

## Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Department: Educational Studies

Degree or Certificate Level: Ph.D.

College/School: School of Education

Date (Month/Year): December 17, 2020

Primary Assessment Contact: Jennifer Buehler, Program Director

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? Summer and Fall 2020

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? Plan has not yet been updated (see #7D)

### 1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

As noted in last year's program assessment report (dated January 20, 2020), members of the Educational Studies graduate faculty have been engaged in significant program revisions since the 2017-18 school year:

- During 2018-19, we replaced the Educational Foundations Ph.D. with a new doctoral program in Education Policy and Equity, which is now serving its second cohort.
- During 2019-20, we replaced our master's degrees in Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, and Educational Foundations with a new M.A. in Education Principles and Practices, which is rooted in three post-baccalaureate certificate options (Advanced Literacy Methods, Inclusive Practice, and Educational Equity) and is now serving its first cohort.
- As the above programs continue to take shape, in 2020-21 our attention has turned to program revisions for the Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and the Ph.D. in Special Education. In September 2020, we learned that both of these programs have been targeted for closure during the Academic Program Review process.
- Given the amount of effort it is taking to roll out new programs, the amount of program development fatigue we are experiencing as a group (note that all of us on grad faculty have also been engaged in redesigning our undergraduate teacher education program during the same period of graduate program reinvention described above), and the fact that we ultimately plan to combine our Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education doctoral programs into *one new program* that we will build together, since Summer 2020, our assessment work has centered on **redesigning the written comprehensive exam** shared by our Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education programs. Our strategy here is intentional: this blended approach to comps, and the blended assessment work arising from it, will inform the development of one new program to replace the old ones.

Last year's program assessment report (dated January 20, 2020) detailed **findings from a faculty review** of the old comps model shared by these two programs. As outlined in that report, the flaws in the old model were legion (e.g., *the exam is backward looking, not forward looking; students are engaging in an inauthentic academic exercise; the exam is flawed on a conceptual level; students receive no feedback on the work they produce during comps; students can pass all their courses but still fail comps*).

In light of these findings, we **developed an entirely new written comprehensive exam model** for Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education doctoral students. This year's assessment report will explain the new model (see attached documents, including rubrics for assessing comps), present student feedback on the new model, and share findings from faculty review of the first round of implementation.

While our faculty review assessed student learning broadly within the new comps model, we focused the review specifically around **two of our five learning outcomes**:

- Outcome #3: Students will analyze social justice issues in education.
- Outcome #4: Students will explain how learning and curriculum theories are used to develop education programs.

## **2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning**

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

**NOTE:** Since the written comprehensive exam is the sole focus of this round of program assessment, no artifacts were collected through coursework.

**NOTE:** There are no Madrid students enrolled in our program.

The new comprehensive exam model consists of **two long papers** that students write over a five-week period and then defend in a **two-hour oral exam** before a **three-person faculty comps committee**.

**The Scholarly Paper**, which is adapted from exam models used at the University of Michigan, Stanford University, and the University of Virginia, and which is based on the student's primary academic interest, provides space for the student to explore an area of scholarly interest that is relevant to the research they expect to conduct for their dissertation. In this paper, the student demonstrates their capacity to do independent research of publishable quality.

**The Theorization of Learning Paper**, which is adapted from a model used at the University of Michigan, and which is autobiographical and narrative in nature, provides space for the student to produce a critical reading of their work in graduate school. In this paper, the student creates a coherent intellectual trajectory out of their program of study and explores the implications of this work for their dissertation and career.

Each **three-person comps committee** consists of the Program Director, the student's faculty adviser, and a second faculty member assigned by the Program Director.

The following **data/artifacts** related to our new written comps exam model were included for this round of assessment:

- The Scholarly Paper and the Theorization of Learning Paper for one summer student and five fall students (12 papers in all, each 15-20 pages in length)
- Comments on each student's papers by their committee members
- Field notes written by the Program Director during each student's oral exam (essentially handwritten transcripts of the exam conversation, approximately 25 pages for each student)
- The results forms for each student, which include summary comments on the overall quality of their work on each paper (these comments are written by the Program Director at the end of the oral exam and submitted to the SOE Program Coordinator for the student's permanent file)
- Student feedback, written in bullet-point form, generated for faculty consideration by four of the six students after their comps experience was over. A fifth student submitted a detailed letter framing the work he had produced in the two papers and providing commentary on the process.

## **3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process**

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

Eight Educational Studies faculty members – which includes all full-time graduate faculty members for the Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction and the Ph.D. in Special Education – participated in the development, implementation, and assessment of the new comps model.

The assessment process included refining the initial draft exam model presented by the Program Director in April, making additional changes to the model in August and September based on our summer student's feedback, engaging with individual students taking comps this summer and fall, and critically evaluating student learning through whole group discussions held during our October and November faculty meetings.

The analysis reported here is drawn primarily from our November faculty meeting, when discussion focused on the

following questions:

- What do the comps artifacts **tell us in general** about student learning in our program?
- What do the comps artifacts tell us specifically about student learning related to **outcome #3** (Students will analyze social justice issues in education)?
- What do the comps artifacts tell us specifically about student learning related to **outcome #4** (Students will explain how learning and curriculum theories are used to develop education programs)?
- What do the comps artifacts **tell us about gaps and weaknesses** in our program and things students are NOT able to do around these outcomes?

#### 4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

Discussion of the written comprehensive exam data yielded the following “major findings,” all of which speak to the power of the new model. These findings also provide direction for future program redesign.

##### General findings

- **The exam is academically challenging.**

Oral feedback from Student #1 during August faculty meeting: The exam made me dig deep and grow as a scholar.

Written feedback from Student #3: “I had peers studying in other fields ... who were taking their comps at the same time. It appeared that our project was much more intensive than theirs.”

Written feedback from Student #4: “The overall intentions of this process—from the descriptions of each paper to the opportunity for student autonomy threaded throughout—truly center the scholar.” [After her oral exam, Student #4 emailed thanks to committee members and noted, “Our conversation today felt like a scholarly gift.”]

Written notes in a letter from Student #5: “[My topic] has proven to be as rewarding as I expected it would be going into the comprehensive exam writing process, but also as complex. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to put a concerted block of time toward thinking, reading, and writing about [my topic].”

- **The exam centers student ownership and agency.**

Written feedback from Student #1: “I thought this form of comprehensive exam was very rewarding. I was able to dig deep and make a connection with myself and the reason for me choosing to pursue a Ph.D. degree.”

Written feedback from Student #3: “The reflective nature of both products, especially the theorization of learning, allowed me to realize just how much I have learned and developed at SLU. The process was empowering.”

Written notes in a letter from Student #5: “Writing my scholarly paper has been a process not just of scholarship around a particular body of literature, but also of thinking about how what I have been and will continue writing about the topic fits into my thinking and goals as a teacher and a scholar.”

- **The exam has practical and tangible use for students.**

Oral feedback from Student #1 during August faculty meeting: The scholarly paper is not a dissertation. It’s something to publish in the future, something you and your adviser are working towards.

Written feedback from Student #2: “With the previous format, I was looking back and trying to recall as much information as I could. In the current format, I was looking forward and using the knowledge I had gained in

previous courses to produce something new. I also felt like this paper was something that would stay with me, something I could build upon or use in the future.”

Written feedback from Student #3: “I felt like I came away with a product that I can use in the future, whereas [projects completed by peers in other SOE programs] appeared more an assessment and application of knowledge that was not personalized to their dissertation topic and may not have much future use.”

Written feedback from Student #4: “I now see how this is meant to serve as a springboard into the dissertation phase and it seems like a natural (and necessary) part of the process. I left [the oral exam] conversation with new ideas and renewed inspiration.”

Written notes in a letter from Student #5: “This topic will be central both to my dissertation work and to my subsequent professional career, and I expect to end up incorporating into my dissertation proposal significant portions of what I have written over the last three and a half weeks.”

- **The exam is personal.**

Oral feedback from Student #1 during August faculty meeting: The theorization of learning paper is NOT a summary of courses taken. Instead, it was more a reflection on myself. Whether you pass or fail, you grow as a person, and when you get feedback from your advisers, you grow as a scholar. It's very individualized.

Written feedback from Student #4: “The time, attention, and care that my committee gave to my papers and the oral examination were beyond anything I expected .... I felt heard, challenged, and supported by each of my committee members and truly feel as though I have gained a network of individuals who understand my interests and work.”

- **Faculty members echoed and amplified these student comments.** They noted that on a general level, the new comps model:

shows students' interests and skills;

provides insight into what's meaningful to students (“we can use that to improve our programs and ourselves”);

shows the whole person (“preserves the individuality of students”; “acknowledges that students come with different backgrounds”);

allows us to hear the passion students have in their work;

stretches students intellectually (“identify who you are in the program, how you got there, and where you are going next”);

invites students to surface new ideas and possible ways forward (regarding the dissertation and work they will take up after they complete the program);

centers student agency (“allowed [student] to bloom in the direction she wanted to grow”; “they own it; it's theirs”);

allows us to build stronger, more collaborative relationships with students as we mentor them;

allows us to discuss the needs of students and respond to those needs.

#### **Findings related to outcome #3 (Students will analyze social justice issues in education)**

- **Social justice concerns showed up both directly and indirectly in student artifacts.** Some students addressed social justice issues *directly* in the content of their exam papers: they used the space of the scholarly paper to analyze barriers and ways forward on social justice issues. For example, Student #3 created a conceptual model of “critical catalysts for change” that would lead to more meaningful employment opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities. Student #4 wove together three bodies of literature to make the case for the need to support antiracist early childhood education and the necessary conditions for antiracist early childhood education to happen. Student #6 wrote about the unique needs of special education students engaged in virtual learning during the pandemic and presented strategies teachers should use to respond to those needs.

Students also addressed social justice issues *indirectly* during the exam process. The oral exam for Student #6 focused in part on how he might take what he had learned from his coursework and his practicum experiences in St. Louis schools and use those lessons to effect progressive educational change in his home country of Saudi Arabia.

- **Community connections and/or co-curricular experiences played a crucial role in students' opportunities to analyze social justice issues in education.** On a program level, faculty members were struck by the fact that co-curricular experiences, and the opportunities they made possible for students to do the work of analyzing social justice issues in education, arose not from the intentional design of our program or our comps model, but instead from relationships and connections students established on their own. For example, Student #3 completed a practicum with the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater St. Louis, while Student #4 won a Tomorrow Builders Fellowship with WePower, a Black-led St. Louis nonprofit. Opportunities like these provided crucial context within which students could apply social justice analyses in their scholarly papers.
- **Social justice concerns were not centered intentionally in the comps task.** The fact that social justice issues came up at all in students' comps papers was a result of individual student interests, values, research questions, and contexts. At no point in our comps process or in the program as a whole do we require a lens of social justice (e.g., for the scholarly or practical application work students complete), nor do we intentionally model what that work can look like.

#### **Findings related to outcome #4** (Students will explain how learning and curriculum theories are used to develop education programs)

- **Students take a personal stance on learning and curriculum theories through the new comps model.** Because each student had to define an area of scholarly interest, work with research literature in their field to intervene in a scholarly conversation, and narrate the relevance of this work to their larger professional story, the new comps model shows us how effectively students are able to *synthesize* their knowledge of learning and curriculum theories and *put their knowledge to use* in accordance with their individual interests, values, research questions, and contexts.
- **Beyond explaining learning and curriculum theories, students actively use those theories to shape, inform, and guide their scholarly work.** Instead of parroting back factual information about learning and curriculum theories, students are now applying those theories to envision and/or effect pedagogical change in a particular area of their discipline and/or a particular local educational context.

For example, Student #2 drew on theories of authorship and voice to make a case for the teaching of film in the high school literature classroom; Student #5 considered Bakhtinian theories of dialogism and dialogical pedagogy to make the case for a particular approach to studying talk in the middle school social studies classroom; and Student #4 drew on Deluzian concepts of “assemblages” and “lines of flight” to theorize her own learning during her doctoral program. As one faculty member stated, “they own the content.”

#### **Gaps and weaknesses in our program**

- **Students struggle to identify a research problem and develop research questions.** Their struggle becomes visible when they have to stake out a focus for their scholarly paper (e.g., “actually knowing how to do research and come up with research questions is a problem”; “they take research courses but still struggle with analyzing data”).
- **Students are learning that lit reviews are really hard.** Many students are engaging in lit review work for the first time when they begin their scholarly paper. This is too late, and it means we have missed opportunities to embed this skill development work, and the habits of mind that accompany it, in our courses.
- **Students (at least some) don't think of themselves as researchers.** Despite the fact that we ask them to write a scholarly paper and, later, produce original research for their dissertation, students don't tend to develop and “own” a researcher identity. This is particularly acute for some of the teachers who enroll in our program (e.g., “the term ‘researcher’ seems so lofty”; “[Student #3] kept saying, ‘I’m a practitioner!’”).

## 5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

Our assessment work on comps suggests findings in three areas that could inform the development of a new combined “practitioner” doctoral degree:

- **Regarding community connections and/or co-curricular experiences.** While all of our students have access to classrooms in some form during their doctoral study – whether as teachers in classrooms of their own, practicum students working in the classrooms of others, or graduate teaching assistants working with undergraduate teacher education students in local schools – ***we need to build in an intentional plan for all students to access community contexts, along with school contexts***, during their program of study if we want students to engage more intentionally in social justice analyses in education. Structured internships may provide a way forward and may ultimately distinguish our program from others in the area.
- **Regarding students’ ability to identify a research problem and develop research questions.** Students’ struggles with basic research skills have long been apparent to those of us who guide students through dissertation projects. This problem has not been limited to our doctoral programs in Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education; rather, it is pervasive in the School of Education. Under the leadership of our Associate Dean, this fall ***we have embarked on a systematic review of the qualitative research course sequence***, including a review of syllabi, a student survey, and a focus group with students who are currently at the dissertation stage. We will use the results of this review process to redesign the scope and sequence of our qualitative research courses, which are shared by all graduate programs in the School of Education.
- **Regarding lit reviews.** The scholarly paper is fundamentally rooted in literature review work, as is the dissertation proposal, and yet some students are doing this work for the first time when they reach these stages of the program. Seeing them struggle at this juncture suggests that ***students need more mini-lit review experiences prior to comps***. Integrating different kinds of literature review work, with different focuses and for different purposes, during the coursework phase of the program will strengthen students’ skills and prepare them to do stronger work in their scholarly paper and on their dissertation proposal.
- **Regarding developing and “owning” a researcher identity.** Since the Ph.D. is a research degree, we have long wondered what it means for classroom teachers to earn a Ph.D. if those same teachers don’t transition from K-12 education to pursue tenure track faculty jobs. In the short term, our assessment process tells us that ***students need more modeling and more chances to get involved with research projects*** before they take comps and/or design their dissertation proposal. This goal is challenging since so many of our students work full time and miss out on research opportunities that are afforded to our graduate assistants. Part-time students also miss out on opportunities to attend research lectures presented as part of our SOE Speaker Series and the SOE Colloquium.

## 6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

- A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

We discussed the results and findings from this cycle of assessment in our November and December faculty meetings.

- B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you’ve initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies

- Course content
- Teaching techniques
- Improvements in technology
- Prerequisites

- Course sequence
- New courses
- Deletion of courses
- Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

- |                                |  |   |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Changes to the Assessment Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student learning outcomes</li> <li>• Artifacts of student learning</li> <li>• Evaluation process</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)</li> <li>• Data collection methods</li> <li>• Frequency of data collection</li> </ul> |
|--------------------------------|--|---|

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

See the findings, and related implications for program and course revisions, reported in the discussion for question #5.

In sum, we will use these findings from this round of program assessment in four ways:

1. Ongoing refinement of the new comps model (TBD in Spring 2021 and Fall 2021)
2. Ongoing redesign work on the scope and sequence of our qualitative research courses (currently underway)
3. New curriculum mapping work that will lead us to include literature review assignments in and across our graduate courses (TBD in Spring 2021 and Fall 2021)
4. Continuing visioning work to build a new combined Ph.D. program, which blends our old programs in Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education, for practitioners (TBD in Spring 2021 and Fall 2021)

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

N/A

## **7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes**

### **A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?**

The entire story of our new comps model, presented in question #1, is a result of our work in the assessment process during 2019-20.

### **B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?**

See the process outlined in question #3.

Developing a new comps model is the first tangible within-program change we have made as a result of program assessment work. We will continue to assess the effectiveness of this part of our program as we continue with the doctoral program reinvention process in the coming year.

### **C. What were the findings of the assessment?**

See the discussion outlined in question #4.

### **D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?**

As we see our Ph.D. programs in Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education close due to the Academic Program Review process, we will use all of the information detailed here, specifically the findings reported in questions #3 and #4, to build a new combined “practitioner” Ph.D. program that is stronger, more well-integrated, more connected to the community, more focused on social justice, and more relevant to local teachers than our prior programs.

For that reason, we are holding off on developing new learning outcomes and a new and improved assessment plan for the Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction. We know we need both, but we are committed to using our time well and being intentional in the program reinvention process.

**IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.**

**Written Comprehensive Exam Guidelines**  
**Ph.D. programs in Curriculum & Instruction and Special Education**  
Saint Louis University School of Education  
Fall 2020

### **Overview**

The purpose of the written comprehensive exam is to assess the knowledge and skill you have acquired during the coursework phase of graduate school, evaluate your readiness for continued work at the doctoral level, and help you prepare to write your dissertation.

The exam includes both oral and written components. The written component consists of two papers that are completed at home over a five-week period. Note that students who do not need five weeks of writing time are welcome to move through the exam process more quickly.

- **The Scholarly Paper**, which is based on your primary academic interest, provides space for you to explore an area of scholarly inquiry that is relevant to the research you expect to conduct for your dissertation. In this paper, you will demonstrate your capacity to do independent scholarly research of publishable quality. You will have choice among a menu of options for this paper, which may include mapping an area of scholarly inquiry and proposing an original intervention in the field, exploring a challenging topic in your literature review, or exploring a challenging topic in your methodology.
- **The Theorization of Learning Paper**, which is autobiographical and narrative in nature, provides space for you to produce a critical reading of your work in graduate school. In this paper, you will create a coherent intellectual trajectory out of your program of study and explore the implications of this work for your dissertation and career. Topics may include the experiences, motivations, questions, and goals that brought you to graduate school; seminal learning experiences both in and out of the classroom; issues, questions, theories, methods, and conversations that have shaped your thinking about your field of study and your emerging goals; scholars and publications that provide models for your research; concepts, lenses, and bodies of knowledge that have shifted or deepened your thinking about key issues in your field; your plans going forward for dissertation research and/or the work you plan to do after graduate school.

The oral component consists of an extended conversation with your comps committee, which consists of the program director, your faculty adviser, and a second faculty reader assigned by the program director.

### **The Process**

The exam process begins with an orientation meeting. During this meeting, the program director will explain expectations and answer any questions you may have. After the orientation, you should schedule a meeting with your adviser to establish a focus for your scholarly paper, set a timeline for your work, and think more generally about directions your two papers may take. After up to five weeks of writing time at home, you will deliver both completed papers to your three committee members. Within the next two weeks, you will

attend an oral exam with your committee. Committee members will ask you to explain what you've written and why, respond to questions about the contents of your papers, and think with you about the implications of this work for your research and career. If you are required to revise your work, you will have up to three weeks to complete the revisions. Upon successful completion of the two papers and the oral exam, you will advance to doctoral candidacy.

### **Scholarly Paper**

*Adapted from exam models used at the University of Michigan,  
Stanford University, and the University of Virginia*

The purpose of the scholarly paper is to demonstrate your capacity to do independent scholarly research of publishable quality. Similar to the work one does in writing a manuscript to submit to an academic or professional journal, you will map an area of scholarly inquiry and then make an original intervention—that is, you will take stock of what the research literature tells us about an area of scholarly interest to you, and then, based on the literature, you will articulate questions in need of answers, problems in need of solutions, and ideas for the work you wish to produce through your own future research in this area.

You should work with your adviser to establish a specific focus for your scholarly paper, guided by the following menu of options:

- Identify one topic/subtopic related to your future research plans and develop a thoughtful review of the literature, including gaps and areas for new research.
- Identify a compelling question that guides your thinking about your research plans. Support this question with a research foundation that establishes the need for the research you plan to conduct.
- Identify a problem of practice and develop a literature foundation to support the development of a practice-based intervention.
- Identify a challenging aspect of your research methodology, discuss the tensions and dilemmas associated with this methodology, analyze published studies that have used this approach, and offer methodological solutions to the challenges you have raised.
- Identify a research question and develop a proposed methodological plan for exploring that question. Be sure to articulate the goodness of fit between the chosen methodology and the question/inquiry, and address the ethical issues that arise in pursuing this methodology, including means of mitigating these issues.

Be aware that the writing you produce for your scholarly paper should be modeled on published works of scholarship; that is, your paper should stand on its own as a piece that could be read by a fellow academic or layperson, appreciated for the contributions it makes and the new insights it provides, and evaluated according to traditional manuscript review criteria.

Faculty readers will expect you to demonstrate your ability to do the following, either explicitly or implicitly, in this paper and/or in your oral exam:

- *Frame a research question*
  - State the problem or issue to be addressed and the research question to be posed as a result
  - Elucidate the basis on which the problem or issue and the research question have been identified
  - Show how the problem/question is linked to prior knowledge and research on the topic (e.g., fills a gap, solves a puzzle, confirms or extends an important finding, overcomes conceptual or methodological limitations of previous research on the topic)
  - Justify the practical and/or theoretical importance of the question to be investigated
- *Discuss relevant literature that speaks to the framing of the question*
  - Identify the contributions and shortcomings of empirical research, theoretical contributions, and advocacy pieces on the subject, being clear to distinguish among these different types of work
  - Synthesize the major findings in terms of conceptual and methodological features and contributions of prior research on the topic
  - Identify the major limitations of previous research on the topic
- *Forecast the conceptual and/or methodological basis of a research intervention*
  - Identify relevant conceptual and theoretical perspectives on your problem/research question
  - Make explicit and justify the proposed linkages between concepts/theoretical frameworks, methods, and the problem/research question at hand
  - Describe evidence or data needed to address the research question and why this source of evidence is appropriate for investigating the research question
  - Discuss advantages and limitations of the research design and methods proposed as they bear on addressing the research question
- *Anticipate the contributions your research intervention is poised to make to your field of study and/or the world of education practice*
  - Explain what your work would strive to accomplish
  - Make the case for why this work is needed, by whom, and in what context

### **Theorization of Learning Paper**

*Adapted from an exam model used at the University of Michigan*

The purpose of the theorization of learning paper is to engage in a critical reading of your learning experiences during the coursework phase of graduate school. Through this writing, you will create a coherent intellectual trajectory out of your individual program of study. You will explore the intellectual consequences of this work in the form of scholarly problems you expect to address and/or questions you expect to focus on in future research and career contexts.

Faculty readers will expect you to demonstrate your ability to do the following, either explicitly or implicitly, in this paper and/or in your oral exam:

- Reflect on the experiences, motivations, questions, and goals that brought you to graduate school in the first place
- Identify seminal learning experiences both in and out of the classroom and discuss their significance
- Thematize across coursework about the issues, questions, theories, methods, and conversations that have shaped your thinking about your scholarly field of interest and your emerging goals (both scholarly and professional)
- Name key scholars and publications (empirical research or conceptual/theoretical contributions) drawn from key journals in your field that provide inspiration and models for your own envisioned program of research
- Discuss new concepts, lenses, and bodies of knowledge that have shifted, expanded, or deepened your ability to think and talk about key issues in your field
- Discuss your planned intervention going forward, both in the context of your dissertation research and/or in the context of the professional role you seek after graduate school

### **Tips for Approaching Each Paper**

#### **Scholarly Paper**

- The focus/direction of your scholarly paper should be co-constructed with your adviser. Together the two of you should tailor a plan that fits your interests, purposes, and needs.
- Think of the scholarly paper as a piece of the dissertation (e.g., the literature on just one subtopic of your research area, or the literature on just one of multiple spheres of influence on your dissertation research).
- If you are already at work on your dissertation proposal, view the scholarly paper as a space where you take a small piece of the proposal and use it to create a paper that you might publish—that is, a paper that is written to stand on its own, and one that offers enough depth on the topic that people would learn from it.
- For ideas and models, consider calls for manuscripts in journals that are relevant to your research. Turn to published pieces in those journals for examples of the stance you will take in your writing (e.g., audience, tone, voice, formatting, citations) as well as formatting guidance (e.g., headings & subheadings, references list, citations).

- View the scholarly paper process as one where much of the decision making is up to you: use the process of figuring out the shape, scope, and purpose of your scholarly paper as a way to hone your dissertation interests and your scholarly identity.
- View the comps experience as connected to seeking real world writing opportunities and real world relevance for the work you will be doing. The goal is for you to write your way to greater authority and stronger professional identity as you move through this stage of your doctoral program.

### **Theorization of Learning Paper**

- Use the theorization paper as a space to narrate how you got from there to here. That is, narrate the process that led from the interests that brought you to graduate school to the plans you now have for your dissertation and, perhaps, a broader program of research beyond the dissertation.
- Stitch a thread to connect your various experiences in the program and show how your thinking developed across coursework, time spent in schools and classrooms, and in relation to your personal/professional life outside of graduate school.
- View this paper as one that ultimately presents the why for the work you are doing and illuminates the process that led you to your why.

### **Expectations for Length, References, Titles, Format, Feedback, Standards for Passing, Revisions, Academic Integrity, and Committee Membership**

**Length.** Each paper should be, at minimum, approximately 15-20 double-spaced pages. Some papers will be longer. As you weave together an account of your personal interests with specific claims about the literature of your field, it is crucial that your work is thorough and your ideas are well-developed. Papers shorter than fifteen pages are unlikely to contain the specificity, depth of substance, and effectiveness of argumentation that a comprehensive examination requires.

**References.** Each paper should end with a list of references that will most likely be presented in APA format. The list of references for each paper should include, at minimum, approximately 20-25 individual sources. Reference lists can and should overlap across the two papers, but lists of fewer than 20 references suggest that you have not read deeply enough in your field to be ready to advance to doctoral candidacy.

**Titles.** As is the case with a journal article, each paper should include an original title that represents the paper's content.

**Format.** As stated in the tips section above, look for formatting models in scholarly journals that are relevant to your area of interest. As is the case with most all journal articles, use section headings to break up the contents of each paper. Sections should be used to create

chronological or thematic structure for your work: use them to organize your thinking and your writing. The sections you create should help the reader follow the argument you make about your field of study, your experience in graduate school, and your emerging plans for research.

**Feedback.** Within two weeks of turning in your papers to your committee, you should expect to receive written feedback on the content and quality of your work from each faculty member (in the form of track changes comments and/or summary evaluation at the end of each paper). You should also expect to attend your oral exam within two weeks of turning in your papers. At the oral, your faculty readers will elaborate on their written feedback in person while posing questions that ask you to speak about the contents of your writing and the ideas you have chosen to examine within your field of study.

**Standards for passing.** Similar to the process with journal articles, each paper will receive a mark of passing, revise and resubmit, or redo/retake. If you receive a mark of revise and resubmit on either paper, you will have three weeks from the date of the oral exam to complete a revision. If you receive a mark of redo/retake, you will be required to go through the written comp exam process again next semester, making a second attempt on one or both papers that is guided by the feedback you received from your committee, and sitting for a second oral exam with that same committee. Students who do not pass comps the first time will not be allowed to request a change of committee members.

**Revisions.** If you receive a mark of revise and resubmit, rest assured that being required to revise is not an indication of failure, and should be approached as an opportunity to continue refining/developing your thinking. Be sure to plan time for revision in your schedule. When you turn in your revised work, you will be required to write a cover letter, similar to what one submits to a journal editor with a revise and resubmit manuscript, that details the changes you made in one or both papers based on the feedback you received. You will submit your revised work, along with the cover letter, to your full comps committee. You will not be required to sit for a second oral exam, but if your revisions are not deemed to be adequate by the committee, you may be asked to sit for an interview where we devise a plan for you to complete additional coursework that allows you to deepen your methodological and/or content knowledge before retaking comps.

**Academic integrity.** Students are expected to abide by the Academic Integrity Policy of Saint Louis University. If a student is found to have plagiarized any part of one or both written comprehensive exam papers, the student will automatically fail comps and be dismissed from the program. Plagiarism is defined as: 1) the unethical use of another's scholarship, including work that has been adapted and translated from a scholarly journal written in another language; 2) inappropriate reliance on an editor/writing coach such that the resulting work is not the student's. Cases where plagiarism is suspected will be reviewed by members of the School of Education Academic Affairs Committee and judged according to the Academic Integrity Policy of Saint Louis University.

**Committee membership.** In most cases, the members of a student's written comprehensive exam committee will continue working with the student in subsequent semesters as

dissertation committee members. As such, the program director will populate committees with faculty members who bring expertise to the student's work in disciplinary content, research methods, or both.

### **Criteria for Evaluating the Scholarly Paper**

**Clarity and importance of problem statement.** Paper makes clear what new knowledge is needed, what problems need to be solved, what theory needs to be tested/developed and why; student connects reader quickly with research problem or question.

**Clarity of research question.** Paper makes clear what the student's intervention is intended to accomplish [e.g., confirmatory, discovery, or exploratory] and how the study will advance our understanding of some education-related phenomenon in the student's chosen field.

**Adequacy of literature review.** Context and "intellectual ancestry" of the content is described in a clear, comprehensive, and coherent manner; research question is linked to the literature; review is appropriately critical and selective.

**Adequacy of proposed intervention.** Student's plans to address the problem, respond to a gap in the literature, engage in a well-conceived methodological approach, or make an original contribution to the field of study are original, clear, and compelling.

**Quality of writing.** Prose is clear, succinct, and coherent; student avoids needless repetition, integrates different parts of the paper, uses adequate citations, and provides specificity without making the document overly lengthy; writing is clear of typographical errors, spelling mistakes, and grammar mistakes.

### **Criteria for Evaluating the Theorization of Learning Paper**

**Agency, ownership, initiative.** Student's stake in the program, a chosen field of study, and academic work is visible. The student is present in the work and invested in its undertaking.

**Synthesis.** Student makes connections (past life and present experience, coursework and emerging area of focus, scholarly interests and professional future, theory and practice, personal and professional motivations) across elements of program, research interests, and life outside the program.

**Specificity.** Key moments, conversations, experiences, and discoveries are identified and their significance is unpacked.

**Scholarly engagement.** Student engages in personal-scholarly reflection by placing personal experiences/perspectives in dialogue with scholars, theorists, and thought leaders in the field.

**What's new/so what.** Student takes stock of impact of graduate studies and their consequences/implications going forward for dissertation, research agenda, and career.

Student accounts for what has evolved or changed in their ways of reading, writing, thinking, and engaging as a scholar.

**Quality of writing.** Prose is clear, succinct, and coherent; student avoids needless repetition, integrates different parts of the paper, uses adequate citations, and provides specificity without making the document overly lengthy; writing is clear of typographical errors, spelling mistakes, and grammar mistakes.

### **Overall Assessment of the Scholarly Paper and the Theorization of Learning Paper**

Each reader will judge each paper to be one of the following:

- **Passing**, with all requirements being met to proceed to doctoral candidacy.
- **Revise and resubmit.** Within three weeks of the oral exam, the student will complete revisions on one or both papers as directed by the committee. Committee members will read the student's revised work and decide if the revisions are adequate for passing.
- **Redo/retake.** If the student's work shows fundamental gaps in knowledge or skill, the student will be required to retake comps the following semester with a new focus and a new oral exam. A student is allowed ONE redo/retake. Students who do not pass comps on the second try will be dismissed from the program.
- **Failure to demonstrate the capacity necessary to proceed to the dissertation**, for reasons to be agreed to by the committee and provided to the student in writing.

**RESULTS FORM**  
*Scholarly Paper*  
School of Education

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_

Student's degree program \_\_\_\_\_

Title of paper \_\_\_\_\_

Program director \_\_\_\_\_

First reader (academic adviser) \_\_\_\_\_

Second reader (faculty member assigned by the program director) \_\_\_\_\_

**Committee decision (check only one):**

Passing \_\_\_\_\_

Revise and resubmit \_\_\_\_\_

Redo/retake \_\_\_\_\_

Failure to demonstrate the capacity necessary to proceed to the dissertation \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the paper in relation to stated evaluation criteria. If revisions are required, state the specific aspects of the work that need to be addressed.

**Revisions:**

If revisions were required, state the extent to which the student has or has not satisfied the goals set out for revision, both in the cover letter that details the changes that were made and in the work itself.

Date five-week writing window begins \_\_\_\_\_

Date exam papers submitted to committee \_\_\_\_\_

Date of oral exam \_\_\_\_\_

If required, date revised papers submitted to committee \_\_\_\_\_

Date of final pass/fail decision: \_\_\_\_\_

Program director signature \_\_\_\_\_

First reader signature \_\_\_\_\_

Second reader signature \_\_\_\_\_

**RESULTS FORM**  
*Theorization of Learning Paper*  
School of Education

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_

Student's degree program \_\_\_\_\_

Title of paper \_\_\_\_\_

Program director \_\_\_\_\_

First reader (academic adviser) \_\_\_\_\_

Second reader (faculty member assigned by the program director) \_\_\_\_\_

**Committee decision (check only one):**

Passing \_\_\_\_\_

Revise and resubmit \_\_\_\_\_

Redo/retake \_\_\_\_\_

Failure to demonstrate the capacity necessary to proceed to the dissertation \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the paper in relation to stated evaluation criteria. If revisions are required, state the specific aspects of the work that need to be addressed.

**Revisions:**

If revisions were required, state the extent to which the student has or has not satisfied the goals set out for revision, both in the cover letter that details the changes that were made and in the work itself.

Date five-week writing window begins \_\_\_\_\_

Date exam papers submitted to committee \_\_\_\_\_

Date of oral exam \_\_\_\_\_

If required, date revised papers submitted to committee \_\_\_\_\_

Date of final pass/fail decision: \_\_\_\_\_

Program director signature \_\_\_\_\_

First reader signature \_\_\_\_\_

Second reader signature \_\_\_\_\_