School of Education Preliminary Examination Policies

The preliminary examination is a time-honored and ubiquitous process in Doctor of Philosophy graduate programs across the United States. Its purpose is to assess the extent to which Ph.D. students who have taken all, or nearly all, of their courses in their approved program of study are “ready” to undertake the rigors of the final stage of the Ph.D. program – the dissertation research. All Ph.D. programs at Colorado State University must include the preliminary examination as part of the process by which students are assessed for their readiness for their dissertation research, and the Graduate School has a set of general rules, regulations and appeal processes governing the preliminary examination in the Graduate and Professional Bulletin. In addition, each academic unit with a Ph.D. program has its own set of policies and procedures it uses to implement the general Graduate School requirements. The information below provides some general information about our School’s policies and procedures.

In 2011, the faculty of the School of Education approved a revision to the prior process by which you will take your preliminary examination in the School of Education. Now, when you and your advisor decide you are ready to take your preliminary examination, you must select from two different options for completing the preliminary examination. Below you will find some general guidelines that pertain to both options. The School of Education website also has more detailed guidelines for each of the options. These can be found at http://www.soe.chhs.colostate.edu/students/doctoral/preexamforms.aspx as well as an Application Form to use to sign up for the Preliminary Exam and rubrics that members of your Graduate Committee will use to evaluate your examination responses.

1. But what if I have already taken one of the two exams under the current (old) model but wasn’t be ready to take the other exam until the fall 2011 or even later?

No problem. If you have either completed or started writing one of the two exams (research or content) under the old model prior to September 1, 2011 you are “grandfathered” into the old model and will continue with your exam processes for as long as it takes to complete them, again, under the old model.

2. What if I was admitted into my Ph.D. program prior to Fall 2011 but was not ready to take my preliminary exam until after the beginning of the Fall 2011 semester – can I take the exam under the old model?

No, the new model of preliminary exams applies to all Ph.D. students regardless of when you were admitted or in what specialization you were admitted. The only exceptions are noted in #1 above.

3. Are there any constraints on me selecting which option I want from among the two new options?

As a matter of practice, the choice will almost always be yours as to which option you choose. If in very rare cases your advisor differs with your selected option and the situation cannot be
resolved, then you and your advisor may want to consider ending the advising relationship.

4. What if I get started on my writing of the prelims and for unforeseen reasons, I am unable to complete the writing in the one month period of time?

In extremely rare instances, such as a major health problem or family crisis, a student may find she or he is not able to complete the written examination within the prescribed time period he or she chose in which to write it. In this case there are two options. If the writing is nearly complete, the student may simply submit what has been written and receive the evaluative judgment of his or her graduate committee based on this nearly complete written work and the oral examination to follow. In the second option, the student may submit a written description explaining the issue to her or his advisor and request an identified “time out” period of time. This request will be circulated by the advisor to the committee and, with a consensus of the committee, will be granted by the advisor without further review.

5. OK – what are the options then, and what are the general guidelines?

There are two – a research grant proposal or a journal article manuscript reporting original research – and the general guidelines are delineated below. More specific guidelines for each of these two options can be found on the SOE website as noted above.

General Guidelines

1. You may select, with advisor approval, from two options – a research grant proposal or a journal article manuscript reporting the results of original research.

2. Regardless of which option you choose, you will have one month to write your response.

3. You will be able to schedule this examination at several relatively open times during both academic semesters and in the summer. In the fall semester you may start the writing process any time during the first two weeks of October, with the oral defense to occur no later than eight weeks after the one month writing period has concluded. In the spring semester, you may schedule the exam to begin any time during the first two weeks of February with the oral defense to occur no later than eight weeks after the one month writing period has concluded. During the summer term, you may only write the exam during the month of July, starting on July 1st. Because many faculty (very likely including one or more who are on your graduate committee) are not under contract during the summer, your oral defense must be scheduled in the time period starting after classes begin for the fall semester and ending the third week of September. This means the earliest you may defend your dissertation and submit a GS Form 24 will be the following summer.

4. Regardless of which semester you and your advisor choose for you to complete your preliminary examination writing, you and your advisor must submit a completed SOE Form 14 (Intent to Complete the Preliminary Exam) by the last Friday of the month
preceding the month in which you wish to write the examination.

5. Upon completion of your one month of writing you must sign a statement (SOE Form 15) affirming that all of the preliminary exam writing is your own original writing and was developed for this preliminary exam. In other words, you are affirming that you have not solicited and used the assistance of any other individual in this writing and you have not “cut and pasted” significant blocks of text from other sources of your prior writing in your written response. This original writing policy does not mean that you cannot write about a topic you have written about before. In fact, for example, you are welcome to use data that you have collected in your graduate work for a research journal manuscript. Too, there may be brief sections of your prior writing that you can paraphrase in your preliminary exam response. The School of Education simply expects you to conform to the spirit of this examination environment which affirms that this is original writing that has not benefited from cutting and pasting large blocks of text from earlier writing.

6. When you have completed your preliminary exam response, you will submit this response, along with two other documents, to the School of Education Graduate Programs office at kelli.clark@colostate.edu. These two other documents are the RFP or journal guidelines (depending on which option you chose) which dictated your exam response, and your signed SOE Form 15. You may sign a hard copy of the SOE Form 15, scan it and send it electronically, or you may hand-deliver the document with your original signature.

7. In addition to negotiating with your advisor which option you select for your exam, you must confirm with your Graduate Committee a date on which you will complete a two-hour oral follow-up which will culminate with the signing of the GS Form 16. This oral follow-up must be scheduled within eight weeks following the day you complete your writing of the exam. During the first part of the oral follow-up, your committee members will query you about various aspects of your writing, regardless of which option you have chosen. The remainder of the time in this oral follow-up will involve queries by your committee on any aspect of your specialization content or research methodology course content. This oral follow-up will no longer include your dissertation proposal defense. You may talk about ideas for your dissertation with your committee at this oral follow-up, but that should be the extent of it.

8. All members of your Graduate Committee will be expected to evaluate your preliminary exam writing, and you can expect questions about both aspects at your oral follow-up.