

EDS Doctoral Comprehensive Exams

Comprehensive examinations are intended for doctoral students to show their independent ability to do scholarly work and merit continuation in their program. They must be completed after finishing at least 75% of the courses listed on your Program of Study and at least 8 months before graduation. Upon satisfactory completion of the Comprehensive Exam, the “Notice of Completion/Admission to Candidacy” form must be submitted to the Graduate School.

The nature of comprehensive exams may vary widely across the department, college, and campus. In EDS, the exam generally is a project that you conceptually co-develop with your advisor and/or committee. However, you must complete the project independently of advisor and committee assistance. It should be useful to you in some manner, such as examining in depth several theories that you might draw from later in framing your dissertation. The exam should not duplicate work that you will do elsewhere, such as your dissertation literature review. However, you might develop examination questions that could lead to publishable papers.

One common type of exam is to develop and answer one or two substantial, scholarly questions. The combined total length might be about 40-60 double-spaced pages. Most references should be recent research articles from scholarly journals (i.e., within the past five years or so, unless you are seeking historical or comparative perspectives).

Once you have completed your exam, a common process is for you to arrange—in conjunction with your advisor—a meeting with committee members for an oral defense of your work, submitting a hard copy to your committee members at least two weeks in advance. Your oral exam might consist of, in order, a brief oral presentation of your work, questions from your committee, a confidential committee discussion with you being excused from the room, and a final decision about your performance reported to you upon returning to the room. The outcome might be pass, conditional pass (e.g., with demonstration of acceptable revisions), or fail.

Category	Result/Next Steps
Pass	* Move to work on dissertation proposal with advisor
Pass with satisfactory revisions	* Opportunity to revise ONCE * Chair will clarify issues with initial project, but student must complete revised work independently * All revised work must be completed by the end of the following semester
Fail	* Discontinue work on doctoral degree

If you receive a rating of ‘accepted with revisions,’ you can revise your work and submit it once more to your committee. Your committee will review your work again, and you will also be required to complete the oral examination again. If you pass your oral and written exams, you can begin work on your dissertation proposal. If you fail, you will not be able to continue work on your doctoral degree.

Below are some sample, approved questions recently developed by EDS doctoral students.

Student 1

1. Investigate and describe the "stage-environment fit" philosophy of adolescent development and create a tool for evaluating the degree to which science and math classes meet the developmental needs of middle school students based on the stage-environment fit model.
2. Investigate and describe the effects that transitioning to middle school has on young adolescents. Given this information, find programs and strategies that are designed to facilitate this transition and report on their effectiveness.

Student 2

1. How are pre-service social studies teachers being prepared in U.S. colleges and universities?
 - What do beginning social studies teachers need to know and be able to do to teach effectively in the secondary classroom?
 - What knowledge, skills, and dispositions are required for new social studies teachers to work effectively with diverse student populations?
 - How has the No Child Left Behind legislation affected social studies pre-service teacher preparation?
2. How might professional development for social studies teachers encourage quality teaching practices that will positively impact student learning and achievement?
 - What are the characteristics of a professional development for social studies teachers that will positively affect student learning and achievement in the classroom?
 - How has the No Child Left Behind legislation affected social studies curriculum and instruction in elementary schools?
 - How might professional development for elementary school teachers positively affect social studies curriculum and instruction in elementary classrooms, in the context of NCLB legislation?
 - How do the needs of novice teachers and veteran teachers differ and how can effective professional development meet the needs of both?

Student 3

The Impact of High-Stakes Testing on Students with Emotional Disturbance

Recent legislation mandates high-stakes testing for students who have traditionally been marginalized or exempt from participating. This comprehensive examination will explore what has, to date, been researched and written regarding the impact of high-stakes testing on students with disabilities in general and students with Emotional Disturbance in particular. Since there has been little research done in this area, it may be necessary to explore the impact of students with Learning Disabilities to extrapolate information and apply to students with Emotional Disturbance.

The review of the literature will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Definition of high-stakes testing
- A detailed description of the policy/legislation requiring students with disabilities (ED) to participate in the testing
- A look at the costs and benefits of having students with disabilities (ED) participate in the testing

- Contemporary views and any existing research both supporting and opposing the legislative mandates
- Current state legislation surrounding high-stakes testing for students with disabilities
- A proposed research agenda

Student 4

This examination will include exploring the current literature and research that has been written on these topics from the standpoint of situated theory or closely related viewpoints and writing a synthesis and critical analysis of this literature.

- 1) How do novice teachers construct their identity in response or relation to
 - a. The school community,
 - b. Mathematics teaching, including district expectations regarding objectives, high-stakes testing, and the provided curriculum, and
 - c. Their students' personal characteristics, including but not limited to the students' cultural, racial/ethnic, and language backgrounds and their previous mathematics experiences and understanding.
- 2) What effect do novice teachers have on the school they enter? Or, conversely, how does the school respond to the infusion of novice teachers?