

**EDUCATION POLICY**  
**PhD**  
**PRELIMINARY**  
**EXAMINATION**

To become a school candidate for the doctoral degree, Doctoral Candidacy students must pass a Preliminary Examination. This is also known as the Comprehensive Examination or the Qualifying Paper and serves as Ed Policy's Candidacy Examination required of all PhDs at Penn. This exam is taken after all coursework is completed. The doctoral Preliminary Examination requires students to demonstrate:

- depth and breadth of familiarity with the literature in their field of study;
- ability to analyze critically issues in their field;
- knowledge and understanding of the intellectual domains and research paradigms relevant to their field of study; and
- ability to present cogent arguments including the effective use of evidence.

Students in the regular Ph.D. program will complete a single examination paper on the intellectual foundations of a research area in the field of education policy. Students pursuing a dual degree with another department at Penn may complete two examination papers. *All* students will be expected to draw from their coursework as well as their own independent scholarly work in preparing for their examinations. The writing required for the preliminary exam will be revised, as needed, to the satisfaction of two faculty reviewers. Students will receive feedback from their faculty reviewers within three weeks of submitting their exams.

**Purpose**

The paper will be a scholarly analysis of an educational research problem that the student's dissertation research will later aim to address. While focusing on a sufficiently complex broad topic, with roots in several areas of theory and knowledge, the paper should not be considered a simple descriptive literature review. Rather the exam paper should involve analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the relevant literature in order to develop a thesis or argument. Students should compare and contrast multiple perspectives on the chosen topic. The paper will be 40-50 pages in length (12 font, double-spaced), providing students the opportunity to tackle a question in depth and using the relevant literatures that inform the narrower topic of a possible dissertation. The aim is to provide the student with an opportunity to locate a particular topic in relation to a broader research tradition as well as related literatures and theories that might contribute to new and innovative frameworks for explaining or understanding this research problem.

The paper should demonstrate depth and breadth of familiarity with the intellectual domains and research paradigms as well as the research literature relevant to the student's dissertation topic; it should also demonstrate that the student can analyze and synthesize this material precisely and critically, and can situate his or her own dissertation topic in relation to broader research literatures to which the research will contribute. The advisor may consult with the student regarding the structure and themes of the paper.

### **Evaluation Rubric for Exam**

Each of the following areas will be separately evaluated:

1. **Theory.** Theoretical/conceptual grounding of paper, including discussion/integration of relevant theories/conceptual models
2. **Thesis/hypothesis/argument.** Soundness of, and justification for, the main thesis/hypothesis/argument set forth in the paper.
3. **Substantive area of expertise.** Demonstration of mastery of relevant areas of expertise (e.g., leadership, policy, school finance) in evaluating and interpreting the literature.
4. **Quality of review,** as measured by
  - a. *depth and thoroughness* in establishing what is known and where gaps are (e.g., inclusion of landmark studies, complexities in mixed findings, inclusion of all major relevant literature).
  - b. the extent to the *review is analytic* and used to support the thesis in their paper, rather than being purely descriptive; and
  - c. *explicit consideration of the design, methods and/or analytic techniques used by the studies reviewed* in the paper. E xplicit discussion of strengths and limits of a study's findings based on, for example, whether they are derived from a case study or a randomized field trial.

After the student has completed the preliminary examination, the faculty reviewers will decide within three weeks from submission whether the student's performance in each of the above four areas is one of the following:

#### ***Score:***

1	2	3	4
Unsatisfactory	Low Pass	Satisfactory	High Pass/Exemplary

If the student earns at least a satisfactory in each of the four areas, the student may continue in the program.

- If the student earns an unsatisfactory in one or more areas, the student must rewrite the examination within two months. In unusual circumstances an extension of up to two further months may be granted.
- In the event of unsatisfactory performance on an examination, the committee must provide a written statement of reasons for the judgment as guidance for preparation for the re-examination.
- A second judgment of unsatisfactory performance in any of the three areas results in the termination of candidacy.

The result of the exam is reported by the Advisor to the Division Coordinator, who in turn reports the result to the SRO.

### **Dual Degree EP Ph.D. Students: Two Field Examination Papers**

The EP preliminary examination for those seeking a dual Ph.D. with another department or school at Penn will assess whether a student has developed depth and breadth of knowledge in both their non-GSE field, as applied to education issues, and also in education policy. These students will complete two separate preliminary exam papers – one in their non-GSE field and one in EP. Students will develop two reading lists: one reading list on education issues in their non-GSE field and a reading list for education policy. Both should ideally focus on a topic and issue relevant to their own dissertation research. The reading list for their non-GSE field should include theoretical and substantive materials, emphasizing classic works, landmark studies, and more recent contributions that reflect core issues and debates within the field. The reading list for education policy should allow the student to show that he or she has read broadly in the field and has acquired a deep understanding of the key theoretical frameworks, substantive debates, enduring issues, and areas for promising future research.

The faculty readers for the preliminary exam will then pose two or three questions for the student to answer in relation to each area. Faculty readers should provide guidance to their students in preparing the reading lists for the exams, but should not assist their students in the writing of the exams. Each exam paper should be between 20-25 pages in length (12

font, double-spaced). Submission deadlines will be determined during discussions between the advisor and student.

After the student completes both papers for the Preliminary Examination, the faculty readers will decide within three weeks from submission whether the student's performance is one of the following:

- *Satisfactory*: In which case the student may continue in the program.
- *Unsatisfactory*: In which case the student must rewrite the examination within two months. In unusual circumstances an extension of up to two further months may be granted.

In the event of unsatisfactory performance on an examination, the committee must provide a written statement of reasons for the judgment as guidance for preparation for the re-examination.

A second judgment of unsatisfactory performance results in the termination of candidacy.