

Policies and Procedures for the Qualifying Exam and the Comprehensive Exam for the M.Ed. Degree

Department of Special Education

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Establish a Supervisory Committee

A student must establish a three-member supervisory committee to advise him or her in completing all study requirements. Upon admission to the Department of Special Education, the student must meet with their appointed advisor to establish a timeline for completion of study requirements, including a timeline for establishing the supervisory committee and identifying the committee chair. Master's supervisory committees consist of three faculty members (including tenure-line, career-line, visiting, and emeritus). Unless prior approval has been obtained from the Graduate School, the chair of the supervisory committee and the majority of committee members must be tenured/tenure track faculty in the Department of Special Education. The student may choose to appoint one member of the committee from another department or college at the University of Utah; however, a committee member from another department or college at the University of Utah cannot serve as committee chair. Exceptions to these guidelines must be recommended and justified by the Chair of the Department of Special Education, and approved by the Dean of The Graduate School. Generally, a faculty member from outside of the Department of Special Education should have knowledge and expertise in the student's area of study. All committee members must hold a master's (M.A./M.S./M.Ed.) or doctoral (Ph.D./Ed.D.) degree. For more information, click here:

<https://gradschool.utah.edu/catalog/degree.php> <https://gradschool.utah.edu/catalog/degree.php>

The supervisory committee should be formed in the first year of graduate work or your first semester if you are in the master's without licensure or BCBA program. It is the responsibility of the student to approach prospective committee members to inquire about their willingness and availability to serve in such a capacity; however, faculty have the right, for justifiable academic reasons, to refuse to serve on a student's supervisory committee. The process of forming a supervisory committee is completed by filing a Request for Supervisory Committee form with the department graduate coordinator.

Upon successful completion of the qualifying exam, and at least one semester prior to graduation, a complete program of study should be entered into the Graduate Records Tracking System by the department graduate coordinator and then approved by the student's supervisory committee and the director of graduate studies. This program of study is reviewed by The Graduate School.

Upon successful completion of the comprehensive exam, the chair of the supervisory committee must submit (a) the decision of the supervisory committee, (b) a copy of the student's exam, and (c) completed evaluation forms from each member of the supervisory committee to the department graduate coordinator who then enters this information into the student's online file. This information must be entered into the student's online file by the last day of the semester in which the student expects to graduate. For additional information, click here: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/graduate-catalog/degree-requirements/>

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Note: Most tenure track faculty in the Department of Special Education are on nine-month contracts, and are not paid to work during the summer; therefore, students should not plan on completing qualifying exams or comprehensive exams during the summer. If requesting an exception, a student should consult with his/her advisor as soon as possible to determine the feasibility of committee member participation during a summer semester.

Qualifying and Comprehensive Exams

The qualifying exam and the comprehensive exam focus on a single topic area identified by the chair of the supervisory committee. The qualifying exam and the comprehensive exam are designed to assess the breadth and depth of the student's knowledge of the research base in his or her specialization area, the ability to synthesize and integrate the knowledge and skills developed in the specialization area, and the ability to communicate ideas in written and oral form.

The qualifying and comprehensive exams should represent the efforts of the individual student submitting the exam. For both exams, work must be completed independently with the exception of support from the U of U Writing Center. Students can obtain support from the U of U Writing Center during the exam process but it is up to the individual student to seek these services ahead of time. Timelines for the exam will not be altered due to students inability to seek support in a timely manner. Students cannot collaborate with other students or individuals outside of the Writing Center to complete their exam. Students should note that "collaboration" means more than working side-by-side with someone else. It also means using another person's notes, reading another's draft of a paper (or having another person read your draft, and engaging in conversations about substantive aspects of the exam. Questions about what constitutes unauthorized collaboration should be directed to the student's advisor/supervisory committee chair. Students can also use Grammarly as a resource which is provided for free through U of U software services. (<https://software.utah.edu/prospective/grammarly.php>)

Successful completion of the qualifying and comprehensive exams requires the student to demonstrate competency in both written and oral communication. The supervisory committee will advise the student with regard to whether the qualifying exam will be a written response or oral response. If the qualifying exam will be a written response, then the comprehensive exam will be an oral response. Conversely, if the qualifying exam will be an oral response, then the comprehensive examination will be a written response. The written and oral responses are described in the following sections.

The qualifying examination must be successfully completed in order to advance to candidacy for the M.Ed. degree. Students must be registered for a minimum of one (1) credit hour during the semester that they complete the qualifying exam. Further, students must be registered for a minimum of one (1) credit hour during the semester that they complete the comprehensive exam.

Written Response (Qualifying or Comprehensive exam)

1. Prior to taking the written response, students must complete SPED 6054-Professional Writing in Education. (NOTE: SPED 6054 may be taken concurrently with the written response with advisor approval.)
2. The student and his or her supervisory committee chair establish a date for the submission of the written response. The student is given the exam question five weeks prior to this date.
3. The student has five weeks to develop a written response to the exam question. The response

must include a double-spaced narrative, cover page, and references, and must be written in accordance with current American Psychological Association (APA) style guidelines. Students may not use external supports (e.g. editor, peer review) other than the U of U Writing Center when developing the written response.

4. The student must submit a draft of his or her written response to the supervisory committee chair for feedback **once** during the five week period on a date agreed upon by the student and supervisory committee chair. The chair may give the student feedback about the content and organization of the response, writing style and mechanics, and use of APA conventions. The feedback from the chair can be provided on the approved written response evaluation form OR in the comments feature in MS Word. The supervisory committee chair is not allowed to line edit nor provide edits via the track changes function in MS Word
5. At the end of the five week exam period, the student submits the final written response to each member of the supervisory committee. The exam will be evaluated within two weeks using the approved written response evaluation form.
6. The supervisory committee chair will notify the student with regard to whether he or she passes the written response. Each member of the supervisory committee votes independently. A recommendation of “Pass” is determined by a majority vote of the supervisory committee.

Oral Response (Qualifying or Comprehensive Exam)

1. The student and his or her supervisory committee establish a date for the completion of the oral response. The student is given the exam question seven weeks prior to this date.
2. The student has five weeks to develop an oral response to the exam question. The presentation must be constructed to be 45 minutes in length. In addition, the student must develop supporting materials, including: (a) an abstract of the presentation, (b) a detailed outline of the presentation, (c) copies of all presentation materials (e.g., overheads, power point slides), (d) a list of references supporting the primary points of his or her presentation, (e) objectives for the audience, and (f) plans for audience involvement.
7. The student must submit a draft of his or her oral response supporting materials to the supervisory committee chair for feedback once during the five week period on a date agreed upon by the student and supervisory committee chair. The chair will give the student feedback about the content and organization of the presentation, writing style and mechanics, and use of APA conventions. The feedback from the chair can be provided on the approved written response evaluation form OR in the comments feature in MS Word and Powerpoint. The supervisory committee chair is not allowed to line edit nor provide edits via the track changes function in MS Word.
3. At the end of the five-week exam period, the student submits the supporting materials to each member of the supervisory committee. The supporting materials will be evaluated within two weeks using the approved Oral Response (Supporting Materials) evaluation form.
4. The student delivers the oral response presentation to the supervisory committee members on the designated presentation date. During the presentation, members of the supervisory committee will ask follow-up questions. Following the presentation, the supervisory

committee will evaluate the student using the approved Oral Response (Presentation) evaluation form.

5. The supervisory committee reviews the student's performance on both the supporting materials and presentation. Each member of the supervisory committee votes independently on the supporting materials and the presentation. A recommendation of "Pass" is determined by a majority vote of the supervisory committee. The student is not required to complete the presentation if he or she does not pass the supporting materials. Successful completion of the exam is the date of the presentation.

Failed Exams

A student who fails a qualifying exam and/or a comprehensive exam may retake the failed exam one time. The retake can be in the same topical area, and the examination process is restarted following the procedures described above. A student is allowed a **maximum of two opportunities** to pass the qualifying exam. Further, a student is allowed a **maximum of two opportunities** to pass the comprehensive exam. (Note: An opportunity to take either the qualifying or comprehensive exam is defined as student receipt of the exam question. Failure by a student to complete the exam at any point thereafter will be considered a failed exam.)

Accommodations

Students are encouraged to identify any special accommodations they may need in taking the qualifying exam and the comprehensive exam. Students must provide written documentation of these accommodations from the Center for Disability Services (162 Olpin Union Bldg.). Accommodations must be mutually determined in a way that does not compromise the role and responsibility of a professional who serves students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodations must submit paperwork from the Center for Disability Services to the chair of the supervisory committee. It is policy that reasonable accommodations are negotiated and recorded in writing PRIOR to taking the qualifying exam and the comprehensive exam.