ELP Specialization Qualifying Exam Policy

The Specialization Qualifying Exam (SQE) is an academic milestone for Educational Leadership and Policy doctoral students. Students must show mastery and synthesis of a body of research literature to pass the exam. In addition, the SQE demonstrates mastery of writing and APA style in preparation for the dissertation or treatise.

Download the Specialization Qualifying Exam Request Form

When Can I Submit?

The student may submit a specialization paper at any time after the completion of 36 hours of coursework, to include all core course requirements, the Introduction to Systems of Human Inquiry course, and one additional research course.

Deadlines & Length

- October 1, January 1, June 1 (unless university offices are closed, then the first business day thereafter)
- The paper should be 25-30 pages in length, excluding the references list.

Content & Formatting

The SQE paper may be related to the student’s dissertation or treatise in part, in whole, or not at all. The focus of the paper may be any issue in education relevant to your program, but it must be specific enough to allow in-depth analysis and coverage within the confines of a 25-30-page paper. It is recommended that the student consult with one or more EDA faculty members on the chosen topic before starting the paper.

The current, 6th edition of the APA style manual must be used in all relevant aspects of the paper, including margins, font size, references, spacing, and citation formats. Papers not written in APA style will be returned to the student for correction. Style mistakes will result in a deduction on the student’s score on the SQE.

Quality

The specialization exam paper should be of such quality that it could be submitted to a competitive education journal (acceptance rate of 33% or less, such as Review of Educational Research: http://rer.sagepub.com). As all papers published in the Review of Educational Research, the specialization paper is an integrated and critical literature review.

Students are encouraged to review sample manuscripts found in refereed journals such as the Review of Educational Research. The specialization paper must be a paper that stands by itself, i.e., it cannot read like a chapter in a larger work and must represent a complete paper with a distinct introduction, body, and discussion/conclusion.

Honor Code

For 30 days prior to the submission deadline, the student should receive no external assistance. Prior to the 30-day “no fly zone,” the student should seek help and feedback from professors and peers but at no time can the student solicit excessive feedback or help. Excessive help can include but is not limited to having a professional revise your paper, employing a professional editor, having someone re-write portions of your paper, etc. In other words, the specialization paper should be an accurate representation of the student’s work and ability.

Grading Process

Complete the Specialization Paper Submittal Form to turn in the specialization paper to Jacinda Herrera.

Submit the paper at least five weeks before applying for Advancement to Candidacy for a specific semester.

Submit an electronic PDF of the paper to Jacinda Herrera. Neither can the student’s name be listed nor can the student refer to him/her/zir self by name in the paper (i.e., the authorship of the paper must be completely anonymous).

Once the specialization paper is submitted, it will be randomly distributed to faculty members for grading. Two faculty members grade each paper. If both of the graders determine the paper to be a “fail,” the paper will be considered to have failed. If one faculty member indicates that the paper is a “fail,” the paper will be given to a third faculty grader. If two of the three determine that the paper is a “fail,” the paper will be considered to have failed.
The department tries to have SQEs graded within two weeks; however, grading can sometimes take longer due to unforeseen circumstances. Each faculty reader will provide at least two paragraphs of feedback.

Once you receive feedback, you should meet with your faculty advisor to discuss the feedback, particularly if your SQE paper relates to your dissertation/treatise.

**Grading Scale**

The following grading scale is used for the SQE:

Pass – student meets expectations for doctoral student work.

Fail – student does not meet the expectations for doctoral work and must re-write the entire exam; student may be required to receive additional preparation in writing.

A student who fails the SQE may only repeat once; after the failing score is received the student must consult the program head and their academic advisor, who will help map out a course of remediation and re-writing.

A second failure on the specialization paper will result in the student's termination from their doctoral program in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy.

**Failed Specialization Examination Paper**

If a student's specialization paper is judged to have failed, the student must consult with their program advisor on the next steps to improve and re-submit the specialization paper. Such steps may include:

- Complete an academic writing course, workshop or tutoring (offered through the university or any other accredited institution) to enhance their scholarly writing capacity before re-submitting the specialization paper. Evidence of successful completion of such additional work must also be submitted.
- If a student chooses to re-submit the same revised paper, it will be graded by the same faculty who graded the first paper.
- If a student chooses to submit a new paper, it will be graded following the initial process (different faculty will read the paper).
- The faculty advisor who was consulted for the revision cannot be a grader for the revised or new paper.
- If the student's specialization paper fails a second time, the student will be terminated from their doctoral program in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Can I employ an editor or get help from classmates on my paper?**

In the 30 days before the deadline (for example, Dec 2 – Dec 31 if you are planning to submit your paper on January 1), you may receive NO help on your paper. Prior to that 30 days, you may talk to and solicit feedback from your faculty and peers. At no time may you receive excessive help from anyone. Excessive help includes but is not limited to employing a professional editor or having someone re-write portions of your paper.

**How soon will I receive feedback and know whether I passed?**

While we try to get feedback to students within 2 weeks of submission, there are sometimes delays. You may inquire with your administrative contact (Jacinda Herrera for PSEL or Melissa Lopez for PHEL) after two weeks, but feedback may take longer.

**Who will read my SQE?**

Two faculty chosen at random from your program area will blind review your SQE. If one passes your SQE and one fails your SQE, it will be sent to a third reader.

**How do I submit my SQE?**

Submit your SQE electronically via email by creating a PDF of your paper by the deadline to either Jacinda Herrera for PSEL or Melissa Lopez for PHEL. Both the paper and the form must be received by the deadline to be sent to faculty for review. You may either scan in and email or hand-deliver your form. The form must contain physical (not electronic) signatures.

**Who needs to sign my SQE submittal form and how do I turn it in?**

Your program advisor of record must sign your form before you submit it. Forms missing your faculty advisor signature will be rejected. You may submit the form by scanning and emailing it with your paper or you may email your paper and hand deliver the form.

**If my dissertation chair and advisor of record are different people, who signs my SQE submittal form?**

Your advisor.

**Does my paper need to include a conceptual framework?**
No. It should, however, contain a cohesive and relevant conclusion based on the synthesis of literature you provide. The only conceptual framework that might appear in an SQE paper is a framework used to analyze the literature itself.

**Does my paper need to include a problem statement?**

You should include an introduction that adequately provides a rationale for why the literature review is relevant and meaningful.

**Does my paper need to include research questions?**

Only research questions you are asking of the literature. Do not include research questions related to your dissertation or treatise.

**How do I avoid plagiarizing myself?**

Follow the APA guidelines on self-plagiarism, and indicate on your cover sheet that portions of the paper were written for course credit.

**What if my literature review is too long because of the many areas I am seeking to cover?**

You should scope the literature review you present in your SQE to be thorough and demonstrate your expertise and to fit within the allocated pages.

**Can I say that I am only including, for example, two of my three main strands of literature so the readers knows I’ve done more work?**

No. This is a stand-alone paper and must be able to be read without additional context. Scope the paper appropriately to cover the literature well and in the pages allowed.

**Should I include a methodology section?**

Students are not required to but may include a brief description of how you delineated and searched for the relevant literature (e.g., search terms, databases, culling of non-relevant articles, etc.). You should not include any information on the methodology you plan to use for your treatise/dissertation.

**How will my work be evaluated?**

Find out by referring to the rubric.