

College of Business Comprehensive Examination Guide

Academic Year 2009/2010

Overview of the Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive exam questions focus on the student's field of interest within the broader context of their doctoral specialization. It is expected that during the formal coursework students accumulated solid knowledge of theory and concepts in business management and/or organizational leadership, research findings and methodologies, and application of theory and research in the chosen concentration. That knowledge must be demonstrated in the exam answers. Questions will address program outcomes and can be linked to the dissertation topic.

Students are not expected to produce original research for their comprehensive examination. Research is secondary in nature. However, the answers have to show a high level of critical thinking and demonstrate student's ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply theoretical constructs and research findings to professional practice.

Comprehensive examination readers are the targeted audience for the answers. As a part of the writing process, the student can produce multiple drafts of the answers, but cannot request feedback on them before submitting the final form for grading. All papers must represent individual work.

The approach and philosophy above applies to students in the DBA (all concentrations) as well as the EdD in Organizational Leadership. The structure and emphasis in the two degrees differ; consequently, the structure of the comprehensive examination also differs somewhat. Below, the DBA comprehensive examination structure is presented first. The EdD OL comprehensive examination structure follows.

The DBA Comprehensive Examination

For purposes of the comprehensive examination, students in the DBA program must identify a research question that will be the basis for each of the three comprehensive examination questions. Many students will already have a clear idea of their dissertation topic and should use this as a starting point. Other students may use the comprehensive examination to "test" a possible dissertation topic.

The research question per se will not be evaluated as part of the comprehensive examination; however, having a clear research question will assist in writing a quality comprehensive examination. Students are strongly advised to discuss their research question, prior to taking the comprehensive exam, with their program chair, advisor, or research faculty.

Structure of the Comprehensive Examination:

The comprehensive exam consists of three questions, focused on:

- 1) theory and concepts in business administration,
- 2) research findings and methodologies, and
- 3) application of theory and research in the chosen concentration

The three questions of the comprehensive exam may be answered in any order. A common and frequently good process to follow is (1) write the research question prior to the comprehensive exam; (2) draft an outline of each of the three comprehensive examination questions; (3) review and if appropriate revise the research question; and (4) write the responses to the comprehensive examination questions in the order best suited to the student.

Response Structure:

The comprehensive examination is structured to allow/require the student to demonstrate knowledge of and competency in the program outcomes of the DBA. The examination does not require a “brain dump” of regurgitating every reading from every class of the program nor is the comprehensive examination meant to be as broad or as deep as the dissertation itself. A quality performance on the comprehensive examination should demonstrate (a) the student’s readiness to begin the dissertation process and (b) that the student has a high probability of completing the dissertation in a reasonable time frame.

Readiness for the dissertation demands a comfort level in both the research competencies needed to conduct an investigation and in competency in and across general leadership/management principles and behaviors as well as the student’s chosen area of expertise (either the concentration directly or a sub-field of that concentration). Of particular importance is the demonstration of analytical competencies around the generalizability of the research outcome. For the DBA program, and particularly for the Argosy programs focus on scholarly approaches to practitioner roles, some level of generalizability is required for good research. This does not mean that an outcome is generalizable to all situations; indeed, that is never the case in any question worth studying. Being able to critically analyze when and how lessons “travel” from one setting to another is how a scholarly approach to practitioner responsibilities expresses itself.

A second fundamental requirement of a quality business product – whether the comprehensive examination or the dissertation – is conciseness and clarity of delivery. Less could be more. Responses must be complete to the question posed but should not try to cover every aspect of every possible interpretation of the question. Indeed, a primary competency is to be able to state a question clearly, frame a response, and stay on topic. **No specific length of response is required for any question.** If length of response is mentioned at all (e.g. 7-10 pages), this is meant to provide general guidelines for typical responses. Students will not be evaluated at a lower level for going under (or over) guidelines presented but only on the completeness and clarity of their response.

APA Format:

Each question must be presented in APA format. Many business publications, including both academic journals and many professional associations, require articles and presentations to be submitted in APA format.

APA guidelines are modified periodically. The university will post, electronically and at campus locations, the edition of the APA guidelines to be followed for any given semester and this will be clearly communicated through multiple channels well before the examination process.

Evaluation of the Comprehensive Examination:

Students receive a maximum of two attempts to successfully complete the DBA comprehensive examination. At least two readers will evaluate each comprehensive examination. Students who receive an average score of “3” or higher on each question will receive an evaluation of “Pass” for the comprehensive examination.

For students taking the comprehensive examination the first time, and who receive an average score below “3” on any or all questions, will initially receive an evaluation of “Rewrite”. **Only responses to questions that received scores below “3” must be rewritten.** Students will have a maximum of two weeks from the time they receive the “Rewrite” evaluation to re-submit the examination for consideration. Failure to meet this timeline will lead to the “rewrite” evaluation being recorded as a “Fail”.

Depending on the depth and breadth of problems identified with the examination (represented in how far below “3” a student scores on each question), the program chair may recommend that the student decline the rewrite option and concentrate on preparation for a second comprehensive examination. The student may also select to decline the rewrite option, accept the “fail” evaluation, and prepare for the second and final attempt at the comprehensive examination. As a general rule, two or three questions with a score below “2”, or all three questions with a score below “3” are unlikely to improve performance enough to support a rewrite attempt.

The final rewrite/decline to rewrite decision rests with the student but the student should give serious consideration to the advice of the program chair.

Students who receive a “Fail” evaluation for the first comprehensive examination will be given the opportunity to take a new examination. The same examination framework is used but the questions will be different. In this second attempt, **students must receive a “Pass” (that is, a score of “3” or higher on each question). No rewrite option is available to students on their second comprehensive examination.**

Students are expected to take the second attempt in either the session or the semester following the unsuccessful attempt. Any extension beyond the following semester must be approved by the program chair.

The EdD OL Comprehensive Examination

For purposes of the comprehensive examination, students in the EdD OL program will be asked to respond to five questions directly related to one of the program outcomes printed in each master syllabus. A subset of these outcomes are addressed in each sitting of the comprehensive examination. These outcomes are listed below.

Program Outcomes:

1. **Leadership in Teams:** Given an organizational situation, identify strategies to develop, maintain, motivate, and sustain self-managed teams using concepts, theories and techniques of team leadership.
2. **Collaboration in Teams:** Given a case study or leadership situation, collect, assimilate, disseminate, and maximize the views of team stakeholders in order to reach defensible goals with minimal conflict.
3. **Conflict:** Given an organizational situation that requires interpersonal or interdepartmental action, identify situations of conflict, diagnose the impact of both overt and covert behavior, and develop a plan for conflict resolution using evidence-based methods.
4. **Ethics:** Given an organizational setting, identify ethical and dilemma-resolution practices, and make evidence-based decisions that integrate personal, social, and corporate responsibility.
5. **Communication:** Communicate orally and in writing to individuals and groups in a concise, clear, organized, and well-supported manner using formats and technology relevant to the organizational context.
6. **Motivation:** Given a leadership situation, identify workplace commitment theories to incorporate influences and power as a leader to motivate organizational stakeholders.
7. **Research:** Given an organizational need to evaluate and defend its actions or potential actions, select, analyze, and apply the assessment techniques, research methods, and/or statistical analyses needed to evaluate and defend those actions based on evidence
8. **Knowledge and Understanding of the Field:** Demonstrate competency in identifying and integrating the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, historical trends, and key figures in the field of organizational leadership.
9. **Change:** Evaluate the impact of change on organizations, organizational members, and other stakeholders and apply appropriate change models and theories to facilitate successful change.

10. **Global diversity:** Analyze and evaluate the involvement of diversity in leadership issues, with special attention to the implications of diversity for individuals, organizations, and societies.
11. **Interpersonal Effectiveness:** Achieve personal development and demonstrate positive relationship skills via effective communication, respect for others, and awareness of their impact on others.

Response Structure:

The comprehensive examination is structured to allow/require the student to demonstrate knowledge of and competency in program outcomes of the EdD OL. The examination does not require a “brain dump” of regurgitating every reading from every class of the program nor is the comprehensive examination meant to be as broad or as deep as the dissertation itself. A quality performance on the comprehensive examination should demonstrate the student’s depth and breadth of knowledge in the field.

Readiness for the dissertation demands a comfort level in both the research competencies needed to conduct an investigation and in competency in and across general leadership principles and behaviors. Of particular importance is the demonstration of analytical competencies around the generalizability of the research outcome. For the EdD OL program, and particularly for the Argosy program focus on scholarly approaches to practitioner roles, some level of generalizability is required for good research. This does not mean that an outcome is generalizable to all situations; indeed, that is never the case in any question worth studying. But being able to critically analyze when and how lessons “travel” from one setting to another is very much how a scholarly approach to practitioner responsibilities expresses itself.

A second fundamental requirement of a quality comprehensive examination is conciseness and clarity of delivery. Less could be more. Responses must be complete to the question posed but should not try to cover every aspect of every possible interpretation of the question. Indeed, a primary competency is to be able to state a question clearly, frame a response, and stay on topic. **No specific length of response is required for any question;** if length of response is mentioned at all (e.g. 7-10 pages), this is meant to provide general guidelines for typical responses. Students will not be evaluated at a lower level for going under (or over) guidelines presented but only on the completeness and clarity of their response.

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APA guidelines are modified periodically. The university will post, electronically and at campus locations, the edition of the APA guidelines to be followed for any given semester and this will be clearly communicated through multiple channels well before the examination process.

Evaluation of the Comprehensive Examination:

Students receive a maximum of two attempts to successfully complete the EdD OL comprehensive examination. At least two readers will evaluate each comprehensive examination. Students who receive an average score at or above “2” on each question will receive an evaluation of “Pass” for the comprehensive examination.

Students taking the comprehensive examination the first time, and who receive an average score below “2” on any question but an average score for all questions above “2”, are required to revise the question(s) on which s/he scored below “2”. Students will have a maximum of two weeks from the time they receive their evaluation to re-submit the examination for consideration. If any question still scores below “2” after the revision period, or if the student fails to meet the timeline for revision, the grade of “Fail” will be recorded for the comprehensive examination.

The student may also decline the revision option, accept the “Fail” evaluation, and prepare for the second and final attempt at the comprehensive examination.

Students will meet with the Program Chair to discuss the reviewers’ comments and determine what, if any, remedial work should be completed before sitting for another examination. The final revision/decline to revise decision rests with the student but the student should give serious consideration to the advice of the program chair.

Students who receive a “Fail” evaluation for the first comprehensive examination will be given the opportunity to take a new examination. The same examination framework is used but the questions themselves will be different. The Pass/Revise/Fail criteria will be the same for the second and final attempt at the comprehensive as for the first attempt. Students who receive a grade of “fail” in the second attempt at the comprehensive examination will be dismissed from the program.