

EDCI Doctoral Seminar I

Preliminary Exams and the Dissertation Proposal

EDCI 59100

Fall 2013



Preliminary Exam Purpose

- The purpose of the preliminary examination, integrating both written and oral components, is to assess the student's readiness to proceed with the independent research and writing that will lead to the completion of a satisfactory doctoral dissertation. The successful completion of the preliminary exam is based upon a composite evaluation of both written and oral components.

Graduate Handbook



Timeline

Plan of Study
and Graduate
Committee
~ 1 yr

Completion of
Course Work
~ 2-3 yrs

Preliminary
Examination
~ 2-3 yrs



Preliminary Exam Committee

- The preliminary examining committee must consist of a minimum of three (3) members of the graduate faculty.
- Typically two faculty members are from within the area of concentration and one from an outside program area within the College of Education or a faculty member may be from a program area outside the College of Education.
- A majority of the committee must be regular WL graduate faculty members.



Written Prelims

- The written examination focuses on the depth of a student's knowledge and skills. More specifically, other purposes include:
 - providing written evidence of a prospective candidate's research skills, knowledge of the field and skills of scholarship,
 - extending a prospective candidate's research skills, knowledge of the field and skills of scholarship, and
 - identifying inadequacies in a prospective candidate's scholarly preparation.



Oral Exam

- The purposes of the oral portion of the preliminary examination are to explore and extend the student's understanding of the written portion(s) of the preliminary examination content. The oral exam focuses on the breadth of a student's knowledge and skills and it allows the examining committee as a whole to witness the prospective candidate's ability to respond knowledgeably and professionally to questions and issues related to the candidate's field(s) of study.



Exam Format

- The format, content, and scope of the exam are determined by the examining committee, which is encouraged to establish ground rules in consultation with the student.
- The formats often vary by program area and can even vary within programs.



Passing the Prelim

- At least 3 members of the examining committee must agree that the student passed; committees of more than 3 may have no more than one dissenting vote.
- A student who does not pass will be given the reasons for not passing and may prepare for a second attempt at a later date (at least one semester must elapse).
- If the examination is failed twice, the student may not be given a third examination, except upon the recommendation of the examining committee and with special approval of the Graduate School.



Prelim Questions

- What have you heard about the format of preliminary exams in your program?
- What questions do you have about prelims?



Dissertation Proposal

- The dissertation proposal is a formal proposal for a dissertation project; the purpose of the proposal is twofold:
 - to ensure that a candidate has a concrete, specific and workable plan for the dissertation, and
 - to allow the advisory committee to offer constructive suggestions for improving the student's dissertation project before it is underway.



Dissertation Proposal

- The proposal may be started at any time prior to the dissertation, but it is typically completed after a student has passed the written and oral portions of the preliminary examinations.
- The proposal should be approved first by the major professor and then delivered to the remaining members of the examining committee at least two weeks prior to a meeting scheduled to discuss its merits.



Timeline

Preliminary
Examination

Dissertation
Proposal

Dissertation
Research

Final
Defense

At least two semesters must elapse between
the preliminary exam and final defense



Proposal Meeting

- The proposal committee will consist of a minimum of four members of the graduate faculty.
- The proposal meeting should be called by the major professor, who should notify the other members of the examining committee. The proposal meeting should not be combined with any other meeting such as the preliminary examination.
- Students may request informal feedback on a draft of the proposal from advisory committee members prior to scheduling the formal proposal meeting.



Proposal Approval

- For the proposal to be approved, at least three (3) members (no more than one dissenting vote) must approve the proposal or approve the proposal with suggested changes.
- The cover page of the proposal should be signed by all approving committee members and a copy of the proposal should be filed with the College of Education Office of Graduate Studies.



Common Proposal Components

- Introduction/Statement of Purpose
- Statement of the Problem
- Background/Review of Literature
- Theoretical Framework
- Research Questions and/or Hypotheses
- Research Methods



Proposal Questions

- Have you seen any examples of dissertation proposals in your program?
- What questions do you have about proposals?

