

**SCHOOL OF TEACHER EDUCATION**  
**Master of Arts in Education**  
**Guidelines for Comprehensive Examinations**

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAM RATIONALE**

The written comprehensive examinations for the Master of Arts Degree in Education have two purposes. First, the comprehensive examination evaluates a candidate's writing skills, especially the ability to organize information, express ideas and concepts clearly, and apply concepts to new situations. Second, the examination provides an opportunity to assess what a candidate has learned, particularly at the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

### **1. Frequency of Administration**

The written comprehensive examination is offered at least twice during the academic year, usually in October and February. Students register for the examination by emailing Melanie Falkenberg at [mfalkenb@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:mfalkenb@mail.sdsu.edu). The deadline for registration is 4:30 P.M. on Friday, two weeks prior to the examination date.

### **2. Eligibility**

In order to qualify to take the examination, students must:

- Be advanced to candidacy
- Have completed at least 18 of the 30 required units for the degree

### **3. Description of the Examination**

Typically, the examination will be three hours in length and held on the San Diego State University campus.

The examination will be comprised of required and optional questions, three of which are to be answered. The essay questions are designed to allow students to analyze and synthesize what they have learned in their masters' program. The general areas to be covered by the examination may include, but will not necessarily be limited to, the following:

- Curriculum development and assessment
- Instructional strategies and approaches
- Principles of educational psychology, human learning, social and historical foundations, philosophy of education, and comparative education
- Understanding and utilization of educational research

Information about the examination will be available for students in the College of Education Graduate Office.

The examination will be developed by the Graduate Program Faculty. The exam questions and resulting examination will be periodically reviewed by the Graduate Program faculty to determine whether or not they meet program standards.

**4. Affidavit of Sole Authorship** (not applicable for 3-hour on-campus exam option).

Students who do the Take Home exam are asked to sign an affidavit pledging that they are the sole authors of their comprehensive exam responses. The Affidavit of Sole Authorship forms are available in the Graduate Office or through the Cohort coordinators.

**5. Formal Request for Extended Time**

In order to accommodate students for whom English is a second language or who may have a learning disability that would represent a disadvantage in a three-hour timed test situation, students may request an additional hour for taking the test. Cohort coordinators (and the Graduate Advisor for Independent Graduate Students) will provide students with a Formal Request for Extended Time form, which requires that they provide a rationale with validation for the request. The exam proctor will be notified in advance of requests that are granted, and will monitor the extra time for those individuals.

**6. Evaluation Procedures**

The Graduate Program Coordinator will select a group of faculty readers for each semester's examination from the total pool of faculty who teach graduate courses. At least two faculty will read each complete set of examinations, whether or not the students are in campus or field-based programs. In the event of disagreement between the two readers concerning the quality of about a particular candidate's responses, a third reader will be asked to evaluate the examination. All examinations will be identified only by number. At no time will a faculty reader know whose examination he or she is evaluating. Only the Graduate Advisor will match the number with the name of the student.

Each question on the examination will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Was the question answered directly?
- Were all parts of the question answered?
- Is the expected knowledge/content, etc. that constitutes an acceptable answer present?
- Do the responses display a command of the proper use of the English language, that is, spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, etc.?
- Is there evidence of thoughtful analysis, synthesis of concepts and/or creative perspectives?

## **7. Grading**

Grading will be on a Pass/Fail basis. A student fails a question when both of the faculty readers assign a failing grade to the same question. In the event of a difference of opinion, a third reader will be called upon, and in that case a student fails a question when one of the original graders and the third scorer assign a failing grade to a the same question. A student successfully completes the comprehensive examination when all three questions are passed.

## **8. Retaking the Comprehensive Examination**

When a student fails the comprehensive exam, the Program Coordinator will exercise one of the following options:

Option #1 If a student fails to answer satisfactorily one of the three questions, he or she may be required to retake that portion of the exam by answering the same question or a new question that covers the content in which the failure occurred. The time and date of the exam retake is determine by the Graduate Advisor.

Option #2 The student may be required to retake the entire exam, by answering the same question or a new question that covers the content in which the failures occurred.

Option #3 The student may be required to sign a contract to take additional coursework.

Option #4 The student may be required to participate in an oral examination evaluated by 2 or more faculty members. (Faculty use this option very rarely).

The student will be permitted to take the comprehensive exam a maximum of three times.

The Comprehensive Examination is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your higher order thinking skills of synthesis, analysis, and evaluation in written essays. The exam questions are designed to illustrate your understanding of complex issues, theories, concepts, and pedagogy. The School of Teacher Education is committed to facilitating the development of highly competent leaders in our schools. Therefore, we are looking to read essays that demonstrate the following:

- 1) **your** understanding of the underlying issues, concepts, theories, and/or pedagogy identified in the question;
- 2) **your analysis** of the issues, concepts, theories, and/or pedagogy found in the question (though we expect you to reference the literature, we also expect you to present your own views/ideas);
- 3) identification of theories, research, and/or evidence that supports your **analysis** (a review of key literature is extremely important in your response);
- 4) citations of scholars and their theories, research, definitions, pedagogy, and concepts using APA style;
- 5) well-written pieces that are logical where the English language is properly used (grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax);
- 6) original work (**plagiarism**, whether it is the use of a few words, ideas, or whole sentences, is not acceptable- please cite the author where the ideas and words have arisen from, severe penalty for plagiarism); and
- 7) a list of references at the end of each question in APA style.

Many of the questions have several components so make sure you understand the question. You may want to create a list of the aspects that you must address in your essay, and then identify researchers, theories, ideas, and arguments that can be utilized to answer those components.

Approximately three to four weeks after the examination, the College of Education Graduate Office will notify you about your examination. Unfortunately because of the vast numbers of folks who take the comprehensive examination, specific feedback cannot be provided, however if you fail, you may ask to see an advisor and discuss the possibility of retaking it. We highly recommend that you take the examination process seriously. The School of Teacher Education policy identifies several avenues for those who do not pass. The faculty can recommend that you retake the test, take additional course work, or deny graduation.

If you have further questions, please contact the Graduate Advisor at [stegrada@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:stegrada@mail.sdsu.edu) .