provides faculty with a basis with which to evaluate students’ ability to synthesize a range of information and develop analytic arguments based upon a firm knowledge of the relevant discipline and the pertinent scholarly literature. Second, these exams, taken collectively, allow the department to determine program strengths and areas for improvement in each of the program curricula.

The comprehensive exam is designed to assess students’ overall knowledge of the content areas in each of the ESR majors. Therefore, individual test items are generally not directly tied to one specific course but instead to the curriculum as a whole, with a focus on required courses. The exam consists both of questions requiring synthesis and integration of two or more curriculum objectives and several additional questions that are related more directly to required courses.

Scheduling

For all students, course work should be complete prior to, or during the semester in which the exam is taken. For doctoral students, it is not expected that students will have started on their dissertation when they take the comprehensive exam.

Comprehensive exams will be given once each semester. Dates will be announced in advance and students must notify the department office of their intent to take the exams at least 10 days prior to the exam date. The exam takes place on two consecutive days, divided into four half-day sessions. Master’s students will take the comprehensive exam on Day 1 only whereas doctoral students will take a two-day exam.

Under extenuating circumstances as deemed by the faculty, students who cannot attend the exam date(s) may take the comprehensive exam on the rewrite date. There is no obligation on the part of the program to offer this alternate testing date and it should be requested only in cases of emergency. In this case, any rewrites would take place on the next exam date (in the following semester).

Preparation

It is advised that in preparing for the comprehensive exam, students review their own program objectives, the suggestions for preparation, and sample questions provided. These items are detailed below and are organized by degree program. These are not to be considered as the only material covered on the exam but as a guide for review. Course materials, textbooks, and semester assignments are also good sources of review material, however, these are not the only sources for study; class projects can be helpful as well.

The learning outcomes should not necessarily be viewed as separate from each other and you should expect a single comprehensive exam question to assess more than one outcome. Questions are generally very applied, supplying you with (or expecting you to supply) a “context.”

The Exam Day(s)

As you are writing your comprehensive exam responses, be extremely explicit and detailed. As reflected below in the sample questions, some items may require a 5-6 page response whereas others may need far less.

Students are not allowed to bring any resources (flash drives, books, copies, notes, charts, or laptops) to the exam. If supplemental resources will be needed for any item, these will be provided on exam day. No headphones are allowed, however, ear plugs are permissible.

Evaluation
Comprehensive exam responses are evaluated by an anonymous panel of two full-time faculty (rotating assignment of faculty). A third faculty member will serve if there is no consensus by the two-member committee.

Comprehensive exam responses will be assigned, on an item by item basis, a score of Fail, Rewrite, Pass, or High Pass. Students receiving one or more “Rewrite” scores may be allowed a second opportunity during the same semester to answer an alternate question(s). A third and final attempt (second rewrite) is not allowed during the same semester.

Any student who scores a “Fail” or does not pass a rewrite item may be required to take additional coursework before retaking the comprehensive exam. Any student failing a comprehensive exam because of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be dismissed from the program and will not be allowed a rewrite or to retake the exam. Discussing exam content with recent students, giving or receiving copies of exam questions are considered academic dishonesty.

The following sections are organized by program. See your program section for specific guidelines and suggestions.
| **Adult Education**  
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<tr>
<th><strong>Student Learning Outcomes</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will be able to conduct effective adult education teaching using methods appropriate to various audiences.</td>
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<td>2. Students will be able to demonstrate competency in planning and implementing educational programming for adult learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nature of the adult learner and learning theories associated with adult education.</td>
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<td>4. Students will develop and articulate a personal philosophy of adult education; students will demonstrate knowledge of philosophies of adult education.</td>
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<td>5. Students will demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of the historical foundations of adult education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Students will acquire extensive knowledge and proficiency in conducting original research and in selecting an appropriate methodology through the application of quantitative or qualitative research methods to an acceptable research problem.</td>
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**Suggestions:** Doctoral candidates will be asked questions that are pertinent and foundational to the field. In your comprehensive examinations you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge of the field and specific area of practice. The exam will focus on material from the core courses, however, students are encouraged to draw from other coursework, as it is relevant and applicable to the exam question. Students are expected to produce answers of high quality to all questions. Students are expected to address all aspects of a question and all sub-questions, should focus only on the question asked, and should demonstrate familiarity with appropriate sources and major authors in an area. Answers to the exam questions will be assessed based on the following criteria: 1) mastery of subject area; 2) integration of knowledge from the core areas of higher education; 3) knowledge of appropriate sources and major authors in topic area; 4) use of applicable knowledge/theory appropriately to address application to practice; and 5) provision of relevant examples where applicable.

**Sample questions:**

1. You have been hired to create and teach a certificate program for adult students who are continuing education instructors who were hired to teach adults because of their subject knowledge. However, most of these instructors have little knowledge of adult education or teaching adult students. What would your curriculum consist of? Remember to include relevant learning theories, teaching methodologies suitable for adult students, program planning issues, assessment issues, as well as the influence of race, class, gender, and culture on adult education instruction. How would you structure a course for an audience like this? How would you evaluate its success?

2. Describe Paulo Freire’s approach to adult literacy instruction. How does his approach differ from other approaches to adult literacy instruction and how does it relate to adult learning theory and methodologies?

3. What issues can interfere with adult learning that are unrelated to cognitive ability? Identify several of these issues and describe how they are inter-related and also how they are positively and/or negatively influenced by public policy, legislative initiatives, and globalism.
## Higher Education Administration
### Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be knowledgeable of higher education history and its influence on current-day higher education institutions.

2. Students will be able to describe and classify theories of curriculum development, as well as construct curricular models for higher education settings.

3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of funding sources in higher education and gain experience with budget development, resource allocation, and financial management in higher education institutions.

4. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of legal and ethical practices related to higher education and apply them to specific higher education case studies.

5. Students will be able to comprehend and apply the legal regulations and policies surrounding today’s workforce in areas of employee relations, recruitment and selection, training, benefits, compensation, diversity, documentation, information systems and other related topics for public universities.

6. Students will be able to articulate and rank the importance of faculty roles and responsibilities as they are applicable to different types of higher education settings.

7. Students will be able to describe leadership theories relevant to higher education and categorize specific leadership practices according to those theories.

8. Students will be able to characterize and critique current trends, issues, and innovations in Higher Education institutions.

9. Students will be able to implement strategies for creating a culturally responsive learning environment in their teaching.

10. Students will demonstrate the ability to design, implement, and analyze research in higher education.

### Suggestions:
Questions will be drawn from the content of the core areas in Higher Education, including Law, History, Finance, Human Resources, Community College, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, the Professoriate, Governance/Leadership, and Organizational Theory. Students are expected to produce answers of high quality to all questions. Students are expected to address all aspects of a question and all sub-questions, should focus only on the question asked, and should demonstrate familiarity with appropriate sources and major authors in an area. Answers to the exam questions will be assessed based on the following criteria: 1) mastery of subject area; 2) integration of knowledge from the core areas of higher education; 3) knowledge of appropriate sources and major authors in topic area; 4) use of applicable knowledge/theory appropriately to address application to practice; and 5) provision of relevant examples where applicable.

### Sample questions:
1. The story of American higher education has often been the story of exclusion. Since the founding of Harvard College in 1636, American colleges and universities have often only opened their doors to students who were white, male, and, more often than not, from the more affluent in society. Those from outside this limited demographic (females, low SES, and various racial and ethnic minorities) were often denied access to educational opportunities and, even when they were granted access, found unwelcoming campus environments.

Within the past few decades, however, increasing diversity on campus has become the cornerstone of higher education’s mission. American colleges and universities have begun to actively ensure that
their doors are open to students from all backgrounds and, once those students arrive on campus, they find a more welcoming climate than they historically have.

Choose one group and examine their quest to gain equal access to American higher education. In your examination, make sure to address the following concepts:

a. Trace your selected group’s historical path in American higher education. What developments within higher education hindered or facilitated this path? Outside of higher education, what societal attitudes and beliefs towards your selected group affected their educational opportunities?

b. What policy changes, either de jure or de facto, affected your selected group’s educational opportunities? When answering this part, remember that policies can be at the local, state, or federal level.

2. During the 21st century, the costs of higher education have risen dramatically. For students at various levels of educational enrollment, from those taking vocational courses at local community colleges to those enrolled in doctoral programs at research universities, increases in the costs of achieving an education are sometimes creating insurmountable barriers. Rising costs, coupled with the lessening of financial aid and fewer employment opportunities post-graduation, have begun to prompt many to contemplate if attending college is worth it.

Furthermore, the once strong public support of higher education has begun to wane. The days of the American public not questioning its colleges and universities are long gone, as many are demanding increased assessment and accountability for higher education. Heeding this call, various governmental groups, agencies, and legislatures have slowly decreased funding for higher education. The recent economic recession and siphoning of funds to other publicly-supported programs have only added to this shift of decreased financial support of higher education.

Using the relevant concept(s) and theoretical framework(s) from higher education finance, discuss the rationale individuals and society use to make decisions about their level of investment in higher education. In your discussion, be sure to include the following:

a. From the perspective of the individual, make sure that your discussion addresses issues related to access and choice. In essence, why should an individual attend college?

b. From the perspective of the public, make sure to discuss the societal benefits of higher education. In other words, why should the public fund higher education?

c. In your response, include a discussion of the policy interventions that relate to the allocation of resources to higher education. When answering this part, remember that policies can be at the local, state, or federal level.
RESA
Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate skills necessary to manage and manipulate, analyze, and interpret data sets
2. Students will have breadth of knowledge in statistical analysis
3. Students will have breadth of knowledge in research methodology
4. Students will demonstrate skills necessary to design and conduct an original scholarly research project
5. Students will engage in ethical research practice
6. Students will have knowledge of the principles and procedures of test construction and measurement
7. Students will have breadth of knowledge in program evaluation
8. Students will identify the critical social issues in education and the implications of these issues

At least one major exam question will require work with SPSS.

Students who have been successful with the comps have recommended studying individual course notes, particularly for outcomes 6, 7, and 8. Outcomes 1 and 2 are best approached as a single “topic” that reflects content in such courses as REF 602, 761, 762, 830, 824 (prior to Fall 2012), and any course in which statistical analysis was needed. Outcomes 3, 4, and 5 are similarly connected to each other and to courses such as 601, 791, 824 (after Summer 2012) and 889. Other students have suggested that reviewing class projects for courses such as 762 and 830 have been very helpful. Focus part of your review on reliability and validity and how these relate to sampling, instruments, etc. More than the other objectives, outcomes 6, 7, and 8 tend to be tied closely to each of REF720, 770, and 709, respectively.

Sample questions:

1. As a member of the IRB at a major research institution, you have been asked to review a protocol consisting of a survey of adolescents’ attitudes and behaviors about underage drinking. What are the primary ethical issues that you would expect the researcher to address in his/her application?

2. You have been hired to develop a questionnaire to measure job satisfaction among administrative assistants at a community college. During a cursory review of the literature, you learn that that there appear to be five primary components to job satisfaction. Carefully explain the steps you would follow in developing, designing, and evaluating the instrument. Pay particular attention to how you could build and/or assess reliability and validity.

3. Why are measures of effect size important? Give an example in which the use of effect size would be beneficial.

4. You have been asked to serve as an evaluator on a grant application to determine the effectiveness of a series of professional development workshops designed for first-year faculty members. These training modules will cover such issues as grant-writing, tenure process, using technology, University resources, etc. As the evaluator you are in charge of writing the “evaluation” section for the grant application. You are limited to two double-spaced pages which must include your approach to the evaluation and the steps to be followed in the evaluation process.

5. Suppose you are a veteran teacher or associate professor with tenure at a local public high school or liberal arts college in Mississippi. In the wake of the Gulf Oil spill, the British Petroleum Company (BP) has approached your school board (board of trustees) and asked it to review a science curriculum it has recently developed. BP would like your institution to use that curriculum to teach...
major portions of the science curriculum. The curriculum would not cost the school any money. If fact, BP has offered to donate $2,000 per year for the first three years to your instruction for your unrestricted use. Also BP has offered to provide up to $5,000 per year for 5 years to support any related scientific research by faculty or students. In this instance, however, BP will retain the right to: (1) review any possible publications or presentations that grow out of this funding, and (2) block any research publication or presentation research it chooses to.

The board of trustees is enthusiastic about this proposition and has asked the principal (president) for feedback before it responds formally to BP. As a veteran of the institution, you have been asked to prepare written comments and questions about the proposed curriculum. You will address three members of the board, the president (or principal), representative from BP, and the chair of the science department at your institution.
| **Student Affairs Administration**  
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<td>1. Students will be able to characterize and critique the history of student affairs</td>
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<td>2. Students will be able to explain and interpret the issues and problems of the student affairs profession within the field of higher education.</td>
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<td>3. Students will be able to differentiate among the characteristics of different groups of traditional and nontraditional college students.</td>
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<td>4. Students will be able to characterize different university (e.g., research, teaching, religiously affiliated, etc.) and college environments (e.g., community, technical, etc.) and predict the effect of these environments on different student groups.</td>
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<td>5. Students will be able to discuss and respond to the cultural, ethical, economic, legal, and political issues surrounding diversity, equity, and efficacy prevalent in postsecondary education.</td>
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<td>6. Students will demonstrate clear understanding of the legal and ethical issues specifically related to the practice of student affairs and be able to apply that knowledge to specific case studies situated in student affairs practice in higher education settings.</td>
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<td>7. Students will demonstrate professional development skills needed to gain employment in the field of student affairs.</td>
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**Suggestions:** Comprehensive examinations are a major milestone in the completion of a student’s academic degree program. The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to provide faculty a basis on which to evaluate your ability to synthesize a wide range of information and develop analytic arguments based upon a firm knowledge of the relevant facts and the pertinent scholarly literature. In other words, the point of the comprehensive examination is to assess your ability to take the common base of knowledge in the discipline, analyze and synthesize ideas, and apply them to realistic scenarios. Finally, the purpose of the examination is to verify that the candidate is able to perform at a professional level at the time that he or she will transition to his or her first professional appointment.

**Sample questions:**

1. Discuss the following: How do you define a student affairs professional? What are the significant concepts, publications, principles, roles, ethics, etc. that you believe every student affairs professional should know in order to be successful in the field? Why do you believe these are important?

2. There are many skills needed for helping professionals. Identify four (4) specific skills you believe are essential for the helping role of a student affairs professional. Be sure to justify why these particular skills are important by drawing on relevant literature as appropriate. Provide an explanation of these skills and discuss examples of real situations you may encounter with a student where these skills should be used.