

PHD IN EDUCATION STUDIES

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION GUIDE

*For students in the Field of Critical Policy,
Equity, and Leadership Studies*

Version Date: April, 2022



All students who started in Fall 2012 and later are required to satisfactorily complete one qualifying paper. The purpose of the paper is to allow students the opportunity to situate their chosen area of research in a broad educational context. The paper serves as the Qualifying Examination.

PH.D. QUALIFYING PAPER:

Students and their supervisors can choose one of two format options for the qualifying paper. The students are encouraged to adopt the format that best supports their doctoral journey. Option A focuses on discussing the theoretical and methodological perspectives that may inform the proposed research. The purpose of this option is to explore the insights of different theories and methodologies, as well as the implications of those choices on the research. Option B involves a review of the literature on the research topic. The purpose of the review is to identify tensions, debates, and gaps for further inquiry. See the instructions for these two options below: students and their supervisors can choose one of two options for the qualifying paper that best supports the student along their doctoral journey. The longer-standing option A digs into the theoretical and methodological ground upon which students' prospective research will sit. Option B digs into how the topic of students' prospective research is taken up in the academic literature and thereby suggests a gap for further inquiry. See the instructions for these two options below:

All research makes knowledge claims and therefore all research is implicated in philosophical questions, assumptions, and issues. Unfortunately, these elements often seem concealed in the research process, making them appear "apparently unnecessary in relation to the immediate practical task of getting research going and bringing it to a successful outcome" (Scott & Usher, 2011, p. 9). In this respect, it is important for you to bring epistemological and ontological issues to the fore of your research and recognize the influential place of philosophical thinking in the research process. Your qualifying paper is a place for you to discuss these ideas in the context of your research. In other words, the purpose of this paper is to give you the opportunity to make clear the theoretical and methodological foundations of the thesis proposal you will develop at a later date.

Please address the following in 6,000-8,000 words, exclusive of references. There is no need to answer all of the problems here in exactly the order they are presented, but generally speaking, you should outline your research focus before the rest of the elements in each option, e.g., methodological approaches and theories, or search strategy and review. You are only required to choose one of the two options below.

OPTION A

1. Research Focus - Provide a short description (1-2 pages) of the educational problem area or issue in which you intend to locate your doctoral research. Identify one or two aspect(s) of the problem area on which your study could focus. State in broad terms what you would hope to accomplish in your study.
2. Identify one or two possible methodological approaches that could inform research in your selected problem area. Reflect upon the possible strengths, shortcoming, weaknesses or contradictions of this/these approach(es). Describe the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin each approach and assess the extent to which each approach might help you to address your research goals(s). Identify and justify the methodological approach you consider to be most suitable for your study.
3. Describe one or two theories that inform your understanding of your selected problem area. Explain why you would draw on these theories, what the grounding assumptions are, and how these theories shape your thinking about your planned research. Discuss ways in which each theory is commensurable with your selected methodological approach(es) and your broadly stated goal(s). Reflect upon the possible strengths, shortcomings, weaknesses or contradictions of the theory or theories you have adopted.

OPTION B

1. Research Focus - Provide a short description (1-2 pages) of the educational problem area or issue in which you intend to locate your doctoral research. Include your motivations for exploring the area or issue you have proposed.
2. Search Strategy - Describe the strategy deployed to search the literature; include keywords, databases, inclusion/exclusion criteria, as well as the analytical approach used to identify the themes and organize the review.

3. Review - Present a literature review that situates the topic of your prospective research. It is expected that the literature review will culminate in the identification of a gap for further inquiry, the significance of addressing the gap, and a preliminary statement of research question(s) informed by a comprehensive understanding of the relevant academic literature. The review should illuminate the theoretical terrain, core debates, and the methodological approaches of the literature analyzed.

You may discuss your paper with anyone, including professors, but you may not submit drafts of your papers to anyone. You are strongly encouraged to discuss the problems with your Supervisor and possibly members of your committee, as it is envisioned that these papers will make a contribution to your research proposal.

STARTING YOUR QUALIFYING EXAMINATION:

As soon as you have completed your coursework, you will start your Qualifying Exam process and must be completed in one term. Qualifying Exams are a Milestone and will not show up as a course in your Student Centre. Once you have passed your Qualifying Exam, it will appear at the end of your transcript under the Milestones area.

REQUEST FOR ADMINISTRATION OF QUALIFYING EXAMINATION:

Students must submit the following to the Graduate Programs Office at least four weeks prior to the end of the term of registration:

- 1 copy of your qualifying paper/literature review (Can be submitted electronically).
- Request for Administration of Qualifying Examination form (located on the "Forms & Guidelines" page of the Current Students website).

GRADING:

Grading will be pass or fail.

The qualifying paper is read by two people: your Supervisor plus a second reader. Each reader will independently determine whether your paper is satisfactory or not and notify the Graduate Programs Office within two weeks after the submission date. The Graduate Programs Office will then notify your Supervisor who will share the results with you. In addition, the readers will be available to meet with you to provide feedback.

If a student's paper is not judged to be of sufficient quality to be marked "Pass" by the reader(s), the student will be permitted to re-submit a revised version of the paper within two weeks of its return. The revised paper will be re-read by the same reader.

If, after reading the revised paper the reader does not assign a "Pass," the student will be asked to withdraw from the program. If the reader assigns a "Pass," the student may proceed in the program to complete degree requirements.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Graduate Programs Office.