

## The Ph.D. in Education at Oakland University: Early Childhood Education Program (ECE)

### Qualifying Comprehensive Examinations<sup>1</sup>

As stated in Oakland University's *School of Education and Human Services Ph.D. Framework*:

Comprehensive examinations will be designed and administered at the department level. Each student must successfully complete comprehensive examinations within one year of completing the required course work and before the approval of the dissertation proposal. Comprehensive examinations will include assessment of the student's knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge in the foundational core, the departmental core, and the cognate areas of study. It is the responsibility of each Doctoral Advisory Committee to design and approve the modes of assessment for the comprehensive examinations. The judgment of successful completion of the comprehensive examination will reside with each Doctoral Advisory Committee. Doctoral Advisory Committees may permit students to repeat the comprehensive examination. Passing evaluations on either the written or oral portions of the examination do not preclude requiring additional courses or other learning experiences if the committee deems that such action is warranted. (p. 7)

The following specific policies and procedures have been approved by the faculty of the Early Childhood Education area.

### The Preparation Process and Student Readiness

To prepare for exams, the student will work with the student's Qualifying Exam Committee members (the Doctoral Advisory Committee, already constituted during the student's first or second year of study and finalized at least one semester prior to preparation for the qualifying exam). The exam committee chair will typically be the student's advisor. The exam committee will review the *student's portfolio* a major source of understanding the student's interests, strengths, and areas for further development. The advisor, in particular, will have provided input, advisement and review of the portfolio throughout the student's doctoral study. In preparation for the qualifying exam, each committee member should review and discuss the portfolio with the student. The committee chair (or the Doctoral Program Coordinator) will provide the student with a general reading list, and the student and faculty members representing the various areas of the exam will develop a working reading list to assist the student in further preparation. When the student elects to proceed to take the exams, the committee will grant approval or propose a plan for further study, coursework, or other appropriate preparation to promote greater readiness prior to granting approval for proceeding to take the exams. Approval will be based on apparent readiness (from the portfolio and meetings with the student).

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<sup>1</sup>From the *School of Education and Human Services Ph.D. Framework* (1995, p. 7).

## Structure of the Exam

The following *four* parts of the qualifying exam are designed to assess the student's readiness to proceed to Ph.D. candidate status and proposal preparation for the dissertation. The exam questions will be designed to promote and assess the student's integration of their knowledge with respect to challenging issues in the field. e.g., comparing and contrasting major theories, approaches, and policies in early childhood education and care; implications from the knowledge base for comparing and contrasting child care and preschool approaches and early childhood education curricula/programs; and designing early childhood curricula/approaches, curricula/program evaluations, research studies, and policy initiatives.

To successfully pass the qualifying exam, the student will demonstrate competence in the following exam segments, as follows.

### **Part 1: Demonstration of Comprehensive Knowledge of the Foundational Core and Early Childhood Education**

This segment of the exam will be conducted on a "take-home" basis, with a limited time frame, specifically a 2-day deadline. The exam segment should demonstrate that a student is *knowledgeable about a wide variety of major issues pertaining to early childhood education*, including knowledge of theoretical perspectives and methodological skills largely from the Ph.D. foundational core courses and knowledge of the major theories, research methods and findings, educational practices and public policies in early childhood education. A basic reading list will be provided and the student and committee members will add to the list to support the student's further development.

### **Part II: In-depth Knowledge of a Specific Area in Early Childhood Education**

This segment of the exam will be a *qualifying paper*.<sup>2</sup> It will be due *at least three weeks* prior to taking Parts I and II of the exam. The paper should demonstrate that a student *has an in-depth knowledge of a particular area of focus*, including the major theories, research methods and findings, educational practices and public policies (e.g., language development of young children and its relation to educational practices; the role of play in educational and care environments; the evaluation of the effectiveness of models of early childhood education; parent participation in early childhood education; fostering early literacy, math, or science in young children; the role of teachers in supporting children's social development). Students will seek input from their exam committee and other relevant faculty and be responsible for generating a reading list.

Based on the *Revised Early Childhood Education Proposal* (1996, p. 61), the student's Qualifying Exam paper is to of publishable quality. It should be related to the student's intended dissertation topic, or emerge from the student's course work, and may be developed from a course paper, e.g., FE 873. The topic should be approved in writing by the chair of the Advisory

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the *Revised Early Childhood Education Proposal* (1996, p. 61), with additions and revisions approved by the Early Childhood Education Faculty (June, 13, 2001).

Committee, and the paper completed as a part of the Qualifying Comprehensive Examinations process.

The paper should address an issue in child development, early learning, curriculum, instruction, policy, or other education-related issue, and may become the basis for a conference presentation or publication. It should provide evidence of research competence for the task of conducting the forthcoming dissertation research project. It should be a minimum of 25 to 35 pages in length, excluding tables and references. It should be prepared in APA format and include a significant review of the relevant literature and point to directions for a curriculum/program, research projects, and policy initiative pertaining to the reviewed area of focus. Although the qualifying paper may constitute a foundation for a dissertation research proposal, it is not intended as the same document. Rather, the qualifying paper provides the students with the opportunity for in-depth focus in an area of interest and thus provides for the scholarship activity that is foundational for the student's future area of expertise and constitutes a demonstration of the student's knowledge, synthesis, analysis, and articulation in that area. Along with input and feedback from the committee, the qualifying paper is intended to provide the student with a solid foundation for subsequent preparation of a specific research proposal for the dissertation.

### **Part III: Comprehensive Knowledge of a Cognate Area**

This segment of exam will be conducted on a "take-home" basis, with a limited time frame, specifically a 2-day deadline. The exam segment should demonstrate that a student *is knowledgeable in a cognate area* (a complementary area of study), including knowledge of the major theories, research methods and findings, educational practices and public policies (e.g., literacy and reading; curriculum development; early intervention; school administration or leadership). Students would seek input from their exam committee (particularly the member from the cognate area) and other relevant faculty in the cognate and be responsible for generating a reading list.

### **Evaluation of the Written Exam**

**Parts I, II, and III** will be evaluated using a scoring system. Specifically, each member of the committee will review each question of each exam segment and judge it as *Pass* or *Not Pass*. A "pass" will be indicated for a given question if the committee member who wrote the question *and* at least one other member agrees that the student passed the question. Students must pass the majority of the questions in each exam segment to pass the exam without conditions. When a student has been judged to not have achieved a "pass" for a majority of questions in one or more exam segments, the Committee Chair or the Doctoral Coordinator will convene the committee to resolve any concerns and set forth conditions for the student to complete or retake one of the exam segments. If a student does not pass two or more parts of the exam, the committee will assess the student's likely potential for passing the exams, upon further writing or study, and decide if the student should be granted approval for retaking the qualifying exam on a future occasion.

### **Part IV: The Oral Examination**

Upon successful completion of the written segments of the exam, i. e., Parts I, II, and III explained above, the student will proceed to take the oral segment of the qualifying exams. This exam will constitute an opportunity for the student to make a presentation in the area of special interest (e.g., the qualifying paper) and demonstrate the ability to respond to questions on the presentation per se and other questions that the faculty may want the student to address regarding issues in the field. Upon successful completion of the oral exam, the student will officially become a candidate for the Ph.D.