Policies and Procedures on Preliminary Examination Option 2: Research Manuscript

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 “qualified” to undertake the rigors of the final stage of the Ph.D. program – the dissertation research. Section E.4.4 of the Graduate School’s Graduate and Professional Bulletin states “A preliminary examination shall be administered at least two terms before the final examination to determine whether the student is qualified to continue toward the doctorate” (p. 27). What “qualified” means varies somewhat depending on university and program, but in the School of Education at Colorado State University, it means proficient at a level that is satisfactory to your graduate committee in three key areas:

(a) broad and deep content knowledge in your specialization;

(b) knowledge at an advanced level of social science research design methods and analytic techniques; and

(c) professional writing skills.

The research manuscript option will assess your skills on each of these four areas. First, your introduction, rationale, and literature review sections of your manuscript will assess, at some level, your knowledge of contemporary theory and empiricism in your content specialization. Second, the technical method section of your manuscript will allow your committee to examine your ability to conceptualize an appropriate design and analysis for a set of questions driving your research project. Third, the quality of your writing, from both a technical and a grammatical perspective, will assess your professional writing skills. Finally, your oral follow-up will allow you to display your capacity to respond extemporaneously to queries about your writing, your understanding of research methodology, and your knowledge of the content in your field of study with clarity and accuracy. Below you will find specific guidelines concerning this option. Make sure you look at the document “Preliminary Examination General Guidelines – SOE PD 15” for general guidelines, some of which have been repeated below.

1. You must complete and submit SOE Form 14 with your advisor to Kelli Clark at kelli.clark@colostate.edu in the School of Education Graduate Programs Office prior to starting your writing for the preliminary examination.

2. You may write a research manuscript to any journal which you and your advisor agree is appropriate for the content of your research. Once you and your advisor jointly identify which journal to which you will write your research manuscript, you may begin to organize materials you will need to develop your manuscript but you may not begin writing the actual manuscript narrative until the day your examination begins.
3. Regardless of which journal you select, it must conform to the following set of guidelines:
   
a. It must be a journal that publishes research, that is, it must have a policy of publishing manuscripts of original research that have a rationale, research questions or hypotheses; a methodology, and data analysis and interpretation sections at a minimum.

   b. You may write a manuscript that reports on the results of either qualitative or quantitative original research, or a systematic review (meta-analysis) of original research; the methodological breadth about which you may write can range very broadly from autoethnography to a randomized controlled trial – the intent here is that your writing reflects a method, analysis, and interpretation.

   c. It must have guidelines that allow for a manuscript length of at least 15-20 double-spaced pages of narrative, exclusive of tables, figures, and references.

   d. It must publish research manuscripts focusing on some area of education, spanning pre-kindergarten to higher education; these research manuscripts can focus on a wide variety of topical areas such as educational policy, classroom interventions, professional development, personnel development, methodology, organizational training and development, to name just a few. The only constraints are that your manuscript must report on the results of research, and it must have some connection to education.

4. Your manuscript may be a genuine attempt to publish original research in which you have previously engaged, or it may be simply an exercise with no expectation of actually getting published. You may also write up a secondary analysis of existing data as well.

5. Your research manuscript may relate to some aspect of your intended dissertation research, but it must involve largely original writing for this preliminary examination exercise (see #8 below).

6. You will have one month to write your preliminary examination research manuscript.

7. 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.

8. Regardless of which option you choose, 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.

9. 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 http://www.soe.cahs.colostate.edu/programs/current-doctoral-forms.aspx. These two other documents are journal guidelines which dictated your exam response, and your signed SOE Form 15. You may either 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.

10. 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-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.

11. 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.