Here are Comps Option 1 Questions that have been used in previous years.

These questions give you some idea about the kinds of questions that will be asked in the Option 1 exam. The first batch of questions is not organized by theme, but the second batch attaches a specific theme to each question.

The sort of questions that will be asked for Part 1 of the new revised comps option will be quite similar to the nature of these, as well.

PAST QUESTIONS

--In the last two decades, a variety of critiques have been leveled against schooling in general and, specifically, against the construction of knowledge and the definition of learning in the various disciplines comprising the school curricula. Such challenges have only escalated in the past ten years with increasing pressures to hold teachers and students accountable for normative schooling outcomes.

Choose a particular school subject that is susceptible to the above critiques and:

1. Describe the critiques that have been leveled at your area of choice;
2. Describe the ways in which addressing these critiques in your chosen area could help, hinder, or redefine the area;
3. Using both critical and mainstream literature, take a stand regarding these critiques. In developing your stance, consider: how justified do you think these critiques are, and why? How does your position differ from those of the critics, and how would addressing your position help to redefine the area you have focused on?

--Imagine you are giving a keynote address to an audience of experienced public school teachers and administrators who are interested in school reform. Choose one of the following topics: the charter school movement, the achievement gap, or professional development. What is most important for your audience to know about your topic and its connection to school reform, and why? In 2500 words, provide an overview of what you might say to your audience.

In developing your address, consider the following questions: What are the current challenges in school reform and how does your topic address them? What are the various perspectives held by interested parties on school reform and your topic? What do you consider to be the most important or seminal studies in support of your stance? How do these studies build on the history of work done on your topic? What recommendations do you have for the audience members regarding steps their school might consider taking as related to this topic?

--Name two education scholars (U.S. based or international) you believe are particularly influential on contemporary educational debates and who represent different perspectives. Develop an essay in which you

1. name the contemporary debate and discuss why it is an important debate to consider (or where you situate it in the literature);
2. describe each scholar's contributions to the this debate; and
3. compare the two scholars' perspectives, impact on the debate, and the evidence base they use (e.g., research they draw upon).

--Drawing on examples from your own subject area or research specialization, how do you conceptualize quality and rigor in educational research? What are the "touchstones" (or criteria or standards) by which you judge quality or rigor in educational research, and what bodies of literature most influence your emerging identity as a researcher?

Throughout your essay, be sure to elaborate on the touchstones by describing them and offering examples (in the context of a single study, a set of studies, and/or a community of researchers in dialogue). Where do you see challenges to your perspective in the perspectives of others in the educational community? How, if at all, might your perspective evolve in response to those challenges? Given your responses, how might diversity of perspectives in the field of educational research be honored?

--In April, 2008, the America's Promise Alliance issued a report, "Cities in Crisis." Findings indicated that only about half of the students served by public school systems in the nation's largest cities received diplomas in 2007. In Detroit, the graduation rate was the lowest in the nation, at 24.9%. Nationally, about 70% of U.S. students graduate, and about 1.2 million students drop-out annually. This report joins a growing number of reports indicating that low graduation and high drop-out rates continue to be a significant problem. Recently, the issue of drop out rates (and how they are calculated) have garnered more attention because states must include them as a measure of high school performance under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Considering these rates, discuss three different possible approaches to analyzing these figures and the implications these approaches have to offering potential solutions. Make references to specific reform policies or practices that have been suggested to ameliorate these problems, and align these reform ideas with the three approaches you have explained.
POLICY
The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education once held a featured symposium entitled, "Should teacher preparation take place at colleges and universities?" The presence of such a symposium at this conference was significant, given that the membership of this association consists almost entirely of college and university-based teacher education program personnel.

School people and prospective teachers have long argued that universities' approaches to the education of teachers inhibits access into the profession by requiring prospective teachers to take irrelevant and unnecessary courses in teacher education. Some governments, such as that of the UK, are trying to push teacher education out of the domain and control of universities and colleges and into the schools. Alternative routes into teaching (such as Teach for America in the US) are also being tried in a number of countries as a way of relocating teacher education.

Provide an analysis of this controversy with consideration of its pedagogical, political, and/or sociological implications. What are the main reasons for this skepticism about university-based professional teacher preparation? Support your argument.

TEACHING/MULTICULTURALISM
A teacher whom you know and respect (you pick the subject and grade level) comes to you with a concern saying:

I have been doing my best to carry out the spirit and the letter of the reform recommendations that you talk about in my classroom, and I can see that they are making a difference. I can see that my students are more engaged cooperatively with each other than they used to be. I can see that they are actively constructing knowledge, both individually and collectively. I can see, too, that their activities in my classroom are more 'authentic,' more like activities associated with work and citizenship outside of school, and less like traditional school tasks.

I am still worried about one thing, though. When I look at the students in my class, the most successful are still those that come from European or East Asian middle-class backgrounds, and the students who get 'left out' are still mostly poor children, Black children, or Hispanic children. What am I doing wrong?

Assume for the purposes of this question that the teacher has been successfully implementing effective teaching practices including multiculturalism and respect for diversity. How would you respond to this teacher? You might wish to comment on the limitations of the reform recommendations (and perhaps of our knowledge in general) as guides for helping the students that this teacher is concerned about.

FOUNDATIONS
Name three major writers (philosophers, researchers, theorists—based in the universities or not) in the 20th century whom you believe have had the most impact on debates within teacher education and demonstrate the nature, examples, and extent of that impact.

CURRICULUM
Students learn a great deal from schooling that does not come from its official educational content, that is not part of the formal (intended or explicit) curriculum. Much of what they learn comes from the process by which schooling is carried out (for example, the instructional and disciplinary modes employed by teachers and administrators), from the form that schooling takes in practice (for example, the organizational and cultural features of the classroom and the school), and from the relationships that are inextricably part of the school environment (particularly those with teachers and with other students). Write an essay on about what students learn from school that is not part of the formal curriculum, drawing widely on appropriate literature for insight and evidence and considering the broader educational implications of this kind of learning.

POLICY
For the past 20 years or so, the national discourse about education has focused on the issue of "high standards for all children." Write an essay with two main parts. First, argue in support of standards as a solution to educational inequities in the U.S. or in another country. Explain why standards could be used as the means for providing a high quality education to all students. Explore the necessary conditions for the successful use of standards to these ends.

Second, argue against standards, explaining why they cannot work as a tool to provide a high quality education for all children and might continue to preserve or exacerbate current inequities in education. Conclude the essay by providing your own perspective on whether standards will or won't provide a high quality education to all students and ameliorate current educational inequities.

In support of your response, be sure to draw broadly on the literature concerning history of educational reform and the goals of education. It may also help you to situate your essay in a particular subject matter (history/social studies, literature/language arts, science, mathematics, for instance) with which you are familiar.

CURRICULUM
A task often required of researchers (and certainly of doctoral students as they write their dissertations) is an examination of a certain body of literature. Your task here is to examine the reading list for these comprehensive examinations as a body of literature.

What is missing from this list? What should be there and why? Perhaps there are specific articles missing, or perhaps there are entire topics or bodies of literature that are missing. If you nominate a topic or body of literature, give some examples of readings that illustrate this area.

On the other side, a reading list such as this one cannot be overly large. If you add something to it, you must also remove something from it. Explain your reasoning for both additions and deletions.
Imagine that you have been invited to be a candidate for a job at a university. As part of your visit, the search committee has asked you to give a pedagogical talk. The instructions are as follows:

Teacher education—as a form of professional education—is characterized by a number of tensions, among them the tension between 1) teaching prospective teachers about relevant theories and 2) helping them feel prepared for practice. This tension arises in various circumstances such as:

- when you want to help prospective teachers learn to teach subject matters (like mathematics or history or biology, for example) but the prospective teachers themselves do not have adequate subject matter knowledge,
- when you want to prepare teachers for schools as they are currently run and preparing those same teachers to be change agents,
- when you want to prepare teachers (who are predominantly middle class white women) to teach children who are quite different from themselves.

Write out the text for a 30-minute talk in which you describe one of those tensions and how it has played out in your own practice as a teacher educator. Draw from relevant literature to help you frame the tension and offer perspectives. What opportunities to learn have you constructed for prospective teachers in hopes of negotiating that tension? How have your attempts to deal with those tensions played out?

Alternatively, if you have not yet confronted one of these tensions in your own practice as a teacher educator, discuss a tension or dilemma that is compelling to you. How does the relevant literature help you understand the content and character/the contours of this problem? Describe an assignment, activity, or set of readings that you might use in a class to address the tension you are focusing on. What would you anticipate would be some of the problems that might arise when using these materials?

"Programs of teacher education at colleges of education have only a modest impact on the way teachers teach."
Write an essay in which you analyze the validity of the following statement. Make sure that you take into account several alternative positions in response to the statement, and draw heavily on the literature to support your argument.

"The connection between teaching and learning is overstated."

POLICY
New federal legislation requires that schools employ "highly qualified teachers" (i.e., fully certified) if they wish to receive federal funds. That is, schools will no longer be allowed to use teachers on "emergency credentials."

a. Briefly lay out an argument to support this policy, making the best case you can for why this policy would lead to improvements in education.

b. Critically assess your argument, using both the research literature and the likely unintended consequences of the policy. In your commentary, consider issues of teacher knowledge, teacher recruitment and retention, and the ways in which districts and states respond to federal policies.

POLICY
It is safe to say that the United States has been in an era of standards-based reform in elementary and secondary schooling for over a decade. We have national and state standards in mathematics, literacy, science, social studies and even fields like technology. These reform efforts have not been without controversy. In addressing this issue, your tasks are to:

1. Select one of the sets of subject matter standards that has been developed since 1985 and (a) describe at least three educational problems which the standards claim to address and (b) describe the standards' recommendations for solving these problems.

2. Identify and describe the opposing viewpoints that form the basis of the controversy between proponents of standards-based reform and their opponents. Include the rationale for each group's position.

POLICY
Provide the most persuasive arguments you can both for and against using standardized testing programs to assess school performance.

TEACHING
When the University of Chicago closed its education program in 1997, a teacher wrote an editorial about the decision and published it in Education Week. In his editorial, he said that the University of Chicago's program would not be missed and that it didn't really offer much to teachers like himself. Among other things, he argued that teaching is a craft, not a science, and that a good teacher-education program respects and relies on the knowledge, judgment, and experience of practicing master teachers.

If it is the case that teaching is a craft, and that it is best learned in schools from classroom
teachers, one could reasonably ask why education courses are needed at all, and one could ask why research should be carried out in a field that is essentially a craft.

Write an essay on the nature of teacher knowledge. As you examine this issue, be sure to do the following:

a. On one side, define the nature of craft knowledge, and describe its role in teaching. How does craft knowledge contribute to improvements in teaching? Use evidence to support your position.

b. On the other side, define the nature of knowledge that derives from theory and research, and describe its role in teaching. How does knowledge from theory and research contribute to improvements in teaching? Use evidence to support your position.

c. Given the differences you have just described, evaluate this teacher's argument about the relevance of teacher education courses.

TEACHING
In the last two decades, a variety of critical challenges have been leveled against schooling in general and, specifically, against the construction of knowledge and the definition of knowing in the various disciplines comprising the school curriculum. For example, feminists have argued that schooling and school knowledge promote male-dominated, "objective," rational ways of knowing and being at the detriment of more collaborative, subjective, and embodied learning. Multiculturalists have made similar arguments regarding the white, Eurocentric knowledge permeating the curriculum, and have called for the inclusion of multiple perspectives and the dismantling of white privilege as the curricular norm. Postmodernists have challenged the grand narratives of schooling and the disciplines that comprise its knowledge, emphasizing the need to recognize, and thus critically examine, knowledge and knowing as always already positioned. Poststructuralists have argued that knowledge is not only positioned--that is, it comes from somewhere and has an agenda--but is also positioning, acting pedagogically on those it engages by inviting (at times demanding) them to know some things and in some ways rather than others.

Choose a particular school subject or a general educational issue that is equally susceptible to the above critiques and:

(a) Describe the critiques that have been leveled at your area of choice;

(b) Describe the ways in which addressing those critiques in your chosen area could help, hinder, or redefine the area;

(c) Using both critical and mainstream literature, take a stand regarding these critiques. How justified do you think these critiques are, and why? How does your position differ from those of the critics, and how would addressing your position help, hinder, or redefine the area you have focused on?
POLICY
Education is constantly in the state of either imagined or actual reform, with an abundance of reform proposals coming from all interested parties on all sides of the political spectrum. Currently, for instance, we see reform proposals having to do with teaching for understanding, curriculum standards, high-stakes testing; whole language; multiculturalism, critical literacy, and so forth. These efforts have not been without controversy as evidenced by "the Math Wars" in which opposing sides have drawn "battle lines" for and against the reforms recommended in the NCTM Standards. While the controversy in mathematics has been widely publicized, other reforms have been equally controversial.

In your essay, select one major reform (it does not need to be one of the reforms on the list above) and do the following:

- Explain the substance of the reform and why its proponents felt it was necessary. Describe two or more specific educational problems that this reform is expected to address and describe how it will address these problems.

- Identify and describe the opposing viewpoints that form the basis of the controversy between the proponents of the reform and their opponents. Include in your descriptions the rationale underlying each group's position.

- Describe your own personal position as an educator on this controversy and defend your position from a perspective of the personal impact on children being tested and the potential influence on society into which these children will become adults. Also, explain how you would address this issue in your own teaching.

TEACHING
The terms “teacher quality” and “quality teaching” are currently being debated across most social sectors. One of the sharpest distinctions in approaches to the assessment of quality teaching is that between the “Input” model and the “Outcome (or Value Added Measures)” model. The Input model takes teachers’ knowledge and teaching practices as evidence of quality teaching. The Outcome (Value Added Measures) model takes student test scores as evidence of quality teaching. In your essay:

- Provide the rationale for using the Input model to assess quality teaching. Explain which educational stakeholders advocate the Input model and why that is a reasonable stance for assessing teacher quality.

- Provide the rationale for using the Outcome (VAM) model to assess quality teaching. Explain which educational stakeholders advocate the Outcome (VAM) model and why that is a reasonable stance for assessing teacher quality.

- Suggest your own criteria for assessing teacher quality, taking into account arguments from both Input and Outcome models. Make references to arguments in the literature to support your stance.
3. The March 23, 2009 issue of Newsweek contained the following letter to the editor written by Nancy Mandel of Corvallis, OR:

“[The author of “Autism and Education” in March 9 Newsweek] has touched on a problem with education in this country. We often hear that American students are becoming less competitive in mathematics with foreign students. Our solution has been to set a minimum standard of desired competency and try to bring the nonmathematically inclined up to those standards. Imagine if the U.S. found itself falling behind other countries in basketball. Identifying students who are short and clumsy and teaching them minimal ball-handling skills would not win us gold medals. Our schools should concentrate on teaching mathematics to aspiring mathematicians, art to aspiring artists and woodworking to aspiring carpenters” (Nancy Mandel, 2009).

Write a letter to Ms. Mandel in which you address the following:

- Classify Ms. Mandel’s stance relative to other stances in curriculum theory. Explain the historical context of her stance and contrast that with alternative stances.

- Explain your own stance on curriculum. You may agree or disagree with Ms. Mandel. Draw on an array of literature to support your stance, and be sure to address counterarguments.