Comprehensive Exam Guideline
RESA and ESR emphases

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 program 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 degrees. 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 as well as several additional questions that are related more directly to required courses. Questions for students in both programs consist of ‘constructed response’ (essay) questions.

Scheduling
For all students, all course work is to be completed 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 Coordinator 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. Doctoral students will take the two-day exam whereas Master’s students will take the comprehensive exam on only one of these days. Be certain to check the website or contact the Program Director to clarify which day will be used for Master’s exams.

Under extenuating circumstances as deemed by the Program Coordinator and Program 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. 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 EXCEPT the following items:
- A 1-page (single side) typed reference list of APA style references; 12 pt font; 1-inch margins. References themselves are to be single-spaced with double spacing between entries. No annotations should be included.
- No headphones are allowed, however, ear plugs are permissible.
- Pens/pencils (you will be provided with scratch paper for making notes and/or outlining your responses)

If supplemental resources will be needed for any item, these will be provided on exam day.

**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.

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<tr>
<th>ESR and RESA Student Learning Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will demonstrate skills necessary to manage and manipulate, analyze, and interpret data sets</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Students will have breadth of knowledge in statistical analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Students will have breadth of knowledge in research methodology</td>
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<td>4. Students will demonstrate skills necessary to design and conduct an original scholarly research project</td>
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<td>5. Students will engage in ethical research practice</td>
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<td>6. Students will have knowledge of the principles and procedures of test construction and measurement</td>
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<td>7. Students will have breadth of knowledge in program evaluation</td>
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<td>8. Students will identify the critical social issues in education and the implications of these issues</td>
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Masters and Doctoral programs share the student learning outcomes above. Both exams are based on the courses in the respective programs. While the introductory courses are shared by both programs, RESA students will have completed more advanced courses.

For doctoral students, 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. In 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.