HIED Comprehensive Examination Policy

The intent of the comprehensive written and oral examination is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the student’s knowledge across the field of higher education administration. The comprehensive written and oral examination is to be taken at the completion of the student’s course work—although Dissertation Prep may be taken after comprehensive exams if approved by a student’s doctoral advisor.

Application and clearance for the comprehensive written and oral examination occurs through the Graduate Student Services Office (418 White Hall). Students should review pp. 29-32 of the EHHS Graduate Student Handbook, including the paperwork the student will need to initiate in order to be cleared to take comprehensive exams. The policy states students must be registered for classes during the semester in which they take comprehensive exams, as listed on page 29. “If a student is not otherwise registered for coursework, they must register for a one credit hour research experience in the program area during the comprehensive exam semester. This will be supervised by the program coordinator.”

The comprehensive examination will be offered twice per academic year. The dates usually fall in the first week (Thursday and Friday) of April and November. Dates will be announced by the program coordinator. The student will receive two questions by email each morning (four total questions) at approximately 8:00 a.m., with the essays to be returned by email each afternoon by 5:00 p.m. (Nine total hours will be provided each day.)

In the HIED Ph.D. program, students complete a two-day written portion of the comprehensive examination from a location of their choosing. The questions will be drawn from the courses required in the Ph.D. program and usually span the content of multiple courses. One question will focus on research. Questions will be chosen by the members of the student’s advisory phase committee and will not be shared in advance with the student.

Students may not share question prompts with one another. Two HIED faculty advisors (comprising the student’s advisory phase committee) read and grade the written portion of the examination; the two advisors may determine that the student has successfully passed the written examination and is ready for the oral examination, or they may determine that there is a deficiency and thus re-writing responses to one or more of the questions is necessary.

Students typically are allowed one week per question for rewrites. Re-written responses must be submitted by the end of the semester. The exact due date for rewrites will be discussed and confirmed by the advisor. If a student does not pass at least two
questions on the initial written examination, they must retake the full comprehensive exam with different questions in the next semester in which comps occur.

Expectations for the written portion of the examination include:

- Students need to demonstrate a culmination of their learning in the HIED doctoral program, synthesizing relevant academic literature to provide specific answers to the questions.
- Students must address the content of multiple courses when responding to each question.
- Grading will be based on content (e.g., accuracy and thoroughness of information) AND form (e.g., written clearly, good grammar and spelling, etc.).
- Students should take care to answer all questions fully. The most common reason why students have to rewrite responses to one or more questions is because they have not fully addressed all aspects of the question. It may be helpful to structure the responses with subheadings to ensure all aspects of the question are addressed.
- Shallow or surface level responses are not appropriate; all positions taken should be defended with appropriate literature.
- Students must provide both in-text citations and references for all sources used.
- Students must adhere to the most current APA style guidelines.
- Organization and thorough preparation in advance for the comprehensive examination is critical for success.

Both HIED faculty advisors must indicate a satisfactory performance on the written portion of the examination before the student can schedule the oral portion of the examination. It is the student’s responsibility to identify a meeting day and time for the oral examination, following consultation with members of the advisory committee.

Both HIED faculty advisors must indicate a satisfactory performance on the oral portion of the examination in order for a student to pass. There is only one opportunity to pass the oral examination. Accordingly, there is no do-over for all or part of the oral examination.

Upon successful completion of the written portion and oral portion of the comprehensive examination, the student may register for Dissertation I.