

DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PROCEDURE

- Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program -
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT

This comprehensive examination procedure, approved by the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Council on October 13, 2004, applies to all Ph.D. students in the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program.

Purpose:

The general purposes of the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program doctoral comprehensive examination are to assist doctoral students to integrate and deepen their understanding of major current theories and alternative views in Canadian and international scholarly literature in the field of curriculum studies, and in a particular area of study within curriculum studies. Equally important, this examination requires students to apply some of these ideas from scholarly literature to outlining and justifying a research method for research in the chosen area of specialization. The examination process is intended to review the students' capacity to address these topics in a more systematic and coherent manner than will have been accomplished in individual courses.

Although the comprehensive examination paper is not a thesis proposal, it could serve as a basis for a subsequent thesis proposal. The examination format is designed to balance the goals of conceptual synthesis and review of readiness for thesis work. The student's written work for this examination is expected to be somewhat broader (more "comprehensive") than the typical literature review in some thesis proposals. Important goals of this process are: 1) to help the student to focus on a particular area of study, 2) to receive constructive feedback from the reviewers, and 3) to inform the subsequent development of a thesis research proposal. Finally, 4) this examination is designed to ascertain whether a student has obtained an adequate knowledge base to continue in the doctoral program.

Form and Content of Examination:

The examination involves a written essay (completed independently, at a time chosen by the student, in consultation with their advisor or intended thesis supervisor). The student is required to address the following major areas in a single essay paper, *through a review of the relevant scholarly literature*:

- A. *Outline, analyze and substantiate the core ideas (explain the conceptual foundations) of an area of specialization.*
- B. *Situate these core ideas in the larger field of curriculum studies.*
- C. *Discuss one (or more) methodological approach(es) to conducting research in this area of specialization.*

The examination requires the student to explain and ground in the scholarly literature an idea for an original inquiry, and to justify why this research question is best addressed by the chosen method or methods of enquiry proposed. Beyond specific knowledge of the thesis research topic, the examination requires that the student be competent to discuss the merits of a wide range of conceptual frameworks and methodological alternatives in the broader field of curriculum studies, and be able to justify his or her proposed study among them. In the examination paper, the student will be required to show evidence of active inquiry, competence in interpreting, analyzing and synthesizing information, and the ability to develop clear and coherent arguments. The student must devote in his or her essay substantive attention to all facets of the student's work identified above (A, B & C). This examination *may* address the topic of the student's intended thesis proposal, but normally should be completed *before* the thesis proposal (the thesis project may later develop along different lines).

The essay must not exceed 7,000 words in length, excluding the reference list (footnotes and endnotes are considered part of the text and must be included in the complete word count at the end of the essay). Consultation with others (especially the advisor) is encouraged, in preparation for writing the examination essay, and it is recognized that this may include discussion of possible substantive points in the essay. Study groups are encouraged for mutual students' support and feedback. Also, it is permissible to use an editor for grammatical assistance. Nevertheless, the essay submitted must develop an individual perspective and must be written independently. The reviewers are expected to give the student written feedback on their essay, which will facilitate the student's future work on the proposal and thesis project. As in the past, students are entitled to write their comprehensive exams in French.

Preparing for the Examination:

Advice on the appropriate timing for completing the comprehensive examination and on possible ways of preparing should be sought, in the first instance, from the student's advisor or the intended thesis supervisor.

Reading lists to prepare for element “B” of the comprehensive exam may be found in the syllabi of CTL1000H sections taught by continuing tenure stream faculty in the previous five years. Ask CSTD Program Assistant, Danny Cavanagh, if you need copies of these. These reading lists could be useful as a student works through the examination preparation and writing process. It should be approached critically, and used in conjunction with the student's experience in, and reflection about particular contexts and areas of specialization in curriculum. Because the lists are intended for a general audience, a student who will use it should discuss with his or her advisor or intended supervisor which ones, if any, would be appropriate. Moreover, there may be a variety of materials that a student will have read that are not on this list, but which are equally relevant to preparing the examination. Focus some of the preparation time on a review of literature associated with the intended thesis project.

Criteria for Assessment of Comprehensive Examinations:

- Academic writing: composition of concise, well-organized, well-argued and coherent written work in appropriate academic style (APA for example);
- Literature review content: arguments well-substantiated through constructively critical synthesis and review of the theories and evidence presented in a range of scholarly literature *relevant to curriculum studies and teacher development*;
- Significance: careful rationale, grounded in the appropriate scholarly literature, for the student's choice of specialization topic;
- Methodology: critical analysis of the strengths, limitations, and key principles of one (or more) methodological approach(es) that could be used in future research addressing this area of specialization.

Timing and Process for Examination:

A student may complete his or her comprehensive examination at any time during the academic year, based on his or her own readiness in consultation with his or her advisor or intended supervisor, after completion of all coursework. The student is requested to notify the Program Assistant at least six weeks in advance of approximately when he or she intends to turn in the completed examination. When a comprehensive examination is turned in, reviewers will be assigned by the Chair of the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Comprehensive Examination Committee, who will also confirm the result after reviews have been completed. Since the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto requires the formation of the thesis committee and approval of the thesis proposal (as well as the successful completion of the doctoral comprehensive examination) to occur no later than at the end of year three of a doctoral program, it is desirable for a full-time student to complete his or her comprehensive examination paper within approximately eighteen months of beginning the doctoral program (or, right after completing required coursework), before writing the thesis proposal.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee is responsible to assign reviewers, to confirm and record examination results, and to review all cases in which one or more reviewers give an examination less than Pass (with minor revisions). In addition, this committee is the first arena for appeal of examination results. This Committee will also see that information for students and Faculty members is updated and disseminated, and review comprehensive examination policy and processes as needed.

The student will submit *one electronic copy* of their completed Comprehensive Examination paper (a blind copy - no name on it except for comprehensive examination student code), with the *cover sheet form* (see Appendix A), to the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Assistant between September 1 and June 1. (Under exceptional circumstances, students may contact the Chair of the CSTD Comprehensive Examination Committee with regards to submission timeline.) The Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Assistant will assign each exam paper a code (to maintain anonymity and accurate records), and collect all submitted exams for the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The Chair of the Committee will then appoint the reviewers (see below – Reviewers and Examination Results).

Faculty reviewers will be given two weeks to read exam papers and turn in reviews. Assignment of reviewers and review of results by the Comprehensive Examination Committee each normally require another week, and if a third reader is needed this would take another two weeks. Thus the entire review process normally will take approximately four to six weeks (not counting July, August, or holiday periods, when reviews will not take place). Students will receive copies of each examiner's review form, in addition to the decision of the Comprehensive Examination Committee.

Students should expect to complete the comprehensive examination soon after completing coursework, and before writing a thesis proposal. The following optimal sequence of doctoral work is recommended:

1. to complete coursework;
2. (concurrent with above) to identify and begin working with an intended thesis supervisor, to begin preparing for the comprehensive exam;
3. to notify the Program Assistant and the advisor or intended supervisor of intent to complete comprehensive examination, with approximate date;
4. to complete and pass the comprehensive examination;
5. to complete and submit proposal to thesis committee for approval;
6. to submit ethical review protocol, based on approved thesis design, and begin research after approval.

Reviewers and Examination Results:

Each comprehensive examination normally will have two reviewers, both (Full or Associate) members of the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies and the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development program. One of these reviewers may be known to the student; to the extent feasible, this first reviewer will have background in the student's area of research interest. The second reviewer is not normally someone in the same specialty area, nor who has worked closely with the student. Both will be appointed as reviewers by the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The examiners will read "blind" copies of the examination essay and will not be informed of the identity of the student.

Faculty reviewers are expected to provide formative feedback to assist the student in completing future work (and outlining any required revisions, if applicable), in addition to specifying one of the results below, on a Comprehensive Examination Review Form (see Appendix B). Each reviewer will submit this form to the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Assistant, who will collect these for the Comprehensive Examination Committee. (It is not mandatory for reviewers to sign their names on the form.) There are three possible examination assessment results:

- Pass
- Pass Contingent upon revisions (advisor's signature required when student submits revisions)
- Fail (re-writing and resubmission of the exam required)

If one or more reviewers assess the examination as "*Pass Contingent upon revisions*," and none of the reviewers assess the examination as "*Fail*," the final result is "*Pass Contingent upon revisions*." The student will have an opportunity to make the changes suggested, and will be required to turn in to the Program Assistant the revised paper, with the advisor's signature (indicating that she/he considers the revisions acceptable), along with a brief cover letter stating what revisions have been made to the original paper. Upon receiving the student's advisor's approval of the revisions, the Program Assistant will inform the Department that the student has passed the comprehensive exam.

If one or more reviewers assess the examination as "*Fail*," the examination paper will be submitted (in blind copy) to an anonymous third reviewer to be appointed by the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The Comprehensive Examination Committee will take into account all three reviews and their own reading of the student's examination essay in making a final decision on the result of the examination. A final result of "*Fail*" means that re-writing and resubmission of the examination paper is required.

If the examination result is "*Pass*" or "*Pass Contingent upon revisions*," the student is not required to re-take the comprehensive exam.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee will examine all reviews to determine the examination result. In each case, the reviewers' written feedback will be given to both the student and his or her advisor, along with a letter informing the student of the final result of the examination.

Re-taking the Examination:

In the event that a student fails to pass the examination on the first occasion, he or she is entitled to one further attempt (following the same process as outlined above, normally with different faculty reviewers). If he or she fails the comprehensive examination a second time, the student will not be allowed to continue in the doctoral program.

Appeals:

If a student feels that he or she has been unfairly treated in any aspect of the comprehensive examination process, he or she may lodge an appeal according to OISE/University of Toronto procedures. The first step in such an appeal is the review of all written materials by the Comprehensive Examination Committee.

CTL Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Comprehensive Examination Cover Form

Students complete this form and submit it with their Comprehensive Examination Paper. All material must be submitted to the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Assistant who assists the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Comprehensive Examination Committee.

Student Name: _____

Student Signature: _____

Student Number: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Word Count (7000 words maximum): _____

TITLE: _____

Name of Advisor (or intended Thesis Supervisor): _____

Please find attached:

one electronic copy of the comprehensive examination, *without* the student's name on it.

For Office Use Only:

Student CODE: _____ Date received: _____

Reviewer #1 (name and review due date): _____

Reviewer #2 (name and review due date): _____

Reviewer #3 (if applicable, name, review due date): _____

Comprehensive Examination Committee Decision: _____

CTL Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Comprehensive Examination Review Form

Student Code:	
PASS (formative feedback below)	[]
PASS CONTINGENT upon revisions (explain below)	[]
FAIL (explain below)	[]
Substantive comments in relation to specified <u>assessment criteria</u> (1 to 2 pages required): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic writing: composition of concise, well-organized, well-argued and coherent written work in appropriate academic style (APA, for example);• Literature review content: arguments well-substantiated through constructively critical synthesis and review of the theories and evidence presented in a range of scholarly literature <i>relevant to curriculum studies and teacher development</i>;• Significance: careful rationale, grounded in the appropriate scholarly literature, for the student's choice of specialization topic;• Methodology: critical analysis of the strengths, limitations, and key principles of one (or more) methodological approach(es) that could be used in future research addressing this area of specialization.	
Signature of Reviewer (<i>optional</i>): _____ Date: _____	
Reviewer's name (<i>optional</i> – please PRINT): _____	

Please return this completed Review Form and the student's Comprehensive Examination paper to Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development Program Assistant Danny Cavanagh.