Master’s and Doctoral Examinations Required
by the Educational Psychology Program at Virginia Tech

Master’s Examination Proposal

There should be only one Master’s exam, the Final Examination (Required by the Graduate School).

Purpose: to ensure that the degree candidate is competent as a scholar and communicator.

Scheduling: Examinations required by the Graduate School (Preliminary and Final), are scheduled through the Graduate School office. Requests to schedule the examination should be received at least two weeks before the date requested. Examination cards should be obtained from the Graduate School on the day of the examination. The card should be returned to the Graduate School office as soon as possible after the examination. Requests to schedule final examinations should include the time, date, building, room number, title of dissertation, and the names of the recommended examining committee.

Procedure: A final examination is required. The final examination will consist of questions generated by a committee of three faculty approved by the candidate’s committee chair. Candidates will be required to word process their responses with no assistance from other human beings. The final exam will be completed within three hours; maximum response page length may be specified. Candidates may consult text and electronic sources during the examination. Candidates will be notified of the results within two days of submitting their examinations.

Thesis: If a Master’s candidate chooses to write a thesis, the final examination will be a defense of that thesis. The committee will meet to hear the defense, and keeping in mind that the candidate is a Master’s student, pose relevant questions and comments. The final examination will last no longer than three hours including all closed meetings of Committees prior to the defense and following the defense. Within this three hour time, Committees will meet to judge the defense and inform candidates of their decisions.

Doctoral Examination Proposal

There should be five examinations for candidates for the doctoral degrees.

Examination 1, The Admission Examination (NOT required by Graduate School)

Purpose: The first purpose of the admissions examination is to judge candidates’ communication skills to ensure they have sufficient promise to meet the demands of sophisticated scholarship. The second purpose is to ensure that candidates’
career objectives are consistent with the means and opportunities offered by the program faculty.

*Scheduling*: The admission examination is scheduled at the initial faculty advisors’ discretion.

*Procedure*: This informal examination is a program requirement that may take many forms but should involve at least two program faculty; the initial faculty advisor may invite one additional faculty member to join. The examination may, at the discretion of the faculty involved, include any or all of the following: reviewing candidates’ writing samples, interviews, conferring with other faculty, or other activities to assess candidates’ success potential as an advanced graduate student. Candidates for admission will be informed of the decision in a timely manner.

**Examination 2, The Qualifying Examination** (NOT required by Graduate School)

*Purpose*: There are three purposes for the Qualifying Examination. The first purpose is to determine if the admission decision was correct. The second purpose is to assess candidates’ career goals to develop a plan of study. The third purpose is to ensure that candidates’ understand all of the expectations of faculty while they are pursuing advanced graduate study. The Qualifying Examination will ordinarily serve at the admission to PhD studies for students completing a Master’s Degree who are changing degree status to doctoral studies.

*Scheduling*: The Qualifying Examination is scheduled following one full semester of advanced graduate study in the program; the Qualifying Examination should be held no later than the second semester of study. The results of the Qualifying Examination are to be kept in candidates’ records. For part time students, the Qualifying Examination should be held between candidates’ 15th and 24th hours of advanced graduate study in the program. For students changing degree status from Master’s to PhD, the Qualifying Examination will ordinarily be held in the term the change of status is enacted.

*Procedure*: This examination is to be scheduled at a mutually acceptable time with candidates and a minimum of three faculty, two of whom must be from the program. These faculty will be projected as members of candidates’ doctoral committees. For this examination, candidates will be presented written questions that provide candidates’ an opportunity to display their analytical skills, their abilities to communicate in writing, and their understanding of important issues relevant to their past and future studies. Candidates will be expected to respond to the questions they are posed within a defined time period (two weeks) to demonstrate their abilities to find, judge, and analyze literature and communicate these capabilities in clearly written prose. The committee faculty will carefully evaluate candidates’ responses and, then, at a scheduled meeting review their judgments with candidates. The committee at that meeting, when candidates are
judged to have passed, will discuss candidates’ plans of study. Based on these discussions, candidates’ will present to these faculty a plan of study within two weeks. This plan of study will then be submitted to the Graduate School.

**Examination 3 – The Preliminary Examination** (Required by Graduate School)

*Purpose:* The purpose of the Preliminary Examination is to admit candidates to doctoral candidacy. As such, the Preliminary Examination is intended to determine if candidates’ have developed/possess the knowledge, intellectual skills, and professional acumen consistent with generally accepted standards of scholarship. In addition, the Preliminary Examination provides candidates’ committee members with information on which to determine if the program wishes to continue working with candidates.

*Scheduling:* The Preliminary Examination must be scheduled as the Graduate School directs:

“Examinations required by the Graduate School (Preliminary and Final), are scheduled through the Graduate School office. Requests to schedule the examination should be received at least two weeks before the date requested. Examination cards should be obtained from the Graduate School on the day of the examination. The card should be returned to the Graduate School office as soon as possible after the examination. Requests to schedule final examinations should include the time, date, building, room number, title of dissertation, and the names of the recommended examining committee.”

“The preliminary examination is a requirement for all doctoral students. This examination must be taken at least nine months before the final examination. At least 24 hours of course work and/or research must remain to be taken, including work for which the student is currently enrolled. The examination is administered by the student’s advisery (sic) committee with at least four members present in accordance with departmental and Graduate School policies, and may be oral, written, or both. The timing of the preliminary exam is within the purview of the advisery (sic) committee. An expected date (semester/year) for completing the preliminary examination must be submitted with the Plan of Study for approval by the Graduate School. The actual date of the preliminary examination may be changed in the same manner as that prescribed for changes in the Plan of Study.”

“Please review the preceding sections on Registration, Scheduling of Examinations, and Completion of Examinations for appropriate information. Individual departments may choose to administer the preliminary examination as a departmental examination. In this case the examination is typically administered by a committee, with all members certifying the results. The results are to be reported to the Graduate School within two weeks after administration of the examination.”
Procedure: Preliminary Examinations are conducted by candidates’ advisory committees under the leadership of the chair of their advisory committee who are also likely to be their doctoral committee chairs. The advisory committee chair, in consultation with candidates will ensure that the candidates’ committees have at least four members. This examination has four parts. The first is the development of an outline for the topics to be covered in the exam (i.e., an outline of the literature review). The candidate will work together with his or her Committee chair to develop the outline. The Committee chair will then give the outline to the committee members and they will provide the Chair with suggestions and approve the outline. This examination is intended to involve students in conducting an extensive analytical literature review of a topic acceptable to all committee members and which may serve as a basis for candidates’ research interests. Second, candidates will be given a fixed time in which they must complete the literature review. Third, once candidates’ work is submitted, a specific time will be set for the Preliminary Examination. This is the date that is submitted to the Graduate School as the official time for the Preliminary Examination. Fourth, candidates will meet with their advisory committee to defend their work. Generally, these defense examinations will begin with closed meetings of committees for members to raise concerns about the work or performance of candidates and/or decide whether to continue with the defense based on the quality of the document. This is followed by candidates defending their work and responding to questions posed by committee members. Finally, committees will again consult in closed meetings to determine the outcome of the examination. Based on the quality of their work and their defense of this work, candidates will be formally admitted or denied admission into doctoral candidacy. As required, the results of the Preliminary Examination will be submitted to the Graduate School. A student whose work is not judged to be satisfactory by a committee may, at the committee’s discretion, be given a second opportunity to complete the Preliminary Examination.

Examination 4: The Dissertation Proposal Presentation (NOT required by Graduate School)

Purpose: The purpose of the Dissertation Proposal Presentation is to examine candidates’ research being proposed to meet the requirements of the dissertation. The goal is to ensure that the proposed research is well conceived, well designed (methods and data analysis), well presented, well designed (methods and data analysis), and possible to complete within a reasonable time frame.

Scheduling: This examination is scheduled at the discretion of doctoral committees. However, the examination should not be scheduled less than two weeks after students have completed a dissertation proposal and distributed the proposal to all committee members.

Procedure: The examination consists of three parts. The first is a closed meeting of the doctoral committee during which committee members address outstanding
concerns or issues related to students’ proposals and if the proposals are of sufficient quality to warrant continuing the Dissertation Proposal Presentation examination. The second is a presentation by students to explain and defend their proposed research. During this part of the examination, committee members may ask questions, make suggestions, and raise issues that appear to threaten the quality of the proposed research. The third is a closed meeting during which the doctoral committee reaches a judgment regarding the future of the proposed research. The decision may be for students to proceed, for students to proceed following revisions, for students to engage in significant rewriting such that another proposal is warranted, and for students to cease graduate study due to apparent lack of knowledge and scholarly skills. Doctoral committees should not authorize students to initiate data collection without fully developed proposals that sufficiently describe the rationale, methods, and analytic procedures to be applied in the research. In addition, when dissertation proposals involve human subjects, students must have received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to initiating any data collection. Generally, IRB review will be applied for following the Dissertation Proposal Presentation examination but before any arrangements are made to collect data. It is the responsibility of the chair of committees to ensure that all applicable regulations and criteria stipulated by the IRB are completely and faithfully fulfilled.

**Examination 5: The Doctoral Final/Dissertation Defense Examination (Required by Graduate School)**

*Purpose:* The purposes of the Doctoral Final/Dissertation Defense Examination are to ensure that candidates have conducted research that meets a high standard of scholarship and that candidates have the requisite understanding and command of scholarly communication to warrant being awarded a doctoral degree in educational psychology.

*Scheduling:* “This examination must be scheduled no earlier than nine months after successful completion of the preliminary examination. Please review the preceding sections on Registration, Scheduling of Examinations, and Completion of Examinations for appropriate information. This examination may be administered by the advisery (sic) committee (at least four members must be present) or a committee appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. To be eligible for graduation at the end of the semester, all final examinations must be completed and dissertations approved by the Graduate School at least 10 business days before the university commencement exercises.

*Procedure:* Doctoral Final/Dissertation Defense Examinations are conducted by students’ doctoral committees following the regulations set by the Graduate School.

“The Doctoral Final/Dissertation Defense Examinations are generally opened with a closed meeting of the doctoral committee to address outstanding issues
and/or concerns. This meeting is followed by a brief overview of their research by candidates after which doctoral committee members ask questions about the research and express concerns. The examinations generally conclude with another closed session in which committee members discuss the merits of the research in terms of students’ proposals, identify all concerns, and determine if the scholarship is sufficient to merit passing. The committee may reserve final judgment until candidates make revisions to their documents as mandated by the committee.”

From Graduate Catalog on the Graduate School Web Site

Examinations

All examinations are open to the faculty and faculty members are encouraged to attend and participate in such meetings. The student must be registered during the semester in which the required examination is taken. If a thesis, dissertation, or major paper is not required, a student may be enrolled in another institution for the final semester provided any courses that are to be transferred appear on the plan of study. Official transcripts for such work must be received by the Graduate School and transfer credit may not exceed the established minimum.

Defending Student Status

If registration is for GRAD 6864: Master's Defense or GRAD 7864: Doctoral Defense, the minimum registration is for 1 hour and the defense must occur within the first 20 class days of the term. If not, minimum registration for 3 hours is required.

Students should submit a Defending Student Status (DSS) form to the Graduate School two weeks before their defense, and if DSS is approved the Graduate School will register the student. Students should not enroll themselves in defending student status.

Students enrolled as defending students will be classified as less than half-time for certification purposes. This status may not meet the minimum requirement for most student loan deferments. Students may wish to take into consideration their student loans when applying for defending student status. International students should consult the Graduate School concerning the visa implications of this status. Students on defending student status are not eligible to hold assistantships or fellowships.

Scheduling Examinations

Examinations are usually administered during regular academic semesters or sessions, i.e., between the first day of classes for a given semester or session and ending with the last official day for examinations.
Examinations required by the Graduate School (Preliminary and Final), are scheduled through the Graduate School office. Requests to schedule the examination should be received at least two weeks before the date requested. Examination cards should be obtained from the Graduate School on the day of the examination. The card should be returned to the Graduate School office as soon as possible after the examination. Requests to schedule final examinations should include the time, date, building, room number, title of dissertation, and the names of the recommended examining committee.

Completion of Examination

To pass any of the required examinations, a candidate is allowed at most one negative vote. If a student fails an examination, one full semester (a minimum of 15 weeks) must elapse before the second examination is scheduled. Not more than two opportunities to pass any one examination are allowed. Students failing any of the mandatory examinations two times will be dropped from the university.

Final Examination (Master's)

An oral and/or written final examination is required of all master's programs (see departmental policy for specific format). Please review the preceding sections on Registration, Scheduling of Examinations, and Completion of Examinations for appropriate information. Normally, the advisory committee will carry out the examination, and can be supplemented by additional members as appropriate. For some non-thesis master's programs, final exams are not structured as above. For more information about such programs consult the departmental policies and procedures document.

Qualifying Examination (Doctoral)

Certain departments require doctoral candidates to take a qualifying examination, usually given at the end of the first year of graduate study. The results are typically used to evaluate subject mastery, to determine deficiencies, and to determine whether the student should continue. The results of qualifying examinations are made part of the student's departmental record. Qualifying exams need not be scheduled through the Graduate School.

Preliminary Examination (Doctoral)

The preliminary examination is a requirement for all doctoral students. This examination must be taken at least nine months before the final examination. At least 24 hours of course work and/or research must remain to be taken, including work for which the student is currently enrolled. The examination is administered by the student's advisory committee with at least four members present in accordance with departmental and Graduate School policies, and may be oral, written, or both. The timing of the preliminary exam is within the purview of the advisory committee. An expected date (semester/year) for completing the preliminary examination must be submitted with the
Plan of Study for approval by the Graduate School. The actual date of the preliminary examination may be changed in the same manner as that prescribed for changes in the Plan of Study.

Please review the preceding sections on Registration, Scheduling of Examinations, and Completion of Examinations for appropriate information. Individual departments may choose to administer the preliminary examination as a departmental examination. In this case the examination is typically administered by a committee, with all members certifying the results. The results are to be reported to the Graduate School within two weeks after administration of the examination.

**Final Examination (Doctoral)**

All doctoral candidates must take a final written and/or oral examination, which is typically a defense of dissertation. This examination must be scheduled no earlier than nine months after successful completion of the preliminary examination. Please review the preceding sections on Registration, Scheduling of Examinations, and Completion of Examinations for appropriate information. This examination may be administered by the advisory committee (at least four members must be present) or a committee appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. To be eligible for graduation at the end of the semester, all final examinations must be completed and dissertations approved by the Graduate School at least 10 business days before the university commencement exercises.