

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

Revised Comprehensive Examination Policies and Processes

PREAMBLE

The Dept of Education has continued to conduct its M.A. Comprehensive Examination along conventional lines, viz. an actual examination. Until 2007, the comprehensive exam was the traditional type with candidates writing the 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 scripts. Upon submission, candidates will sit for an oral exam whereby they defend their written exam submission.

In light of the numbers of graduate students who now move through the Department (by far the highest in FAS), the Comprehensive has become burdensome for both the students and their academic mentors. Students, who are already expected to prepare exhaustive research proposals and defend those orally (our Dept being the only one in FAS to insist on a full proposal development and defence), are herewith lumbered with this additional zero-credit task, the value of which in terms of academic benefit is highly questionable. Moreover, the timing of the examination is awkward as it coincides with other end-of semester examinations and requirements.

The revised comprehensive policy recognises our continuing commitment to an examination stop for the students and ensures 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). The modified MA comprehensive exam will be put into effect starting Spring 2018.

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

**Modified M.A. Comprehensive Examination Policies and Processes
Approved by Department January 26, 2018**

Purpose

The purpose of the Comprehensive examination 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 abstract as the vehicle for the demonstration of these skills.

Components

The comprehensive exam consists of two components:

- a. Abstract.
- b. An oral defense.

Process

1. Registration for the comprehensive exam:

- a. The student will be eligible to register for the comprehensive after:
 - i. Successful completion of all core courses
 - ii. Concurrent or successful completion of EDUC 321
- b. The students will register for the Comprehensive under EDUC395 (P, F, PR) and will be given two attempts to pass it.
- c. Once registered for EDUC395, 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. The student can invite an additional reader from the specialty area.

2. Examination Process

- a. Once ready and upon consultation with their advisors, students will submit their abstract 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' abstract:** should be 5-8 pages in length and contain 10-12 references. It should provide a problem statement/rationale, research questions, methodology (data collection and analysis), and a statement regarding the significance of the proposed study. The adviser will give minimal guidance at this stage as the preparation of the Abstract is now part of 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 abstract and demonstrate knowledge of content of the cited literature. Candidates will be examined by all thesis 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 based on rubrics that will be shared with students ahead of time.
- b. After the proposal defense, each member of the committee will report to the Chair of the Curriculum and Examination Committee a single number as an overall evaluation i.e. 1, 2, 3 or 4 based on the rubric scale.
- c. Results of the comprehensive examination will be reported as follows:

- i. **Pass with Distinction**: Cumulative total score of 11-12.
 - ii. **Pass**: Cumulative score of 8 – 10 inclusive.
 - iii. **Re-read and review**: If there is discrepancy of more than 1 point between the scores of any two committee members OR automatically for a cumulative score of 7.
 - iv. **Fail**: If the candidate gets a total of 6 or below.
- d. Results will be issued within a week of the date of the proposal oral defense.
 - e. Students who successfully complete their comprehensive exam will receive a grade of (P) as their comprehensive course (EDUC 395) grade.
 - f. Should students fail the comprehensive exam, PR will be entered for EDUC395 on their records and they will be allowed to revise their proposal and repeat the defense one more time. Should students fail their second attempt they will be dropped from the program.

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

Appendix A

Assessment Rubric for Proposal Defense				
Component/ Criteria	Exceeds Expectations 4	Met 3	Partially Met 2	Score
	No modifications	Minor Modifications	Revisions	
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</p>	<p>The research problems are 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>	

		the literature; they provide direction and boundaries of the research; the research aims are clearly defined and formulated				
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	Places reasonably the topic or problem in the scholarly	Incompletely places the topic or	Incoherently attempts placing the topic or	

		broader scholarly literature and identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory	literature; generally identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory	problem in the broader scholarly literature; identifies whether it is exploratory or explanatory with some problems	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 identifies 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 to what needs to be done locally and internationally	Limited identification of what has been done locally and internationally	Severe problems in reporting what has been 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/ THEORTICAL RIGOR	The candidate demonstrates a broad and profound mastery of the field's essential theories and concepts and applies them proficiently (competentl	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.		

	y / skilfully) and creatively in his/her work.			
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.	
DATA ANALYSIS	The analysis design demonstrates an excellent mastery of the chosen method, and systematic,	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.	

	accurate and reliable data analysis.			
SIGNIFICANCE	<p>The anticipated research results provide sound and relevant answers to the presented research questions.</p> <p>The anticipated thesis/ project results make a substantial theoretical and empirical contribution to the field.</p>	<p>The research provides good answers to the questions presented.</p> <p>The thesis contributes new sound knowledge or a new sound perspective on the field.</p>	<p>The anticipated research results provide fairly acceptable answers to the presented research questions.</p> <p>The anticipated thesis/ project results contribute some new knowledge or a new perspective on the field.</p>	
STYLE (APA style, citations, references, & mechanics)	The research is remarkably clearly and coherently reported.	<p>The research is clearly and coherently reported.</p> <p>Both the linguistic form and style are flawless.</p>	The research is clearly reported but its structure, style or linguistic forms have some shortcomings.	

	Both the linguistic form and style are at the high proficiency level.			
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.	

