

Guidelines for the Ed.D. Preliminary Exam | as of spring 2020

Purpose of the preliminary exam

The preliminary exam represents a synthesis of your learning across your courses and application of this learning to a research topic/problem of practice within educational leadership.

Requirements for the preliminary exam responses:

The preliminary exam consists of three distinct, but related essays focused on three topic areas, which will be applied to your particular area of study. These questions are designed to move you closer to identifying a particular research topic/problem of practice that will serve as the focal point for your dissertation in practice. These general topic areas include:

1. Leadership of organizations

Synthesize the major themes/ideas/strands of leadership and organizational theory as they relate to your problem of practice. Place each theme/idea/strand within the broader scholarly literature attending to definitions, strengths and limitations/critiques and key relationships and components within each theory. Finally, apply and evaluate those theories with greatest salience to current leadership practice with respect to the utility of each to school/district/campus leadership.

2. Literature review

Synthesize the major themes/ideas/strands of the literature related to your research topic/problem of practice (e.g., discipline disparities; student retention; teacher professional learning). Frame your research topic/problem of practice within the existing research literature, identifying key concepts, definitions, and major debates. Identify potential gaps in the literature or areas requiring further exploration. Finally, apply your understanding to pose a research inquiry/question(s) for future study.

3. Methodology/methods connected to your research topic/problem of practice

Describe potential methodological approaches you could take to examine your research topic/problem of practice (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, case study, action research, etc.). Synthesize the major themes/ideas/strands of these potential methodological approaches (including driving epistemologies and common data collection and analysis methods associated with these approaches). Given your research topic/problem of practice, which methodology will provide the best lens of analysis for addressing your research topic/problem of practice and answering your research inquiry/question(s) as identified in your literature review question?

Requirements for the preliminary exam responses:

Each essay should be between 20-25 pages, excluding a title page and references in keeping with APA formatting requirements (no abstract is needed). Please submit as one continuous Microsoft Word document via email to Jennifer Gallagher (j.gallagher@wsu.edu), with your dissertation chair copied in the email.

Students should title their preliminary exams in the following way:

- Student name_Preliminary Exam_Semester Year. **For example:** Rodela_Preliminary Exam_Spring 2020

Essays should roughly align to the following format:

1. Each response needs to begin with an introductory paragraph that sets forth a clear direction for the response.
 - a. You need to restate the question, identify your 3-5 major ideas as they relate to the major themes/ideas/strands in response to the question, and then transition to your first theme/idea/strand.

- b. Each following set of paragraphs should take on a new theme/idea/strand with transitions between the themes/ideas/strands.
 - c. Subheadings for each area/section should be included to help the reader understand where the response is moving.
2. Your major ideas (e.g., leadership, social justice, qualitative methodology, etc.) all need to be clearly defined and substantially rooted in the literature.
 - a. Discussion of themes/ideas/strands should demonstrate that you have learned the content from the program (i.e., use your course notes and readings) and are able to synthesize that learning into a coherent whole. The focus should be clearly on synthesizing instead of summarizing.
 - b. Citation is required. The inclusion of long quotes (more than 20-30 words) is discouraged. The committee wants to know what you have learned.
 - c. Do not editorialize or make claims that cannot be supported by the empirical literature. Avoid making sweeping statements.
 - d. Make clear in this section that none of this thinking is fully determined; that is, there are multiple ways to unpack these themes/strands/ideas. A critique always exists; be sure to address it.
 - e. Demonstrate your understanding that this literature is complex and evolving. Start (briefly) with the seminal thinking and then work your way up to recent work.
 - f. Conclude this section with a working definition or summary of the themes/ideas/strands you have discussed.
3. Once you have a working definition/description of the themes/ideas/strands linked to your research topic/problem of practice, apply it as the exam question asks. Be sure to draw from what you have written in the prior section and show how it helps or hinders understanding your current practice, setting, or context. In other words, use the ideas you have spent time defining to unpack this example/exemplar that you know so well. It is okay to point out where the theory does not apply or where it is not a complete explanation. Remember contexts differ and nothing fully explains everything. Therefore, where there are gaps – point those out. Addressing gaps shows you are thinking critically.
 - a. The aim is to apply your theoretical understanding to a research topic/problem of practice. Your job in this section is to briefly describe your research topic/problem of practice and employ the theory to make sense within a leadership or school/district context.
 - b. Here you can be a bit more expansive, but your ideas/examples should be rooted in the literature as well. Be sure to cite as appropriate.
 - c. If you have an entire paragraph without a cite, look closely at the claims you are making and be sure you have not headed too far afield from the question.
4. Each response needs to conclude with a paragraph that brings closure to the question.
 - a. Similar to the introductory paragraph, make sure your thesis is clear and that you have reviewed/restated your major themes/ideas/strands.
 - b. Briefly review how you applied that thinking to your professional world.
 - c. End with a strong final sentence.
5. Attend to coherence and formatting in each response.
 - a. References should be in APA format.
 - b. Proofread for both spelling and grammar.
 - c. As a generalization, short sentences are better than sentences that run on for many lines. Break your ideas into manageable segments in order for your committee to better understand what you are writing. Seek conciseness over superfluous language.