

HIED Comprehensive Ph.D. Examination Q & A

What is the purpose of the Comprehensive Examination?

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

How do I apply for the exam?

Application and clearance for the comprehensive written and oral examination occurs through the Graduate Student Services Office (418 White Hall). The application form should be submitted to the graduate school and notification to the advisor should occur at least one month prior to administration of the test. Students should review the appropriate sections of the EHHS [Graduate Student Handbook](#), including the paperwork the student will need to initiate in order to be cleared to take comprehensive exams. Moreover, students must be registered for classes during the semester in which they take comprehensive exams. If students are not otherwise registered for coursework, they must register for a one-credit hour Individual Investigation (HIED 76596). There are no additional assignments or responsibilities for this course, other than preparation for the exam. The HIED Ph.D. program coordinator is responsible for the supervision of this one-hour experience.

When is the comprehensive exam offered?

The two-day comprehensive examination will be offered twice per academic year. The dates usually fall in the first week (Thursday and Friday) of November and April. Dates will be announced by the Ph.D. program coordinator. The student will receive two questions by email each morning at approximately 8:00 a.m., with the essays to be returned by email each afternoon by approximately 5:00 p.m. Accordingly, if you receive the test a few minutes late (or early) note that fact on the top of your first page in order to receive nine total hours.

A staff member in Foundations, Leadership, and Administration (FLA) will coordinate the actual delivery of the questions and, upon completion, receive the student's essays. The FLA staff member will then submit the questions and essays to the committee members. Students with disabilities with documentation from Student Accessibility Services will be granted accommodations as appropriate.

How are the questions selected?

In the HIED Ph.D. program, students complete a two-day written portion of the comprehensive examination from a location of their choosing. Three questions will be based on the courses required during the Ph.D. program or in prerequisites. However, only prerequisites taken at Kent State at the Ph.D. level (i.e., 70000 level) are included. Accordingly, if the student took a prerequisite course during the Master's degree (i.e., 60000 level), it will not be included on comps. Also, each question will include content from multiple courses.

One question will focus on research. Questions will be chosen or created by the members of the student's advisory phase committee and will not be shared in advance with the student. Students may not share questions with one another.

Who grades the exam?

The two faculty advisors (comprising the student's advisory phase committee) grade the written portion of the exam. The two advisors may determine that the student has successfully passed the written exam and is ready for the oral or may determine that there are deficiencies. In that instance, students may be asked to rewrite their responses to one or two questions or the entire exam. When rewriting one or two answers, students are typically allowed one week per question. Rewritten responses must be submitted by the end of the semester. The exact due date for rewrites will be discussed and confirmed by the advisor. When three or four responses are found inadequate, the student must retake the entire comprehensive exam with different questions in the next semester in which comps occur.

What are the expectations for the written portion of the examination?

Expectations 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. While we expect students to utilize course texts and materials, responses to each question should also integrate relevant scholarly literature beyond course readings.
- 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.). We expect students to proofread each question's response before submitting it.
- Students should take care to answer all questions fully. The most common reason why students are required 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.
 - Appropriate literature includes articles from peer-reviewed academic journals, texts and materials from class, and coverage of current events from high-quality journalistic sources focused on higher education.
 - All factual claims must be cited; you must make it clear when departing from facts to your interpretations and conclusions.
- 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 advance preparation for the comprehensive examination is critical for success.

Both members of the advisory committee must indicate a satisfactory performance on the written portion of the examination before the student may schedule the oral exam.

What are the expectations for the oral portion of the examination?

It is the student's responsibility to identify a meeting day and time (two hours) for the oral examination, following consultation with members of the advisory committee. The meeting may be either face-to-face or through Teams, given preferences of the student and the committee members. If face-to-face is selected, it is also the student's responsibility to reserve a room for the meeting.

During the oral exam, the content of the written exam is subject to further questioning as well as content brought up during questioning.

Both members of the advisory committee must indicate a satisfactory performance on the oral portion of the exam for a student to pass. There is only one opportunity to pass the oral. Accordingly, there is no do-over for all or part of the oral exam.

What is next?

Upon successful completion of the written portion and oral portion of the comprehensive examination, the student may register for Dissertation I once any remaining coursework is satisfactorily completed (i.e., Dissertation Prep and/or Research in HIED). CONGRATULATIONS!!!

In the comparatively rare instance where students do not pass the examination, it is recommended that they talk with their respective academic advisors.