MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
PHD PROGRAM IN HIGHER, ADULT,
AND LIFELONG EDUCATION (HALE)

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
Revised October 2013

Fall 2014 Exam Period:
Part One Section A: August 22-25, 2014
Part One Section B: August 29-September 1, 2014
Exam Registration: By August 15, 2014
See Instructions for Exam Registration (p. 2)
Department of Educational Administration
PhD Program in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE)

Comprehensive Examination
Policies and Procedures

Introduction: Form, Purpose, and Timetable

The HALE PhD Comprehensive Exam is made up of two parts:

Part One is a written exam, in two sections, designed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate the integration of knowledge of topics, issues, and resources in postsecondary education reflecting completion of the HALE Core Curriculum.

Part Two is the last step in the development of a dissertation proposal—approval of the proposal by the student’s guidance committee. This part of the Exam is an opportunity for students to demonstrate the capacity to complete the HALE Program.

Students are expected to take Part One of the Exam within one year of completing the HALE Core Curriculum. Part One is offered twice annually: at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. Part Two of the Exam is normally completed during a student’s third or fourth year in the HALE Program.

The University requires that students be enrolled at the time they are meeting any exam requirement.

1. Comprehensive Exam, Part One

1a. Exam Registration: Registration for the Exam requires the permission of the student’s advisor in writing (via e-mail) to the HALE secretary. Advisors will provide permission once students have discussed with them their understanding of Exam Policies and Procedures and their plans for preparation. Register at haleadm@msu.edu. To provide anonymity in Exam submission, students will be assigned an Exam number following registration and before the Exam is posted at the Desire2Learn (D2L) course management system.

1b. Preparation: Students may work together and on their own in preparing for Part One of the Exam. During the Exam period, all work must be done individually. When exam takers upload their exams they are verifying a statement certifying that they had no assistance (regarding content or editing) during the Exam period.
1c. Petitions for Additional Time to Write the Exam Essays: Students who wish to request additional time to write the Exam essays must petition the HALE faculty. The faculty will consider requests for accommodations from students who are (a) non-native speakers of English or (b) registered with MSU’s Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. Requests should include a brief account of the reasons additional time is needed and should be sent to the HALE secretary at haleadm@msu.edu no later than 21 days before the Exam period. Earlier requests are welcome. Students who request additional time can expect a prompt response from the HALE faculty. Typically, if the request is approved, a student will have an extra day to write each Exam essay.

1d. Duration and Location: Students have three days to write each of their Part One essays. Each section of the Exam will be posted at D2L be available on a Friday at 8:00 a.m., with the Exam essay to be uploaded by student authors to D2L by 8:00 a.m. on the following Monday. Specific uploading directions will be available with the Exam. The two sections of the Exam will be offered in consecutive weeks of the Exam period. The Exam may be written anywhere.

1e. Materials Permitted: Students are permitted the use of any materials in writing their two Part One essays (Sections A and B). The essays should not include work previously submitted for academic credit.

1f. Exam File: HALE maintains a file of recent successful Exam essays, which can be accessed on-line through the HALE website.

1g. Exam Questions and Essays: Part One of the Exam has two sections.

Section A: Students choose one question from two or more options based primarily on topics and materials from the courses of the HALE Core Curriculum. The focus is on integration of knowledge of postsecondary education.

Section B: Students choose a journal article from two or more provided by the faculty and respond to a question about it as an example of research. Articles are selected for their relevance to postsecondary education and the quality of their scholarship. Prior knowledge of the content matter in the articles is not required to write a successful Exam essay.

Sections A and B are written during consecutive weeks of the Exam period.

1h. Essay Length and Format: Each Exam essay should be 10-12 typewritten double-spaced pages not including the Exam bibliography. Each essay should begin with identification of the question being answered. The bibliography, reflecting all sources cited (and only those), should be attached to the Exam. The Exam and bibliography should appear in a 12 pt. font and with 1-inch wide margins. The format of the Exam bibliographies should conform to the latest edition of either the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association or the Chicago Manual of Style.

The student’s assigned HALE Exam number should appear in the upper right corner of the first page of each Exam essay. Student names should not appear anywhere on the Exam itself - not on
the first page, the file name (students should use the assigned exam number instead when saving the file on their computer), running heads, or anywhere else. All identifying information must be removed before an exam is uploaded. Faculty readers are not told the names of Exam writers or their numbers. Students who are unsure of how to remove personal identifying information from a document’s properties may wish to consult the College of Education’s Center for Teaching and Technology in 133 Erickson Hall (ties@msu.edu; 517-355-8437).

1i. Submission of Exam Essays: Students should upload their Section A and B essays to the D2L course management system. Specific uploading directions will be available with the Exam. **Uploading your exam to the HALE PhD Comprehensive Exam D2L site certifies that you assent to the following statement:**

“All work on my Comprehensive Examination was done only by me, with no assistance or consultation during the Exam period regarding content or editing.”

1j. Evaluation: The Exam essays are evaluated by the HALE faculty according to these criteria:

For Section A: (a) Relevance of the Exam essay to the question; (b) Organization, presentation, and completeness of the argument; (c) Clarity of the writing; and (d) Appropriate and sufficient scholarly and other citations.

For Section B: (a) Analysis and evaluation of the article, particularly its argument; (b) Clarity of the writing; and (c) Signs of the analysis and evaluation being situated in the field of higher, adult, and lifelong education as represented in the HALE Core Curriculum.

A Note on Arguments:

Simply defined, an argument is a formal presentation of evidence or reasons supporting a particular claim or position on an issue of interest to a specific audience.


Two widely used university-based websites (at Colorado State and Purdue) devoted to writing offer accounts of the making and uses of arguments. Both reflect the “Toulmin Method” reflecting the work of the influential philosopher Stephen Toulmin (in *The Uses of Argument* [1964]).

http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/index.cfm?guides_active=argument&category1=31
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/

1k. Results: Exam results will be made known about five weeks after the Exam period. Students earn a pass for the Exam with passing essays for Sections A and B, which are evaluated individually.
11. **Re-taking the Exam**: Failing either Section A or Section B requires re-taking that part of the Exam. Failing both requires re-taking both. Gaining approval to re-take the Exam requires the following steps:

First, students who fail one or both parts of the Exam must present to their advisors by the end of the semester in which the failed Exam was taken a written plan for preparing to re-take it (one or both sections). It must specify preparations—e.g., writing practice Exam essays, reviewing exemplary Exam essays, seeking help with writing, including opportunities at the MSU Writing Center—and a timetable for completing them. The plan must also identify the semester in which the student intends to re-take the Exam. The plan must first be approved by the advisor, who then submits the plan for review to the HALE faculty which must also approve it for the student to proceed.

Second, students wishing to register to re-take one or both sections of the Exam must first report to their advisors in writing on the results of preparations according to the plan. The advisor presents the report to the HALE faculty for approval.

At each step, first the plan and then the report on preparations, approval is required by the student’s advisor and the HALE faculty. Students who do not earn a pass after taking one or both sections of the Exam a second time will not be permitted to continue in the HALE Program. Under exceptional circumstances students may, after consulting with their advisor, petition the HALE faculty for a third opportunity to take the Exam. The petition, explaining why a third attempt at the Exam is merited, must be submitted to the student’s advisor before the end of the semester in which the failed Exam was taken. The petition must include a written plan for re-taking the Exam as above, with details about preparation and identification of the semester in which the Exam will be retaken. Should the petition be approved, by the advisor and the faculty, the student then must proceed according to Step 2 before registering to take the Exam. Submitting a petition to take the Exam a third time carries no guarantee of approval.

2. **Comprehensive Exam, Part Two**

2a. **Timetable**: Part Two of the HALE Comprehensive Exam must be successfully completed within five years from the time a student begins the first class that appears on his or her doctoral program of study. **Note**: All remaining requirements for the degree must be completed within eight years from the time when a student begins the first class in his or her doctoral program of study.

2b. **Writing a Dissertation Proposal**: There is no standardized format for a dissertation proposal. A dissertation proposal typically includes a statement of the subject to be studied (often named the “research question[s]”) and the research methods to be used, a partial account of work by other scholars on the subject, and an explanation of how the author expects to analyze or interpret what was discovered as a result of the research. Some indication of the anticipated uses
or applied value of what is discovered can also be a part of a dissertation proposal. A proposal can also include a draft of an interview protocol and other resources expected to be used in the research. But individual dissertation writers, like all scholars, can tailor their work according to the demands of their subjects and their preferences in matters of organization. There is no standard length for a dissertation proposal.

2c. Advising: Students should consult with their advisors and other members of their Guidance Committee in planning and preparing a dissertation proposal.

2d. Approval of a Dissertation Proposal: The student’s Guidance Committee approves a dissertation proposal when it is judged to be satisfactory or better for launching the research project.