

Humphreys College, Stockton, California

Graduate Council and Department of Graduate Studies

Culminating Experience Guide

- Graduate Thesis
- Graduate Project
- Comprehensive Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Culminating Experience Outline

- Three Options: Thesis; Project; Comprehensive Examination
- Student Portfolio Requirements
- Oral Presentation

A. Thesis/Project Pathway

- Thesis/Project: Process of Completion
- Selecting a Thesis/Project Committee
- Responsibilities of the Committee
- Prospectus Requirements
- Thesis/Project Standards
- Oral Presentation of the Results

B. Comprehensive Examination Pathway

- Comprehensive Examination: Process of Completion
- Student's Petition
- Selecting a Comprehensive Examination Committee
- Responsibilities of the Committee
- Comprehensive Examination Standards
- Individual Study of *the Main Examination Themes and Resources*
- Essay Writing
- Essay Evaluation by the Committee
- Oral Presentation of the Results

Continued

CHAPTER 1

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING THE PROSPECTUS AND THE THESIS/PROJECT

- Prospectus
- The Thesis/Project
- Preliminary Pages
- Chapters
 - I. Introduction
 - II. Review of the Literature
 - III. Methodology
 - IV. Results
 - V. Discussion and Recommendations
- References
- Appendices
- Thesis/Project Preparation: Ethical and Legal Rules
- How to Credit Your Sources
- Quoting and Paraphrasing
- Footnotes

CHAPTER 2

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION STUDY SUGGESTIONS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- How to Study the *Main Examination Themes and Resources* Provided by your Committee
- How to Write, Document, and Format your Examination *Essays*
- How to Prepare for the *Oral Presentation* of your Results to the Examination Committee

INTRODUCTION

The Culminating Experience Outline

All students in a master's program must complete a culminating experience as part of their degree requirements. Typically, culminating experiences are related to the Program Learning Objectives of the master's degree and address topics pertinent to *Early Childhood Education* or *Administration in Educational Settings*.

Three Options. The culminating experience options in the program are the *thesis*, *project*, or *comprehensive examination*:

- The *thesis/project* is considered to be a demonstration of a student's mastery of the curricular requirements of the program and evidence that the student can develop scholarly, valid, and useful knowledge in the respective discipline. Students who successfully complete the thesis/project portion of the program demonstrate a capacity to exercise analytical skills, apply theory and research, and skillfully address practical professional issues. Similarly as the comprehensive examination path, the thesis/project completion tests both the depth and breadth of a student cumulative knowledge. An oral presentation of the thesis/project is required. Note: The *thesis* path is recommended to those who consider pursuing further graduate work.
- The *comprehensive examination* is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, think critically and independently, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination must evidence critical analysis, appropriate organization, and accuracy of documentation. Similarly as the thesis/project path, the comprehensive examination tests both the depth and breadth of a student cumulative knowledge. An oral presentation of the comprehensive examination essays is required.

Student Portfolio Requirements. Students are required to submit a completed *portfolio* prior to their oral presentation. A completed portfolio contains at least one major assignment from each course and a reflective assessment of the student's progression through the program, the synthesis of knowledge, and the attainment of the program's learning outcomes. Course assignments are to be submitted to the College's online course management system.

Oral Presentation. An *oral presentation* of the culminating experience is required. The student presents his/her work to his/her committee. Once the culminating experience work is ready for submittal, the student's thesis/project or comprehensive examination committee chair schedules the presentation.

A. Thesis/Project Pathway

Thesis/Project: Process of Completion

The thesis/project is a plan-driven, significant, intensive, and independent endeavor. To ensure a successful and timely completion, the student is obliged:

- to meet with his/her advisor to discuss the topic in general and select the members of the thesis/project Committee;
- to set up a planning timeline with the Committee chair and follow it;
- to submit a prospectus for approval by the thesis/project Committee prior to beginning the thesis/project; once an approved prospectus has been filed with the Department of Graduate Studies, a student may proceed to the development of the thesis/project;
- to secure the human subject clearance, if necessary, prior to collecting data or starting research process;
- to allow sufficient time for revising drafts based on Committee feedback;
- to submit the thesis/project, free of errors, to the Graduate Studies Office for its evaluation and the oral presentation.

Note: Submission of the work on time does not guarantee graduation; acceptance of the thesis/project by the Committee signals completion of the program.

Timing: The program is designed to give four units of credit for thesis/project work as part of the degree's requirements. This is normally done through enrollment in EDUC 399 - Culminating Experience. It is important to manage the timing of the thesis process in order to finish on a particular timeline. For instance, if he/she desires to finish the thesis/project during the first quarter of EDUC 399, the student should have an approved prospectus filed with the Department of Graduate Studies prior to registration for the course. As a general guideline, a student in this situation should plan on beginning the thesis/project process and development of the prospectus one to two quarters prior to anticipated enrollment in EDUC 399. Therefore, a full-time student taking two courses per quarter would need to begin the prospectus process in his/her fourth or fifth quarter of the program.

Selecting a Thesis/Project Committee

The student is responsible for selecting the chair of his/her thesis/project committee from the core faculty in the Department of Graduate Studies (the Committee). The Committee includes three members of the Humphreys College full-time faculty. The chair of the Department of Graduate Studies may grant an exception allowing for one Committee member outside of the College, as long as substitution serves a specific purpose or provides expertise related to the topic of the thesis/project.

Responsibilities of the Committee

The Committee is responsible for guidance and counseling during the preparation of the thesis/project. Its members suggest specific improvements in organization, form, and content. The Committee also has the responsibility for certifying that the student is competent in the subject area contained in the thesis/project and is able to communicate his/her scholarly or creative efforts to others with a high degree of skill. The Committee is authorized to approve theses/projects as meeting the culminating experience requirements of the program. Approval by the Committee indicates that the student's thesis/project represents scholarly work worthy of the master's degree, gives a clear and accurate description of the work performed, and conforms to standards of graduate-level writing.

Prospectus Requirements

Each student submits a *prospectus* for approval prior to beginning the thesis/project. At a minimum, the prospectus includes a clear and detailed description of the research/project, a brief review of the literature and/or other resources, as well as a conceptualization of the problem or research questions or the expected objectives of the project. Prospectus approval is the responsibility of the Committee, which evaluates the research questions or objectives posed along with the methodological adequacy.

Upon prospectus approval, the student may proceed to the development of the thesis/project. Working closely with the Committee chair, he/she will complete the requirements of the approved thesis/project. Four units of credit towards the program will be granted upon successful completion of the thesis/project. Based on the consent of his/her advisor, a student will be enrolled in EDUC 399 - Culminating Experience and will finish the remaining requirements of his/her thesis/project. The student must be enrolled in this course continuously until all degree requirements have been fulfilled; those who do not finish the requirements of the course in one quarter receive an "IP" grade. All students must finish the course within one year of beginning it.

Thesis/Project Standards

- *Thesis*: A written product of an in-depth study that verifies originality, critical thought, and thorough documentation with APA style. Included in the thesis are the identification of the problem, articulation of the major assumptions, explanation of the methodology and significance of the research, analysis of the data, and a conclusion and/or recommendation. The finished product must evidence content mastery, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, clarity of purpose, and accurate and thorough documentation. In light of those standards, the thesis preparation might be a valuable experience for those students who consider pursuing their further education (Ph.D., Ed.D.). An oral presentation of the thesis to the thesis Committee is required.

- *Project*: A significant endeavor appropriate to the educational professional fields. Like the thesis, it will include originality, critical thought, and documentation with APA style. Particular to this option will be a rationale for the project, its significance, objectives, methodology, a conclusion and/or recommendation that will be described and summarized in a written summary. The student in consultation with his/her Committee will decide the nature, content, and the depth of the project. An oral presentation of the project to the project Committee is required.

Theses/projects must be presented formally in accordance with standard formatting guidelines. Theses and bound projects are placed in the College library and are available to the public. Bound projects are treated as theses with regard to format, binding, and incorporation in the library.

Oral Presentation of the Results

When a student successfully completes the thesis/project, he/she will be scheduled for a public *oral presentation* of the results. The presentation provides an opportunity for the student and his/her Committee to discuss the topic of the thesis/project, and for the student to clarify any remaining questions or concerns.

B. Comprehensive Examination Pathway

Comprehensive Examination: Process of Completion

The comprehensive examination is a plan-driven, significant, intensive, and independent endeavor. To ensure a successful and timely completion, the student is obliged:

- to petition the Department of Graduate Studies for the comprehensive examination pathway;
- to form a comprehensive examination committee (the Committee);
- to set up a planning timeline with the Committee chair and follow it
- to study the *main examination themes and resources*;
- to submit four comprehensive examination essays, free of errors, to the Graduate Studies Department for their evaluation and the oral presentation.

Student's Petition

The process begins with a student's petition to pursue the comprehensive examination pathway, submitted to the Department of Graduate Studies. The student may petition for this pathway as early as one quarter prior to his/her anticipated enrollment in EDUC 399 – Culminating Experience.

Selecting a Comprehensive Examination Committee

Upon the approval of the petition, the student is responsible for selecting the chair of his/her comprehensive examination committee from the core faculty in the Department of Graduate Studies in a way similar to the formation of a thesis/project Committee (see above).

Responsibilities of the Committee

The Committee is responsible for developing two lists: (a) *the main examination themes and resources* and (b) *the specific examination topics/questions*. Additionally, the Committee sets up (a) *the student's examination schedule* and (b) *the evaluation rubrics*; both documents will be made available to the student. For other responsibilities of the Committee, see the Thesis/Project Pathway section of this Guide, the part on the Responsibilities of the Committee (above).

Comprehensive Examination Standards

The comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, think critically and independently, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination must evidence critical analysis, appropriate organization, and accuracy of documentation. Similarly as the thesis/project path, the comprehensive examination tests both the depth and breadth of a student cumulative knowledge.

Individual Study of *the Main Examination Themes and Resources*

Upon petitioning for the comprehensive examination, the student will receive the *list of the main examination themes and resources* to be studied in the anticipation of the comprehensive examination during the following quarter(s). The student will have up to one quarter for the home study of *the main examination themes and resources*. The standard academic support services of the College will be available, including the individual pre-examination consultations, along with the Graduate Studies Academic Club open sessions.

Essay Writing

Upon enrolling in EDUC 399 – Culminating Experience, the student will receive the above-mentioned *list of specific examination topics/questions* from which he/she will choose four to answer in the format of four research-based comprehensive *essays*.

The student will have the following two consecutive weeks to work on the specific *examination topics/questions*. It is generally understood that the resulting four essays will be based primarily on the previously assigned *list of the main examination themes and resources*, though the student may utilize additional academically valid sources, extending and updating the main list, as well as his/her relevant professional experiences.

Each of these four essays will follow the structural and documentation patterns of the American Psychological Association (APA). In general, each essay will contain a thesis/argument/issue statement, followed by its development in a logical, concise manner, reflecting the critical readings of various academically valid resources. Each essay will contain a brief conclusion or summary, followed by a list of references cited in the main body of the essay.

At the end of the second week, the student will submit all four essays electronically by the date set up by the Committee.

Essay Evaluation by the Committee

During the following week of the quarter, the Committee will evaluate each essay individually on the *pass/fail* basis.

- Successful completion of *all four essays* will be necessary to graduate.
- A student who satisfactorily responds to *two* of the four *topics/questions* will be allowed to rewrite and resubmit the *fail*-graded essays. The time conditions for the retake will be specified by the student's Committee; in general, the student will have one week for rewriting and resubmitting of the two essays classified as *failed*.
- A student who satisfactorily answers *less than two* of the four *topics/questions* will receive an "IP" grade in EDUC 399. He/she will be required to petition to retake the entire comprehensive examination in the next quarter. In this instance, new examination *topics/questions* will be generated by the Committee for the next attempt of the comprehensive examination.

Oral Presentation of the Results

When a student successfully completes the examination, he/she will be scheduled by the Committee for a public *oral presentation* of the results. Typically, the presentation will take place during the following two weeks of the quarter. The presentation provides an opportunity for the student and his/her committee to discuss the *topics/questions* addressed in the essays, and to clarify any remaining questions or concerns.

CHAPTER 1

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING THE PROSPECTUS AND THE THESIS/PROJECT

Prospectus

In general, the prospectus is a description of the main features of the forthcoming work. In academia, it is a conceptual outline of the thesis/project or another major assignment, submitted by a student for professional discussion and official approval.

The prospectus preparation starts with the selection of the thesis/project topic. The topic should reflect student's professional and personal interests and experience and fill a niche within a body of the previous research.

At a minimum, the prospectus of 7-10 pages, which will outline the future research, will contain the following:

- Proposed title of the thesis/project.
- Statement of the major research problem, hypothesis, or question:
The area of inquiry is expressed specifically, avoiding vague terms; the obvious fact that the prospectus is a plan based on the student's current understanding of the issues under inquiry should not justify an imprecise prospectus statement.
- Discussion of the importance of research:
The prospectus demonstrates that the research project is in some way significant to a major activity in the field of education.
- Analysis of significant prior research:
This part supports the statement of the problem, hypothesis, or question by characterizing its theoretical and methodological framework. It cites the key research resources, mostly published texts, and justifies their selection.
- Outline of the possible research approach or methodology:
The prospectus characterizes the chosen methodology and alternative approaches (if applicable), and the principal methods and techniques (e.g., library research, archival research, observational research, surveys, interviews, public records analysis, and specific laboratory methods).
- Outcomes of the research:
The student offers his/her rationale of the project from the point of its expected scholarly and practical applications and contributions

The Thesis/Project

The thesis/project content and organization follow Humphreys College's specific requirements that are, in general, derived from the American Psychological Association (APA) documentation style.

Note: Humphreys College's requirements for theses/projects take precedence over those for the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed., 2010), unless stated otherwise in this guide.

The thesis copy consists of four basic parts: Preliminary Pages; Chapters; References; and Appendices. The project copy follows a similar structure with the emphasis upon the practical documentation placed mainly in the appendices part.

Preliminary Pages:

- Title Page
- Certification of Approval Page
- Dedication Page (optional)
- Acknowledgement Page (optional)
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables
- List of Figures
- Summary

Chapters:

- I. Introduction
- II. Review of the Literature
- III. Methodology
- IV. Results
- V. Discussion and Recommendations

References

Appendices

Preliminary Pages

Title Page. The title clearly informs about the main and subsequent themes of the thesis. It does not contain any abbreviations. Typically, the title does not exceed 12 words. The title is centered between the left and right margins, and positioned in the upper half of the page.

The title page contains the author's name (first name, middle initial/s, last name); all titles and degrees are omitted. If the name contains a suffix (e.g., Jr. and III), the name and the suffix are separated by a space rather than by a comma. The name is positioned in the lower part of the page, above the date of the thesis submission.

In the middle of the page, place the prescribed statement about the author's college affiliation and the purpose of the thesis (see Appendix A of this instruction).

Certification of Approval Page. This page contains the statements prescribed by the college in a format displayed in Appendix A.

Dedication Page. The dedication page is optional.

Acknowledgement Page. The acknowledgement page is also optional. It may contain information about a grant or other financial support or about a substantial assistance provided by author's instructors, colleagues, family members, or friends.

Table of Contents. The table of contents follows the format included in Appendix A of this instruction).

List of Tables. If the thesis contains more than one table, the author makes the List of Tables. Titles of the tables must be identical with those used in the main text of the thesis.

List of Figures. If the thesis contains more than one figure, the author makes the List of Figures. Titles of the figures must be identical with those used in the main text of the thesis.

Summary. The summary contains a succinct description of the thesis content and relevance. Similarly as a research report abstract, the thesis summary represents the germane features of the completed work. At least, it conveys the following elements:

- The main research problem (hypothesis, question, or issue) addressed in the thesis.
- The principal research methods, techniques, and procedures.
- The key results and findings.
- The substantial conclusions, recommendations, and applications.

In general, the summary should contain the basic concepts and terms (keywords).

The APA abstract-composing guidelines apply here (the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 2.4); the thesis summary is supposed to be accurate; non-evaluative; coherent; readable; and concise. Recommended summary length ranges between 120 and 350 words, only rarely exceeding a page.

Chapters

I. Introduction

The opening chapter clearly identifies (a) the research problem (hypothesis, issue, argument, objective) addressed by the thesis, and (b) the research strategy.

To achieve this goal, the introduction explains

- the problem's importance and unique relevance in light of the previous research;
- the links between the problem and chosen research strategy; and
- the theoretical and practical outcomes.

In general, the *thesis* will address the problem either in a *basic* or *applied* research manner. By its practical nature, the *project* will gear primarily toward applied research resources, methods, and outcomes. In case the applied research involves a dispute of controversial issues, the author seeks an objective, balanced position. The critical charge must be always based on factual evidence.

The introduction of an empirically oriented thesis includes the hypothesis statement about the main problem, argument, and/or question. It offers a rationale of the chosen approach. The work might address the main hypothesis along with several less substantial ones.

It is expected that the introduction is written in a concise, clear style.

II. Review of the Literature

The literature review includes works relevant to the central theme of the thesis/project and its research methodology. In some cases—dependent on the specifics of the thesis—the literature review requires a relatively deep historical account documenting author's complex understanding of the origins and further developments of the problem. Another criterion determining the literature review scope is the unique value of the chosen resources for the understanding of the specific aspects under inquiry.

Generally, the literature review summarizes and/or paraphrases the substantial results and methods of previous research in light of the thesis plan. The essential purpose of it is to clarify the scholarly pertinent background of the thesis.

III. Methodology

While the introduction and the review of literature state the problem, explain the purpose of the thesis/project, and its cumulative historical and theoretical foundations, the *methodology* chapter explains how the research was done in this particular work. It also offers the definitions of the main concepts, as well as the operational definitions of the used variables. This methodology chapter fulfills two interconnected goals: it ensures that the research methods and results are objective and allows the future replication or update of the research.

It is recommended that that the methodology chapter is divided into several parts. Each of them is briefly subtitled; if needed, even subsections are subtitled into logically structured units. Even more specific methodological information may be placed in appendices.

In case the subjects of the thesis/project are human research participants, the author informs about the nature and criteria of the sample selection and its members' involvement. The basic group/subgroup characteristics include the data on participants' age, gender, ethnicity and/or race, education, socioeconomic status, and any other data relevant to the research problem.

The methodology chapter reveals sampling procedures, including the selection criteria. If relevant, the chapter informs about the technical circumstances of the data collection - for example, locations, financial arrangements, and safety measures. The chapter further discusses the statistical relevancy of the sample size, power, and precision.

If applicable, another part of the methodology chapter defines the definitions of all primary and secondary outcome measures and covariates.

The chapter informs about the methods, techniques, and procedures of the data collecting, including questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

The author is expected to include the information about the research design and the experimental manipulations and interventions.

Note: For more information on the methodology chapter, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 2.06.

IV. Results

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the data and the results of their analysis, as reported in the previous methodology chapter. This summary leads to valid conclusions.

It is important that the summary stems from all results, regardless of their positive or negative outcomes; even though the outcomes do not support the hypothesis stated in the introduction, they are supposed to be incorporated in the result chapter.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis must be objective, complete, and accurate.

If the thesis/project author uses statistical procedures, it is not necessary to explain them, nor is it needed to define the basic statistical concepts. The exception would apply, when the use of a particular method requires a special justification.

For a more detailed instruction concerning statistics and data analysis; ancillary analyses; participant flow; intervention and manipulation fidelity; baseline data; and adverse events, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 2.7.

V. Discussion and Recommendations

After stating the hypothesis (argument, issue, problem) in the introductory section of the thesis/project, clarifying and justifying the methodology, and presenting the research results, the author is ready to discuss the theoretical and/or practical implications of the findings.

The discussion and recommendations chapter usually consists of three major sections:

- The *opening* part compares the initial hypothesis to the ultimate research results. In case of a discrepancy, the author attempts to explain it *post hoc*, while taking into account the rationale for the original assumptions, for example, the results of previously conducted research, as reflected in literature.
- The *middle* section offers a more detailed interpretation, evaluation, and qualification of the results. It is an opportunity to offer ideas about the resulting

- applications in both the further research and/or under practical, real-life conditions.
- The *closing* part of this chapter may summarize the principal findings on the utmost generalized level, highlight the overall validity of the work, including its replicability. It may also identify the open research problems deserving attention in the future, especially those open problems that result from the author's current findings.

In general, the discussion section is an intellectual treatment of the problems under inquiry; it does not contain any new pieces of factual information. In this respect, the author should strive to connect the discussion chapter with the introduction, and present the fact-based evidence in the other sections of the thesis/project.

Note: For more information on the discussion and recommendations chapter, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 2.08.

References

The references section is a highly standardized complete list of published scholarly works and other sources, cited in the text of the thesis/project. The list acknowledges the sources and enables their location.

This section always starts on a new page. All entries are double-spaced and printed in a hanging indent format.

Note: For more information on the references section, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Chapters 6 and 7.

Appendices

A thesis/project copy may have one appendix or more appendices. Each appendix starts on a separate page.

The appendices are distinguished by capital letters (Appendix A, Appendix B...). Their order is determined by the reference position in the chapter section of the thesis/project. Each appendix is identified by a title (including headings and subheadings, if needed), though the in-text references are limited to the letter labels (Appendix A, Appendix B...).

The appendix/appendices section may include plain text documents, as well as tables, figures, and displayed equations. Each of those non-textual documents is identified by the appropriate appendix letter followed by a number (Appendix A1, Appendix A2...).

Note: For more information on the appendix section, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 2.13.

Thesis/Project Preparation: Ethical and Legal Rules

In spite of the fact that your thesis/project is not primarily designed for publication in print or on the Web, the ethical and legal principles outlined in latest edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* apply to both students' research and scientific writing style.

The first rule is *accuracy* of scientific knowledge. The ultimate value of the research method is its verifiability. The author does not adjust the data to his/her hypothesis. To prevent such a manipulation, the researcher clarifies all methods, techniques, and procedures in the methodology chapter of the thesis/project, and constantly refers to the sources. The skilled reader should be able to verify the author's findings and conclusions by repeating the research path.

Graduate program participants are obliged to archive raw data and procedure-related documents for at least *five years* after the acceptance of the thesis/project by Humphreys College.

The second set of ethical and legal rules excludes any form of *plagiarism*. Under any circumstances a student does not use somebody else's words, including those expressing ideas, as his/her own.

- To *cite verbatim*, the author uses quotation marks or the block quotation format.
- To *paraphrase* a source by summarizing and/or restating its content, the author identifies the source by acknowledging it. (Example: As explained in the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2010), the use of scientific method enables to repeat observations for the sake of their verification.)

Similar documentation rules, securing the clear identification of sources, apply to the use of *research models* and their rationales, both published and related via personal communications. If the author develops an original research model, it should be clearly stated in the introduction and explained in the methodology section of the thesis/project.

The third set of ethical and legal standards protects *the rights and confidentiality of research participants* and deals with *the conflict of interest*. When the research involves humans, the student avoids any disclosure of confidential information. The student must follow the College's rules concerning confidentiality protection and consult the latest edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 1.11.

In some cases, especially in preparation of master's program *projects*, students are expected to prevent any *conflict of interest*. Most frequently, this conflict is manifested as appositive and/or negative bias in the interpretation of facts and evidence. The author is

obliged to disclose any personal or professional affiliations that might be interpreted as a source of the conflict of interest.

For more information, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sections 1.7-1.12.

How to Credit Your Sources

Any research-based report is a unique attempt to contribute to the processes of gaining and communicating knowledge. Readers of a thesis/project should be able to identify the author's contribution in the context of previously published works.

Research reporting is always based on the acknowledgement of previous research results in a standardized manner. The documentation standards are codified in the publication manuals issued by various professional associations and agencies (e.g., the American Psychological Association, the Modern Language Association of America, the University of Chicago Press, and the American Sociological Association). The graduate studies program in education at Humphreys College adapted the latest American Psychological Association's standards for crediting sources (the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Chapter 6).

The courses of graduate studies and thesis/project preparation are based on *critical reading* of literature. To explore the backgrounds and dimensions of the specific theme, the student is expected to become acquainted with all relevant publications, though only some of them will be directly cited in the final version of the thesis/project manuscript. The decision depends on the value of definitions, data, hypotheses, arguments, and other ideas for a particular thesis/project theme.

Another rule of graduate-level work is that the student has personally read the cited works. Only under a few clearly justified circumstances, is it permissible to "quote a quote" or paraphrase without reading the original source. Usually such a meta-communication borders with the violation of ethical rules. Those circumstances include second-hand citations from rare, lost, or destroyed sources. In such a case, the student clearly states that the original quote was taken from the source at hand (as cited in...).

The only exception from the source-crediting requirement is the use of ideas, facts, and figures considered "common knowledge." This vague expression refers to the general level of knowledge expected to be common to a broadly defined target audience or the specific scholarly work. Common knowledge may include the references to the basic natural and social phenomena, generally undisputed definitions of terms, popular proverbs, and well-known passages from classical literature and religious texts. Since the concept of common knowledge is relativistic, the student should always cite the source when in doubt.

The thesis/project author is obliged to *cite* all works that influenced his/her research and writing process. The works referenced (cited) in the main body of the thesis/project

include *ideas* (e.g., theories, research methods and results, and concept definitions) and *facts* (scientifically relevant research data and other information pertinent to the thesis/project theme and methodology).

It is both a legal and ethical requirement that researchers credit their sources, both texts and personal communications, to avoid *plagiarism*. The *exact words* are surrounded by quotation marks; in-text references are also inserted each time when the author *paraphrases* the original text or data. The paraphrasing includes a summary of the cited text and rearrangement of words. The same rule of the known-source acknowledgement applies to the *design and structure* of the whole research project and all its substantial parts. The source acknowledgement does not diminish an originality value of the resulting work. Actually, it elevates it – making it clearly a firm part of the intellectual inquiry progress.

Under limited circumstances, researchers might be accused of *self-plagiarism* when claiming that their previously published work is an original. With the exception of minor descriptive passages, the author is obliged to refer to the original source of his/her own duplicated ideas, words, and data used within the otherwise new study. The thesis [project] linked to the previously *published* work of the same author, must clearly delineate the original text and its scholarly value from the new work.

For more information about plagiarism and self-plagiarism, see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sections 1.10 and 6.01.

To avoid *plagiarism*, authors have two documentation choices: quoting and paraphrasing.

Quoting and Paraphrasing

Quoting. The direct quotations used in the text of the thesis/thesis are always acknowledged by

- the author's name;
- year of publication; and
- page(s) or paragraph number.

For technical details, see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sections 6.03 and 6.05.

The author arranges the *direct quotations* in the following manner:

- Quotations that contain *less than 40 words* are included in the text narrative within the appropriate paragraph. The quoted text is separated from the author's text by the double quotation marks. The parenthetical reference starts immediately

after the closing quotation marks, regardless whether the quoted text concludes the sentence or is inserted inside the sentence.

- For the quotations that include *40 or more words*, the author uses a *block quotation* format. The double-spaced block starts on a new line. It is indented a half inch from the left margin. The block is not enclosed in the quotation marks. Each line starting a new paragraph within the block is indented an additional half inch.

The information about the source of the block quote is located in parentheses after the closing punctuation mark. The source citation includes the author's name, the year of publication, and the page (or paragraph) number. No period is placed after this parenthetical citation.

When the source of the block quote is cited as a part of the author's narrative preceding the quote, the parenthetical reference is reduced to the page (or similar) information.

If the block quotation contains secondary quoted material, enclose such material by a pair of double quotation marks.

Paraphrasing. The thesis/project author does *not* always need to *quote* the sources directly. Instead, he/she may choose to *paraphrase*—or simply *refer*—to somebody else's ideas or facts. The paraphrasing does not require the use of quotation marks, yet, the original meaning and specific context must be preserved.

To link the paraphrased content to the reference section of the thesis, the author informs about a page or paragraph (section) location of the original source, following the documentation rules applied to the direct quotations (above).

All documentation-style manuals underscore the quotation *accuracy* requirement. It includes the original source errors and misprints. To signal their occurrence, the thesis author inserts the Latin word *sic* (italicized) in brackets after the erroneous quotation [*sic*].

The thesis author is permitted to make certain changes from the source without explaining them:

- in a direct quotation to change the first letter of the first word from a lowercase letter to an upper case – and vice versa;
- to change the punctuation mark at the end of the quoted sentence for the sake of logical sentence syntax;
- to switch single quotation marks into double quotation marks – and vice versa.

In the following instances, any departure from the source originality must be explained:

- to mark *the omission of a part of the original sentence*, use three spaced ellipsis points (. . .);
- to mark *the omission between two sentences*, use four points; the first of them enclose the first quoted sentence while the following three spaced ellipsis points stand for the omitted text. The use of the ellipsis points *at the beginning or end of a quotation* indicates that you quote only a part of a sentence;
- to *insert* any necessary explanatory material inside the quotation, use brackets;
- to *emphasize* a specific part within a quotation, use italics; insert the words *emphasis added* enclosed in the brackets, immediately after the italicized words.

In case you need to quote *an original text that includes a citation*, it is *not* necessary to list the work cited in the reference section. Such a “citation within a quotation” is not considered a primary source.

Obviously, a responsible thesis author attempts to read the secondary sources for the sake of contextual and factual accuracy.

The full disclosure of the source origin is recommended also for paraphrasing the *principal ideas* relevant to the thesis. The reference, even though it is not presented as a direct quote, should allow for easy identification of the original source.

Frequently, online research sources do *not* contain any page information. To lead to your source, use paragraph numbers, marked in the parenthetical reference as *para.*; additional techniques are presented in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, section 6.05.

In-text references are always linked to the alphabetized reference list. Each source used in the thesis must appear at least twice – once as a full entry in the reference list and once in the text in the author-date citation format. The following exceptions apply: (a) references to *major classical works* are made in text only because their sections are standardized (e.g., the *Old and New Testament*, Greek and Roman classics, Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, or William Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*); the author of the thesis/project identifies his/her source in the initial citation by the version used; (b) references to unpublished *personal communications* (private correspondence, interviews or conversations) are cited in the text only because they cannot be recovered; it excludes them for the reference list.

For specific rules of the in-text reference citing, consult the following sections of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*:

- One Work by One Author (6.11);
- One Work by Multiple Authors (6.12);
- Groups of Authors (6.13);
- Authors with the Same Surname (6.14);
- Works with No Identified Author or with an Anonymous Author (6.15);
- Two or More Works within the Same Parentheses (6.17);
- Secondary Sources (6.17);

- Classical Works (6.18).

Footnotes

Footnotes serve two specific purposes: (a) to extend the main *content information* and (b) to confirm that *the copyright permission* was granted.

The value of content footnotes depends on their relevancy to the main course of discussion. A particular footnote deals with one fact or one idea. In case a footnote is more complex, the author should attempt to incorporate its content into the main body of the thesis or to the appendix section. The footnote material should not overwhelm the text by unsubstantiated digressions.

Generally, copyright permission footnotes are placed on the same page as the reference to the copyrighted source. They refer to:

- the source of a lengthy quotation;
- scale and test items;
- reprinted or adopted figures and tables.

For more copyright-acknowledgment rules, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Section 2.12.

For the consecutive numbering of footnotes, use superscript Arabic numerals. To refer to a footnote, place it in a parenthetical note, without using the superscript, e.g., (see Footnote 3).

The footnotes might be also listed in a separate section, titled Footnotes, starting on a new page, following the reference section.

CHAPTER 2

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: STUDY SUGGESTIONS

This chapter addresses some of the most relevant aspects of your individual preparation for the comprehensive examination. The suggestions follow the basic outline, as presented in the Introduction to this Guide:

- I. How to study the *main examination themes and resources* provided by your committee.
- II. How to write, document, and format your examination *essays*.
- III. How to prepare for the *oral presentation* of your results to the examination committee.

As stated in the Introduction to this Guide, similarly as the thesis/project path, *the comprehensive examination* tests both the depth and breadth of your cumulative knowledge. Specifically, the examination committee will assess your ability

- to integrate knowledge of the study area;
- to think critically and independently;
- to demonstrate a mastery of the subject matter.

Additionally, the master's program graduate is supposed to demonstrate adequate skills in the fields of

- critical analysis applications;
- appropriate organization of the writing assignments,
- accuracy of documentation;
- oral presentation of the results

How to Study the *Main Examination Themes and Resources* Provided by your Committee

Q: When and under which circumstances will I receive my *list of the main examination themes and resources*?

A: You may petition for the *comprehensive examination pathway* as early as one quarter prior to your planned enrollment in EDUC 399 – Culminating Experience. You will receive the *list of the main examination themes and resources* to be studied in anticipation of the *comprehensive examination* during the following quarter(s) upon the petitioning. Your examination schedule will be set up by your comprehensive examination committee.

Q: How does my examination committee select *the main examination themes*?

A: Your committee will derive *the main examinations themes* from *the learning outcomes* of the advanced-degree program you chose to study several years ago. Naturally, you will feel familiar with the committee's themes. By now, your basic coursework is completed; you have pursued in-depth study of both theoretical and applied concepts, with a focus on the skills of reflective practitioners and professional leaders. By setting the *themes*, the committee wants to remind you about the depth and breadth of the academic field of your choice. The ultimate goal is to assess your cumulative knowledge and your ability to apply it. The *themes* will reflect both the core subjects as well as your emphasis area (ECE or Educational Administration). Along with *the main examinations themes and resources*, you will receive the commission's *evaluation rubrics*; the rubrics will help you in focusing on the examination criteria from the very beginning of your culminating experience.

Q: What are the committee's criteria for the selection of the *main examination resources*? Will I be able to utilize the set of my textbooks?

A: The committee is aware that by now you possess an entire collection of program-related textbooks; you should keep all of them handy, along with your well-organized class and reading notes, writing assignments, online database access instructions, syllabi, or important class handouts. However, most of your textbooks have been focused on the particular subject matter of individual courses. The comprehensive nature of the examination requires studying additional, more substantial resources, mostly books. This is the reason why your committee will release the list of those *resources* along with the *main examination themes*.

Q: Once I receive *the main examination themes and resources*, how should I approach them?

A: Under a typical scenario, you will have more than ten weeks to study the themes and resources individually. Your preparation should be driven by the Comprehensive Examination Standards, as stated in the Introduction to this Guide:

The comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student's ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, think critically and independently, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination must evidence critical analysis, appropriate organization, and accuracy of documentation. Similarly as the thesis/project path, the comprehensive examination tests both the depth and breadth of a student cumulative knowledge.

Q: Now, a more specific question: How to approach the *books* listed in the *main examination themes and resources*?

A: In practical terms, you should *read* each of the books with the intent to *learn* as much as possible about the *main examination themes*. To understand which parts of the books are most relevant to the themes, you might benefit from the following "reading to learn" tips.

- Become acquainted with the author/s professional background and intent.
- Understand the main thesis/argument/issue of the book and its structure.
- Study all parts of the books that are relevant to the *main examination themes* thoroughly.
- Become familiar with the technical terminology; if needed, consult additional resources to clarify definitions.
- Annotate the most relevant sections of each book, using systematically marked index cards, or a similar annotation technique you may have developed during your studies.
- Make sure your reading notes are carefully composed and clearly marked, distinguishing between (a) direct quotations and (b) paraphrases – in order to prevent unintended plagiarism. (The College’s honor code, including the anti-plagiarism policy, applies to the graduate programs in full.)
- Keep in mind that your reading notes might become the most convenient APA documentation tool during the upcoming writing of your final essays.
- If time permits, try to outline or even draft preliminary brief essays on the substantial concepts and issues stemming from the *main examination themes*, while incorporating selective direct quotes and/or paraphrases from original sources – all cited in the APA style.
- Compose a preliminary APA-formatted *References* list of all academically valid sources you used during your preparation so that during the essay writing you will not need to worry about formatting technicalities.
- Ask for individual consultation, of needed.

Q: Besides being a master’s program student, I am a working professional in the field of education. To which extend am I supposed to use my practical experiences?

A: Similarly as during your previous regular coursework, your professional experiences, if properly incorporated in the academic context, may enrich your study performance. Some of the *specific examination topics/questions*, which will be released upon your enrollment in the EDUC 399 course, will give you a chance to apply your expertise in the comprehensive *essays*. In a broader sense, you are already well aware that the graduate program seeks to approach topics from various perspectives so that students may achieve both understanding of particular topics and the capacity to reflect on and analyze the relationships amongst *theory*, *analysis*, and *practice*. This principle applies to the entire program, including your culminating experience.

Q: Understandably, the *main examination resources* will be mostly printed publications, an equivalent of the *Great Books* in Education. However, during my studies, I am frequently using not only printed but also *online* resources.

A: Yes, the list of books you will receive along with the *main examination themes* will represent a “golden fund” of the education-related literature. However, during the two-week planning and composing of your examination *essays* you will be welcome to utilize any *additional* resources of academic value. They may include not only your textbooks or

printed journal studies but also the relevant online resources. The committee expects that you will demonstrate not only the comprehensive knowledge of the advanced program-related facts and ideas but also your heuristic skills.

Q: I am aware that I will have up to one quarter for the home study of *the main examination themes and resources*. Will I have access to Humphreys' Library and Learning Center, online databases, computer laboratories, and other services?

A: In the course of the culminating experience, upon your enrollment in the program-related courses, you will have full access to the support services of the College. You will be also welcome to ask for the individual pre-examination consultations. The Graduate Studies *Academic Club* will hold its regular open sessions for small-group consultations.

How to Write, Document, and Format your Examination Essays

Q: When will I receive my set of the *specific examination topics/questions*?

A: As stated in the Introduction to this Guide, upon enrolling in EDUC 399 – Culminating Experience, each student will receive the above-mentioned *list of specific examination topics/questions*. From that list, you will choose four *topics/questions* to answer in the format of four research-based comprehensive *essays*.

Q: How much time will I have to complete my four comprehensive *essays*?

A: Under the standard circumstances, once you enroll in the EDUC 399 course and the committee releases your *list of specific examination topics/questions*, you will have the following two consecutive weeks of the quarter to (a) plan, (b) draft, (c) revise, and (d) complete the *essays*. You will be obliged to submit all four *essays* electronically at the end of the second week. The exact submission deadline (day and hour) will be set by your committee in advance.

Q: Will the committee determine the documentation and style format of the four *essays*?

A: So far, in all your regular writing assignments completed during the graduate program at Humphreys College, you have applied the general rules of the American Psychological Association (APA) documentation and formatting. You have become well acquainted with them. Therefore, each of the four comprehensive examination *essays* will follow the structural and documentation patterns of the APA.

Q: What will be the minimum requirements for the structure and size of the *essays*?

A: In general, each of the four *essays* will contain at least

- an opening thesis/argument/issue statement;

- the main body of the essay, developing the opening statement in a logical, concise manner, and reflecting the critical readings of various academically valid resources;
- a brief conclusion restating the opening thesis/argument/issue and summarizing the major points;
- a list of references cited in the main body of the essay.

The committee expects that each of the four *essays* will have between 12 and 15 double-spaced pages, following the APA format. In your own interest, you should develop and follow a detailed plan for both stages of the culminating experience: (a) the individual study of the *main examination themes and resources* and (b) the writing of the four *essays* responding to the *specific examination topics/questions*. Keep in mind that especially during the two-week essay-writing period you might take some extraordinary measures and adjust your professional, family, and personal commitments.

Q: To which extent will I be able to utilize my previous term papers, literature reviews, and similar academic assignments, as accepted during my master's program coursework, in the comprehensive examinations *essays*?

A: The committee will expect that you submit four *original* essays responding to the *specific examination topics/questions* with an academic vigor reflecting the advanced-degree expectations. Since your previous work has become a partial depository of your knowledge and skills, it may serve as one of the academically valid resources for your final *essays*. Make sure you have your main coursework assignments readily available in clearly marked electronic and/or printed files.

Q: I expect that the *specific examination topics/questions*, released upon my enrollment in EDUC 399, will give me a chance to incorporate my own *professional experiences from the field of education*.

A: As stated in the Introduction to this Guide, it is generally understood that the four *essays* will be based *primarily* on the previously assigned *list of the main examination themes and resources*, though you may

- utilize additional academically valid sources;
- extend and update the *list of the main examination themes and resources*;
- apply your own relevant professional experiences in order to support the thesis/argument/issue statements of the essays.

How to Prepare for the *Oral Presentation* of your Results to the Examination Committee

Q: As I understood, once I successfully complete the four essays and receive all passing grades, I will be invited for an *oral presentation* of the results.

A: Under the standard circumstances, your examination committee will schedule the *oral presentation* within the following two weeks of your enrollment in the EDUC 399 course. The presentation will take place on the College premises. It will be open to public. Both you and the committee will have an opportunity to discuss the *topics/questions* addressed in the *essays*, and to clarify any remaining questions or concerns. Additionally, the committee might be interested in a concise oral summary of your culminating academic experience from the points of view of the main challenges and opportunities.