

Comprehensive Exam for the Master's Degree in Special Education (M. Ed.)

Students enrolled in the Master's of Education in Special Education Program take a comprehensive exam towards the end of their academic work to fulfill the requirements for a Master's Degree at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF).

The final comprehensive examination constitutes a synthesis and application of knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired during the course of study leading to the Master's Degree in Special Education. The exam covers topics from the area of special education certification. The exam requires candidates to analyze, evaluate, and apply principles, theories, and understandings about the teaching and learning of students with exceptionalities.

In order to take the comprehensive examination, the Graduate Department at School of Education at UAF establishes the following minimum requirements:

Eligibility

In order to take the comprehensive exam, candidates must have completed the following:

- A candidate must be minimally enrolled in a 3-unit approved course during the term in which the comprehensive examination is taken (i.e., the candidate's final semester).
- Candidates holding general education certification must have accumulated at least 36 credit hours (including the final semester's enrollment) in the Master's Program, and have an approved plan of study on-file with the Graduate School. Initial licensure and master's candidates must have accumulated at least 39 credit hours (including the final semester's enrollment) in the Master's Program, and have an approved plan of study on-file with the Graduate School.
- A candidate must be in good academic standing and must have the approval of the School of Education Graduate Department and the candidate's graduate committee to proceed with the exam.
- Candidates are strongly discouraged from completing their clinical practice experience and comprehensive exam during the same semester.

Registration

Candidates should complete the Advancement to Candidacy Form at least one semester before enrollment in the exam. At the same time, candidates must meet with their advisor or committee chair. The comprehensive exam is a take-home exam and is offered in fall and spring semesters only. The Advancement to Candidacy Form, a schedule for deadlines, and the actual exam dates can be obtained from the website or the graduate advisor.

Duration and Schedule

Candidates have 4 calendar days to complete the exam. The comprehensive exam questions will be emailed on a designated Friday morning at 10:00 a.m. Candidates have until the following Monday morning to electronically or hand-deliver the completed exam. Exams turned in beyond the established dates and times are considered void.

Permitted Materials and Academic Integrity

Candidates are encouraged to use quality resources in responding to the comprehensive exam questions. Such resources include peer reviewed journals, books, professional magazines, and professional websites. Resources to be avoided include encyclopedias (including Wikipedia), dictionaries, the popular press, and community- building, personal, or subjective websites. Additionally, exam responses should not include work previously submitted for academic credit, and must adhere to the highest professional, personal and intellectual standards of academic integrity (note the UAF Student Code of Conduct). During the exam period, all work must be done individually. Students will be required to sign a statement certifying that they had no assistance (content or editing) during the exam period.

Disability Accommodations

Accommodations will be made for students with verified disabilities. Students with disabilities who require accommodations for taking the comprehensive exam must contact the Office for Student Disability Services at UAF. See Part V of this document (Resources & Contact Information) for further information.

Preparing for the Exam

Candidates should contact their committee chair for assistance in preparing for the comprehensive examination. Assistance provided by the chair may include distributing sample questions, offering study tips, scheduling study sessions, and so forth.

Exam Questions

The exam will consist of 4 questions. The exam questions will be based on areas of research interest that have been predetermined by the candidate and their committee chair. The areas of research interest must be related to special education. Additionally, current (within the past 10 years) and readily available research studies must be available on the areas of interest. Candidates are discouraged from choosing topics not related directly to those with disabilities, topics that are obscure, and/or topics that are not well researched.

Format and Length

Responses should be typed. Each response should be a minimum of 1500 words in length (not including the reference page), double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and use a traditional 12-point font (Times New Roman, Courier, Arial, etc.). The formatting should adhere to APA (6th edition) guidelines. Candidates should begin their responses by identifying the specific prompt they are to answer. Each response should be based on research with current citations (10 citations minimum per response). Responses should be written in third person unless the question prompts for a personal reflection. The APA style reference page should reflect only citations used in the responses.

Evaluation

Exams will be graded by the candidate's committee or program faculty, and evaluated based on the following considerations:

- Did the candidate grasp the central intent of the question and write directly to that topic?

- Was the flow of language smooth and well structured? Were the responses grammatically correct?
- Did the use of language reflect a clear and extensive mastery of the professional vocabulary of the topic?
- Were the generalizations supported by sufficient details, documentary evidence, and appropriately cited sources?
- Did the scope of content reflect reasonable mastery of the topic?
- Did the documentation fairly reflect the relevant literature of the field?
- Was the total volume of the writing appropriate for the time allowed for the writing?
- Were the elements of content “accurate?”

Note: Candidate comprehensive exam responses will be submitted to SafeAssign, an electronic plagiarism checker.

Results

Candidates will be notified of the results of their exam in writing approximately 2 weeks after the exam is submitted. The ratings for the exam are pass or fail. The committee chair will contact students who do not pass the Comprehensive Exam to determine re-examination options.