

**American University of Beirut
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Department of Education**

Revised Comprehensive Examination Policies and Processes

PREAMBLE

The Department of Education used to conduct its M.A. Comprehensive Examination along conventional lines, *viz.* an actual examination for some time. Until 2007, the comprehensive exam was a traditional type of assessment with candidates writing an examination under supervision. However, in January of 2008, the Department moved to a take-home format with candidates being given 10 days to submit their responses to a series of questions. Upon submission, candidates would then sit for an oral exam in which they defended their written exam submission.

In light of the numbers of graduate students who move through the Department (by far the highest in FAS), that Comprehensive Exam format became burdensome for both the students and their academic mentors. Students, who were already expected to prepare exhaustive research proposals and defend those orally (our Department being the only one in FAS to insist on a full proposal development and defence), were lumbered with this additional zero-credit task, the value of which in terms of academic benefit was highly questionable. It was reported by several graduate students over the years that that format of the comprehensive exam was neither purposeful nor meaningful to their experience as graduate scholars. Moreover, the timing of the examination is awkward as it coincides with other end-of semester examinations and requirements.

The Department decided to revise the comprehensive policy recognising our continuing commitment to an examination stop for the students and ensuring the continuing need for our procedures to align with the established FAS sequence of events pertaining to MA candidates (finishing the course work, passing the comprehensive, and then submitting a proposal to the graduate committee). So in Spring 2018 students could defend their thesis/project proposal in lieu of the comprehensive exam. At that time, as a transitional measure, defence of a “min-proposal” understood as an extended abstract was deemed sufficient. The revised format described here and takes effect in Fall 2021 for old and new students, equates the successful completion and defence of the full thesis/project proposal with the completion of the comprehensive exam (EDUC 395).

**American University of Beirut
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**Modified M.A. Comprehensive Examination Policies and Processes
Approved by Department of Education on May 11, 2021
(To take effect for old and new students in Fall 2021-22)**

Purpose

The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination (EDUC 395) is to evaluate the graduate students' ability to synthesize knowledge arising from strands of the discipline which they have specialized in with a view to demonstrating that they have attained such a level of mastery that they are ready to make an original contribution to the field. The Department of Education has accordingly chosen the preparation and oral defense of a thesis or project proposal as the vehicle for the demonstration of these skills.

Components

The Comprehensive Exam consists of two components:

- a. Full proposal document.
- b. An oral defense.

Process

1. Registration for the comprehensive exam:

- a. The student will be eligible to register for the Comprehensive Exam (EDUC 395)
 - i. Concurrently with or after successful completion of EDUC 321.
 - ii. After approval from the student thesis advisor
- b. The students will register for the Comprehensive under EDUC395 (with a P, F, or PR as possible grades) and will be given two attempts to pass it. Once registered for EDUC 395, students will enlist the services of a committee (2 members for an intended project, 3 members for an intended thesis). This committee will be the student's Comprehensive Examination committee as well as the project or thesis committee.

2. Examination Process

- a. Once ready and upon consultation with their thesis/project advisors, students will submit their proposal directly to all members of their comprehensive committee allowing a minimum of two weeks prior to setting the date for the oral defense.
- b. **The thesis/project' proposal:** In the case of the thesis, this should provide a problem statement/rationale, research questions, a statement regarding the significance of the proposed study, literature review, and methodology (data collection and analysis). In the case of the project, this should include a problem-statement/project-objectives, design of project implementation, and statement of significance for practice and/or policy. The adviser will give guidance during the preparation of the proposal and grant his/her approval to student to set the date for the Comprehensive Examination.
- c. **The oral defense:** will consist of a presentation of the intended study that should not exceed half an hour. The presentation should include the student's defense of the arguments made in the proposal and students must demonstrate knowledge of the content of the cited literature. Candidates will be examined by all thesis/project committee members in attendance.

3. Evaluation of the Comprehensive

- a. The student's comprehensive examination committee will evaluate the written and oral components of the comprehensive. The rubric in the Appendix can be used as a guide for the evaluation.
- b. Immediately after the oral defense, the student is asked to leave the room and the committee deliberates and decides on whether the candidate has successfully defended the proposal. The result is then shared with the chair of the department to enter the grade for EDUC 395.
 - i. In the case of first-time registration for EDUC 395, the committee indicates whether or not the student has passed the proposal defense reporting a P (for pass) or PR (for in progress) if the student does not successfully defend the proposal.
 - ii. In the case of a second registration for EDUC 395 registration, the committee must report either a P or F for Fail. MA students have only two chances to register for and successfully complete the Comprehensive Exam.
- c. In sum, successful completion of EDUC 395 is considered to be the same as successfully defending the thesis/project proposal.

Comprehensive Timeframe

The timeframe below provides a listing of steps involved in the implementation of the MA Comprehensive Exam with their respective deadlines.

MA Comprehensive Exam Process

1. Complete (or at least register for) Educ 321 and consult with your advisor to get approval before registering for the comprehensive



2. Enlist the services of a committee (2 members for an intended project, 3 members for an intended thesis). This committee will be your Comprehensive Examination committee **as well as** your project or thesis committee.



3. Write a proposal for your proposed research study or project under the guidance your thesis/project advisor and submit it to your committee.



4. Present and defend your proposal orally to your committee. This will be the oral component of your comprehensive exam. If they award you a **Pass**, you will have passed your Comprehensive Examination. If they do not award you a Pass, **'PR'** will be entered on your transcript and you will need to register for EDUC395 a second and final time.



5. Once you have passed your Comprehensive, you can submit an Abstract with the name of your committee members online **via the petition system** to the **FAS Graduate Committee**.



6. You can now register for EDUC398 (project) or EDUC399 (thesis), and start working with your advisor on refining your proposal, apply to the IRB to obtain approval to begin implementing your thesis or project field work and then move on to writing up your thesis/project document.

Appendix A

Assessment Rubric for Proposal Defense						
Component/ Criteria	Exceeds Expectations 4	Met 3	Partially Met 2	Not Met 1	Score	
	No modifications	Minor Modifications	Revisions	Drastic revision		
RESEARCH PROBLEM, AIMS, AND QUESTIONS	<p>The research problem is adequately justified; it connects logically with the theoretical framework. It is innovative and advances the literature on the topic.</p> <p>The research questions are well grounded in the literature; they provide direction and boundaries of the research; the research aims are clearly defined and formulated</p>	<p>The research problem are is justifiable and connect with the theoretical framework.</p> <p>The research questions are clearly defined and formulated, and the research aims are logical and well-stated.</p>	<p>The research problem is vaguely justified. It connects weakly to the theoretical framework. It replicates the literature on the topic.</p> <p>The research questions are not clearly connected to the literature; they don't provide clear direction for the research; the research aims are written in general and vague statements</p>	<p>The research problem is rather unambitious and only loosely tied to the theoretical framework. It is not supported with the literature on the topic.</p> <p>The research questions not grounded in the literature; they don't provide any direction for the research. The research aims are neither well-stated nor coherent.</p>		
Literature Review	Purpose:	states purpose and focus of the review clearly and comprehensively; the research problem is well defined and all variables included	States purpose and focus of the review but with minor problems; the research problem is defined but variables included lack some characteristics	States purpose and focus of the review with evident problems; the research problem is defined but variables are inconsistently included	Purpose and focus of the review are not clearly stated; the research problem is inaccurately defined with inadequate reference to variables	
	Coverage:	Explores comprehensive local and regional as well as international databases for relevant empirical studies (Shamaa, ERIC...); relies on refereed journals and primary sources	Explores satisfactorily local and regional as well as international databases for relevant empirical studies (Shamaa, ERIC...); relies mostly on refereed journals and primary sources	Explores limited related databases for relevant empirical studies (Shamaa, ERIC...); relies on few refereed journals and primary sources	Explores minimal or related databases for relevant empirical studies (Shamaa, ERIC...); relies on hardly any refereed journals and primary sources	

Analysis:	Places the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature and identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory	Places reasonably the topic or problem in the scholarly literature; generally identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory	Incompletely places the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature; identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory with some problems	Incoherently attempts placing the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature; vaguely identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory	
	Identifies patterns and synthesizes relevant ideas under adequate themes	Identifies most patterns and synthesizes to a good extent relevant ideas under adequate themes	Identifies patterns and synthesizes relevant ideas inconsistently under adequate themes	Identifies patterns invalidly and does not adequately synthesize relevant ideas under themes	
	Identifies clearly variations in definitions relevant to the area of inquiry	Identifies generally variations in definitions relevant to the area of inquiry	Identifies vaguely variations in definitions relevant to the area of inquiry	Does not identify variations in definitions relevant to the area of inquiry	
	Identifies appropriately research methodologies and instruments that are relevant to the purpose of inquiry (validated questionnaires, tests and scales).	Identifies most research methodologies and instruments that are relevant to the purpose of inquiry (validated questionnaires, tests and scales).	Identifies some research methodologies and instruments that are relevant to the purpose of inquiry (validated questionnaires, tests and scales).	Inadequately attempts to identify research methodologies and instruments that are relevant to the purpose of inquiry (validated questionnaires, tests and scales).	
	Compares and Contrasts, in depth, studies with apparently conflicting findings, discusses and explains the discrepancy	Satisfactorily compares and Contrasts studies with apparently conflicting findings, discusses and explains the discrepancy	Attempts to compare and contrast studies however with apparent problems, discusses	No comparison or contrast among conflicting findings; does not discuss or explain the discrepancy	
Organization:	Clear division of the review into sections and sub-sections	Acceptable division of the review into sections and sub-sections	Vague division of the review into sections and sub-sections	No division of the review into sections and sub-sections	
Conclusions and implications:	Identifies what has been done and needs to be done locally and internationally	Generally identifies what has been done and slight reference	Limited identification of what has been done locally and internationally	Severe problems in reporting what has been done locally and internationally	

			to what needs to be done locally and internationally			
		Comprehensive and thorough set of implications specified to all relevant audiences: policy makers, practitioners, and scholars	A satisfactory set of implications specified to most relevant audiences: policy makers, practitioners, and scholars	Incomplete set of implications specified to some relevant audiences: policy makers, practitioners, and scholars	Incoherent set of implications	
CONCEPTUAL/ THEORETICAL RIGOR		The candidate demonstrates a broad and profound mastery of the field's essential theories and concepts and applies them proficiently (competently / skilfully) and creatively in his/her work.	The candidate demonstrates a good mastery of the field's essential theories and concepts and applies them correctly in his/her work	The candidate is familiar with the field's essential theories and concepts but shows concise skills in applying them in his/her work.	The candidate demonstrates a limited mastery of the field's essential theories and concepts; shows minimal adequacy in defining, describing or using any of these theories or concepts.	
METHOD		The argument for the chosen research method demonstrates in-depth proficiency in the field. The material are creditably selected, presented and substantiated.	The argument for the chosen method and selection and presentation of the material demonstrates a good mastery of the field.	The argument for the chosen method has few inadequacies. and the selection and presentation of the material has minor shortcomings.	The argument for the chosen method has major inadequacies. and the selection and presentation of the material has numerous shortcomings.	
DATA ANALYSIS		The analysis design demonstrates an excellent mastery of the chosen method, and systematic, accurate and reliable data analysis.	The analysis demonstrates a good mastery of the chosen method, being both accurate and reliable.	The analysis design demonstrates a fairly acceptable mastery the chosen method and problems in systematic, accurate and reliable data analysis.	The analysis design demonstrates minimal mastery of the chosen method and serious problems in systematic, accurate and reliable data analysis.	
SIGNIFICANCE		The anticipated research results provide sound and relevant answers to the presented research questions. The anticipated thesis/ project results make a substantial theoretical and empirical contribution to the field.	The research provides good answers to the questions presented. The thesis contributes new sound knowledge or a new sound perspective on the field.	The anticipated research results provide fairly acceptable answers to the presented research questions. The anticipated thesis/ project results contribute some new knowledge or a new	The anticipated research provides some acceptable answers to the questions presented. The anticipated thesis/ project results contribute a limited amount of new knowledge.	

			perspective on the field.		
STYLE (APA style, citations, references, & mechanics)	The research is remarkably clearly and coherently reported. Both the linguistic form and style are at the high proficiency level.	The research is clearly and coherently reported. Both the linguistic form and style are flawless.	The research is clearly reported but its structure, style or linguistic forms have some shortcomings.	The reporting of the research has structural, linguistic or stylistic shortcomings, which impairs the overall coherence.	
DEFENSE OF THESIS/ PROJECT PROPOSAL	The candidate presents and defends the thesis/project proposal at the mastery level.	The candidate presents and defends the dissertation successfully	The candidate presents and defends the thesis/project proposal rather satisfactorily.	The candidate presents and defends the thesis/project proposal unconvincingly.	

