

**Administration & Curriculum (A&C)**  
**EDL DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS**  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Miami University  
*Information for A&C EDL doctoral students & faculty*

*April 2009*

When an A&C student in the Ph.D. or Ed.D. program is nearing the end of coursework, preparations should be made for the comprehensive exam. A&C doctoral comprehensive exams represent an exercise of scholarly work and dialogue between student and committee faculty members. The exam process is to be conducted with the student's dignity as a person and learner in mind.

### **Objectives of the Comprehensive Exam**

The comprehensive exam has a dual function: that of *integration* and of *assessment*. It is an exercise, which requires students to *integrate* knowledge from across courses and learning experiences of the doctoral program, bringing together disciplines, theories, readings and experiences to reconstruct coherent meanings of these diverse (and overlapping) disciplines and discourses. The comprehensive exams are also a vehicle for *assessment* of the student's ability to comprehend, organize, apply, and effectively communicate important knowledge related to their field of study. As such, the comprehensive exam essays and oral discussion of their work serve a dual role. The process helps students integrate, learn, and assess knowledge in their field of study. Comprehensive exams also help faculty to evaluate the doctoral student's knowledge relevant to the student's program emphasis, scholarly interests, and, in some cases, their professional goals.

Comprehensive exam evaluation is a learning process whereby the student and the faculty committee members participate in scholarly dialogue, an exchange whereby students can critically engage the knowledge or important ideas of their program of study.

### **When and how to take the A&C Comprehensive Exam**

The comprehensive examination is taken after all course work has been completed, or during the last weeks of course work. (Students may, with permission, take comps with *one* final class left to take.) ***ALL INCOMPLETES MUST BE CHANGED TO GRADES before comps can be taken.***

EDL A&C comprehensive exams are held three times a year: late October (fall semester), early April (spring semester), and early August (summer semester).

## **“The Yellow Sheet” (Program Committee)**

When A&C students are accepted into the doctoral program, the EDL department chair assigns a temporary advisor who assists in planning a course of study for the student's first few semesters that fits the student's selected major and satisfies the requirements of the department and the Graduate School.

Between half way and two-thirds of the way through the doctoral program, students have what is commonly called a “Yellow Sheet” meeting: a meeting of the student, advisor, and 3 EDL faculty who comprise the students’ Comprehensive Exam Program Committee. (The Yellow Sheet is literally a yellow document, available in the EDL office, which lays out the course requirements and options for each degree program—Ph.D. and Ed.D.)

In preparation for the Yellow Sheet meeting, students:

1. Meet with their advisor and select a Program Committee. The Program Committee should consist of one faculty who represents each of the major program areas: the doctoral core, the major, research, and educational leadership.
2. Complete the Yellow Sheet by writing in the course number, course title, and semester taken (or planned to be taken) of each doctoral course. Write neatly as this document goes on to the Dean’s office for final approval.
3. Give the completed yellow sheet to Cindie Ulreich to place in the student’s file to be reviewed at the Yellow Sheet meeting.
4. Work with your advisor to schedule a Yellow Sheet meeting of the student and the Program Committee.

At the Yellow Sheet meeting, the student, faculty advisor, and the Program Committee review the student's plan of study and assures that all requirements for the comprehensive examination will have been completed by the time the student is planning to take the exams. The Committee then designates which faculty member will write questions for the Comprehensive Exam. The advisor completes a form identifying each faculty role and gives it to Cindie Ulreich.

## **Comps Questions**

Writing the Comps questions. Students meet with each faculty member on the Program Committee to discuss the nature of the questions. After that meeting, faculty send the questions to Cindie.

Core Questions. One question from each of the core classes (Ethics, Power, and Culture) will be on the Comps exams. While sitting for the exam, students choose which of the core questions they want to respond to. Core faculty write these specific questions in advance, and *students do not see these questions before the exam.* Student may study core questions from prior exams in the Big Red Comps Binder (see below).

Major, Research and Leadership Questions. Faculty prepare these questions differently, and students should be sure to clarify each faculty member's procedure before the exam. Some faculty write the question with students; other faculty tell students the general idea of the question; other faculty do not tell students what the exam question will be.

## **How to Study for the Comprehensive Examination**

See the Big Red Comps binder in the EDL office that has copies of past comps questions. Students can look at and make copies of questions (The binder must stay in the office). The binder is helpful to see what kinds of questions have been asked in past years, including the Core questions.

Study Groups We encourage students to prepare for comps in study groups with other students. While reviewing coursework materials, classmates can help fill in and expand ideas covered in courses. Discussions are helpful, as are writing out practice essays.

## **Format**

Comprehensive exams consist of a minimum of four questions and a maximum of eight questions in the areas of the doctoral core; major; research; and educational leadership.

Students have two options for taking their comprehensive exam: the "on-site" timed format or the "take-home" option. Student should let their advisor and Cindie Ulreich know which format they are choosing within 3 weeks of the exam.

For both options, students are responsible for delivering their completed examination to an EDL office staff member for distribution to the Program Committee.

For both options, students should identify each question by topic and professor, and number pages consecutively.

### On-Site Format:

The on-site exam option is an eleven-hour examination taken in McGuffey Hall, consisting of four areas, and completed over a period of three to four days. A schedule showing what subject areas will be written on each day of comps week will be distributed to students no later than a week before the exams begin.

The on-site option consists of a minimum of four questions and a maximum of eight questions.

The on-site written examination consists of the following areas with designated times for writing each area:

- Doctoral core (2 hours)
- Major (6 hours)
- Research (2 hours)
- Leadership theory (1 hour)

Students will be provided lap top exams from the Department and will be assigned to their respective writing places (usually a faculty office or empty classroom) on the first morning of the exams. On this day, and every day of the exams, students meet in the EDL office for the office personnel to take them to their assigned place and deliver the question(s) for that writing period. Writing will begin at 9:00 a.m., Monday through Thursday of the scheduled week.

Students may bring a dictionary, but no other written or printed materials, into the examining room. Food and drink are also allowed. Any breaks taken during the writing are included in the writing time.

When students finish writing, return the exam to the EDL office, and the exam will be copied to a data stick and printed. Students may take time to check the spelling. Other than this, no further work may be done on the answers.

### Take-Home Format:

With the take-home exam option, students take questions home for one exact week, and respond to questions within a specified page limit. Students pick up the packet of exam question from the EDL office on a given day and returned the completed exam to the EDL office exactly one week later.

Program Committee faculty give the assigned questions to Cindie Ulreich two weeks before the examination. Students will be given a week (Monday 12:00 noon. to Monday 12:00 noon) to complete the exam responses.

Answers should be of the same quality as those expected in a doctoral course, free from any technical errors, and including references (APA) style and bibliography. Responses are to be double spaced using 12 point font.

The take-home option consists of a minimum of four questions and a maximum of eight questions.

The take-home written examination consists of the following areas with designated page limits for writing each area:

- Doctoral Core – 8-page limit
- Major – 12-page limit
- Leadership – 4-page limit
- Research – 6-page limit

## **Comprehensive Oral Examination Evaluation**

The written examination is followed by an oral examination no later than four weeks after the written component.

The comprehensive oral exam committee consists of at least five voting faculty—the four faculty from the student’s Program Committee and one Level A member of the graduate faculty from another department appointed by the Department. (The students’ advisor works with Cindie Ulreich to identify this “outside” person.)

Cindie Ulreich completes Graduate School form D-1: Request for Appointment of Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Committee and sends it to the Graduate School for approval, at least 10 working days before the date of the oral examination.

Four of the five members must approve the examination (written and oral) for the student to pass. If the committee exceeds five members, there can be no more than one dissenting vote.

If the student does not pass the examination, the comprehensive examination committee may permit re-examination under conditions stipulated by the committee. The re-examination may not be given earlier than the next semester or summer session.

When a student passes the exam, faculty sign the Graduate School form D-2, “Results of Comprehensive Examination for the Doctoral Degree and Application for Candidacy” and deliver it to Cindie Ulreich to send to the Graduate School.

With passage of the comprehensive examination, students are then ready to begin their dissertation work!