



Department of **Education Policy and Social Analysis**
Teachers College, Columbia University

Sociology & Education Program

Culminating Integrative Experience

Option 1: Comprehensive examination. The comprehensive examination for the M.A. and Ed.M. degree in Sociology and Education is designed to give students an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned during the master's program. The exam is a take-home exam, administered on an individual basis. It has two parts.

Part A will be based on the student's particular interests. The student will draft 4-6 essay questions related to areas of sociology of education, as well as education policy, that you have become most interested in during your time at TC. The questions should not be too broad in scope and should be answerable in 4-5 double-spaced pages.

For each essay question the student drafts for Part A, he or she will also develop a short bibliography of approximately 6-8 relevant readings that they foresee using to answer each of the essay questions. These mini-bibliographies should include books, journal articles, and policy reports drawn from readings in courses they have taken that are of special interest to them and that will enable them to formulate their answer to each question they submit.

Both the bibliography and the sample questions should be submitted to the student's advisor for initial approval at least six weeks before the student wants to start writing the exam. Submitted questions and bibliographies may go through two or three revisions based on the advisor's review. From this list of questions, the program faculty will then select two questions for the student to answer as part of their take home exam.

Part B of the exam will be a set of questions, developed by the faculty, that cover core themes in the sociology of education, including: foundations of sociology and education, education policy, stratification and inequality, and the sociology of organizations in education.

To prepare for this part of the exam, students should develop a 20-30 citation bibliography that includes books and journal articles drawn from courses they have taken in their core Sociology and Education Program courses that represent major themes in the field. Some overlap between this bibliography and the shorter bibliographies developed for each individual question submitted for Part A is natural and expected. For Part B of the exam, students will be given two possible faculty-written questions and will be asked to respond to one question of their choice. All questions should be answered in 4 to 5 double-spaced page essays.

The student and advisor will agree on a start date for the take-home exam period, which lasts two weeks. On that date, before 5 pm, students will be e-mailed their exam, which will consist of two questions selected for Part A and the set of possible questions for Part B. During the two-week (14 day) exam period, students may make use of any academic resources they deem appropriate as they write their responses. Students may also consult with other students taking the exam, but each answer should be written by the student and should be original and unique.

Students will submit the completed examination by e-mail to their advisor and copy to Katherine Y. Chung (kc2610@tc.columbia.edu), the Sociology and Education Program Manager in the EPSA office, at the end of the two-week period. A return email from any of these individuals serves as confirmation that the exam has been submitted.

All examinations are graded on a Pass/Fail basis; they are assessed on whether the responses fully answer the questions asked; utilize central ideas and evidence from readings and courses to make a coherent argument; and are written in a clear and compelling manner. If a student should fail one or more questions, he or she will have an opportunity to retake that portion of the exam. Only one retake is permitted.

Timeline for the Master's Exam:

1. Contact your advisor no less than two months before you plan to take the exam to go over the requirements and timeframe
2. Turn in your first draft of sample questions and bibliography to your advisor for approval no less than 6 weeks before the exam
3. Schedule the start date for your exam with your advisor and SOE program manager at least two weeks before taking the exam
4. Make sure to pay attention to the graduation deadlines to determine when the exam needs to be completed and graded – e.g., early January for February graduation and end of April for May graduation. The exam period must end in time for your advisor to grade it before the pink, supplemental forms are due to the TC Registrar for the graduation deadline for that particular term. The exact dates and deadlines for master's degree completion are published for each fall and spring semester in the TC Academic Calendar. The necessary duration of the grading period is determined by your advisor's schedule at the end of the semester. Please discuss this with your advisor when scheduling your exam.

Sample Questions from Prior Exams:

1. Many racial and ethnic minority students do not succeed in school. Consider some of the most compelling explanations for this vexing problem within the sociology of education literature. Based on your analysis of this literature, what school reform strategies would you propose to improve the academic achievement of minority students?
2. What forces increase or reduce the likelihood that a social/educational concern will be elevated to a policy problem?
3. David Labaree has described three major goals of American education. Do these three educational goals—democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility—take on different meanings for different groups? If so, in what ways, and why?
4. Discuss the various ways of defining and measuring equality of educational opportunity. In your view, which of these approaches is most compelling and why?
5. Does school choice contradict or support the concept of meritocracy within schools? Why or why not?
6. Forms of capital – human, economic, social, and cultural – have received much recent attention in research and theorizing about the determinants of educational success. Define cultural

capital, and consider how it may contribute to our understanding of the schooling experiences of a particular group, such as African-Americans.

Option 2: Master's integrative project. With special permission, students in the M.A. and Ed.M. programs in Sociology and Education may satisfy the culminating integrative experience requirement by preparing a research-based project. Master's students who opt to complete the integrative project are required to enroll in EDPS 6021 Sociological Research Methods – Reporting for 1 point in the Fall and 2 points in the Spring semester of the year in which they plan to graduate. The class meets every other week in the Fall semester and more frequently in the Spring semester until the middle of April.

This 8-month class is specifically designed for second- or third-year master's students who want to graduate in May. First-year Master's students are not eligible. *Students who do not participate in the class during Fall semester will not be allowed to enroll in the Spring semester.*

Master's Integrative Project Requirements:

The research project can range in size and scope from a full-blown study to a research paper that is equivalent to two term papers. Average length of the essay will be 40-70 pages plus references.

Projects will either entail original data collection and analysis, a new analysis of an existing data base, or a sophisticated and theoretical review of existing research. The first two options are considered “empirical integrative projects” and the third option is considered a “theoretical integrative project.”

Empirical integrative projects will include several chapters/sections, including an introduction that frames the study and speaks to its significance, a review of relevant literature and a conceptual framework, an explanation of methodology, discussion of the findings and analysis, and implications and recommendations for policy, practice and/or further research. You can employ either quantitative or qualitative methods, but you need to make sure your methods are appropriate given the research question you are trying to answer. Similarly, you can collect your own data or analyze an existing data base. If you are collecting your own data, you need to be realistic in terms of the scope of the study and your timeframe.

Theoretical integrative projects will include more extensive reviews of literature on a particular topic or issue. They should also include an introduction that frames the project and its contribution and several chapters or sections framed around different areas of the literature. These projects should have solid conceptual framework that tells the reader something new and important about this body of literature – e.g. what is missing from that literature? What new insights can we glean from this literature? Why is this particular body of literature important?

Timeline for the Master's Integrative Project:

Students must enroll in EDPS 6021 for 1 point in the Fall semester.

Reviews of literature and methodology sections of the project are drafted by early December.

Data collection occurs from late November/early December through January or early February.

Final drafts of entire projects are due in mid- to late-March.

Final projects are due the third week of April for May graduation.

If a student's master's integrative project is judged unsatisfactory by the instructor of EDPS 6021 and/or his or her advisor, the student will be required to take the M.A. or Ed.M. comprehensive examination, as appropriate, under the terms described in Option 1 above.