

UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
School of Education



Graduate Handbook

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## **PREFACE**

This handbook is designed to provide a description of the School of Education's policies, procedures, and guidelines that are important to the success of graduate students as they complete the requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree. It outlines key aspects of the program, highlights important guidelines, presents important forms and paradigms, and sets forth critical time frames. It serves as a supplement to the Graduate Catalog and provides students and faculty greater specificity with regards to the operational procedures that may not be presented in the graduate catalog. Students and faculty are encouraged to become familiar with its content. Successful progression through the program is based, in part, on each student's familiarity with procedures and guidelines contained therein with attention to critical timelines and processes.

The faculty of the School of Education wish all students success as they progress through the various stages of the Masters of Arts in Education program. We hope that your experiences throughout the program will equip you with the requisite knowledge, abilities, competencies, skills, and disposition to make a vital contribution to the society you elect to serve.

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## MAE Program Components

The Master's of Arts in Education (MAE) program is intended primarily to prepare highly competent professionals in any of the three concentration areas listed below. These are Education Administration and Supervision, Counseling and Guidance, and Teaching. Each student selects one of these as an area of concentration. Incorporated under the teaching concentration are the sub-areas of Special Education, Reading, and Technology. Any student electing the Teaching concentration can select 15 credits from one of the three sub-areas or 15 credits from a combination of the three sub-areas.

The 36 credit hour program devotes 15 credits to core courses, 15 credits to concentration courses and 6 credits to the thesis option. For students pursuing the no-thesis option, an Independent Study 3-credit course is required along with a 3-credit elective taken from among the graduate education courses. Successful completion of the comprehensive examination is an additional requirement for the no-thesis option.

Enrollment in *Edu. 600 Thesis* for the first semester is for 6 credit hours and 1 -credit for each subsequent semester until the thesis is completed. The School of Education requires its students to complete the thesis in no more than four semesters. Students must complete the MAE program within five years of matriculation. Under no circumstance will an extension be granted to exceed 7 years. The Graduate Catalog specifies the conditions under which such extensions may be granted. See section on General Admission Requirements.

## Credit Load for Graduate Students

The MAE program is mainly a part-time program since the majority of its clients are full-time employees. Students who enroll for 9 credits are considered full-time and must receive permission from the Provost to be so enrolled, **if they are full-time employees**. Students wishing to pursue full-time graduate studies should consult with their academic advisor or School of Education Dean to receive appropriate counseling on the efficient progression through the program. Full-time enrollees must recognize that they may or may not be able to carry a full load due to the course offerings. Students who take two courses per semester, should ensure that one is a concentration course. Ideally, students should take one concentration and one core course to move through the program expeditiously. Appendix A identifies the paradigms for each concentration area using a part-time enrollment schedule of 6 credits per semester.

## Dates & Deadlines

Students are responsible for any deadline dates established by the School of Education. Typical deadline dates apply to application for comprehensive examinations each semester, thesis submission for defense examinations, removal of incompletes, and submission for approval to conduct study by the V. I. DOE. No thesis defense will be scheduled after November 15 in the Fall semester and April 15 in the Spring semester or the following working day if these dates fall on a weekend. Students should check the catalog, School of Education office, and other publications periodically for deadline dates.

## **Program Advisement**

Each student who enrolls in the graduate program is assigned an academic program advisor, a full-time faculty whose primary function is to guide the student through the program. Faculty advisors consult with students about appropriate course enrollment, sequencing of course work, signing off on registration forms, ensuring students have prerequisites for appropriate courses, knowledge of deadline dates, and offering advice on other matters related to the program. Each advisor keeps a Graduate Student Program Form on file to record each student's progression through the program. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to seek academic counseling from their advisors. However, students have the ultimate responsibility to be familiar with and follow the university's program requirements.

Students accepted to the graduate program should seek advice prior to registering for their courses. Similarly, students should identify an area of concentration prior to enrolling in the first set of courses. Depending on the area of concentration, a specific core course may be required as a prerequisite for a given concentration area. By consultation with the advisor, students can enroll in courses in the proper sequence and eliminate prolonging their time the program.

## **No-Thesis Option**

Regardless of the area of concentration, all students are required to select one of two options to complete the core requirements for the MAE degree. These are a thesis option and a no-thesis option. Students choosing the no-thesis option are required to complete Edu. 530: Independent Study and an additional 3-credit course taken from the graduate education courses. In addition, successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination is required. Edu. 530 is a three credit course that is to be completed in one semester. To be eligible for the course, students must have the following prerequisites: 18 credits that include Edu. 500, Edu. 501 and three concentration courses.

Once a student is registered in Edu. 530, an independent study advisor is assigned to guide the student through the process. The Office of the School of Education informs the student of his or her advisor and the student initiates the process. The Independent Study Project form is completed and filed in the office once the project prospectus is developed. A "pass" or "fail" grade is issued upon completion of the independent study. Students who receive an "I" (incomplete) grade for this course have until the midterm of the following semester to remove the grade and submit the final project. Failure to remove an "I" results in the "I" converting to an "F". Students who choose the no-thesis option must also sit and pass the comprehensive examination.

## **Comprehensive Examination**

### **Overview**

The comprehensive examination is designed to assess graduate students knowledge of course material and their ability to synthesize course work and personal learning as they relate to issues and problems in education. As such questions are developed from a wide range of topics and assess students' knowledge and ability to apply, analyze, and synthesize concepts, theories, and practices in a well written coherent essay at the post-baccalaureate level. The examination

is based upon integration of the core subjects with each of areas of concentration.

### **Admission and Administration**

Students are advised to sit the exam in the final year of their program. Admission is through a petition application to the Office of DOE. Appendix D identifies this form. The comprehensive examination is usually administered on the second Friday in November and April in the Fall and Spring semesters respectively. A full-time faculty administers the test on the same day and time on each campus.

### **Format**

The comprehensive examination consists of three one-hour essays selected from the core and concentration areas. One question is to be answered from the core and two from the student's concentration area (i.e. Educational leadership, Teaching, or Counseling). The student is given a choice of three core questions from which to select one to answer. Similarly, alternatives are provided from which students answer two concentration questions.

### **Scoring**

The answer to each question is reviewed and scored independently and "blind" by three faculty readers. Papers are identified only by the last four digits of a student's social security number. An answer is rated as "pass" or "fair". In order to pass the comprehensive examination, at least two passes must be obtained for each question. One failure of either core or concentration questions result in failure of that component. A student who passes one component but fails another can retake the failed section (core or concentration) in a subsequent sitting. Failure of two retakes of the comprehensive examination results in dismissal from the graduate program. Students are encouraged to seek explanation from the Division Chair regarding reasons for their failure on any item. The comments by each reviewer for a failing item are recorded and read to the student.

### **Preparation for the Comprehensive Examination**

In general, candidates for the examination are strongly advised to review their class syllabi course objectives, course notes, papers, textbooks, and other course material along with the examination of major works in the field. Application of major theories and concepts and their implication to classrooms and schools should be reviewed as well. In addition, candidates should perfect their writing skills and confer with advisors and or instructors to resolve any uncertainties. Students should call the Office of the DOE to clarify deadlines dates for the exam.

### **Summary Steps for the No-thesis Option**

#### **Steps**

1. Student is assigned an Independent study advisor upon registration in course.

2. Student initiates contact with advisor and consults on project.
3. Student files Independent Study Project Plan in the division.
4. Student develops and completes project.
5. Student submits to instructor
1. Instructor submits copy to the Office of the division by the date of grade submission.

### **Thesis Option**

Students who select the thesis option, must register for 6 credits the first semester and 1 credit for the remaining three semesters. Students are allowed up to four semesters to complete the thesis process. Approval to extend this time is required by the Provost. Students must show cause why such an extension is needed. The request may or may not be granted.

The writing of a thesis involves conducting an empirical investigation, which requires the observation and collection of original data and related activities. This is not a research term paper. Upon officially registering for Edu. 600: *Thesis*, each student is assigned a thesis advisor or thesis chair. That person is a full-time faculty within the Division who has the major responsibility for guiding the student through the process to the completion of the thesis defense. Students are notified, generally in writing, of their thesis advisor as soon as the official roster identifies the student as a registrant.

### **Role of the Student**

Each student must initiate contact with his or her thesis chair to start the process for the thesis proposal development. Unlike other courses in the program, there is no set class time for Edu. 600 and Edu. 530. It is not unusual therefore for students to attend less regularly to the commitments required in pursuing the thesis. This usually results in unpleasant consequences for all involved. Graduate students are advised to establish contact with the thesis advisor immediately and establish a schedule for regular meeting times to discuss the development of the thesis proposal and thesis. Students should adhere to schedule and work diligently in making corrections and revisions as directed by the thesis Chair and second reader. Because writing a thesis occurs in stages and is a process of writing and rewriting, students are urged to devote a great deal of time to this undertaking.

### **Grading of the Thesis**

Students who make steady progress in the development of the thesis proposal and thesis, as determined by their thesis advisor, receive a grade of "I" or incomplete each semester until the thesis process is completed.

## **Development of Thesis Proposal**

Different advisors use different mechanisms for guiding the student through the thesis process, however the following ideas represent what students should expect as being the norm. It is important to note that the development of a thesis occurs in phases. The first major phase is the development of a thesis proposal. Several sub-phases exist within this to include:

- 1). identification of a workable research problem /question for investigation;
- 2). extensive review of the literature to set the background for the problem.
- 3). identification of the research question(s) and or hypothesis(es);
- 4). identifying the purpose of the study and the definition of terms
- 5). establishment of the significance of the study.

This is a process that may take weeks to accomplish with several revisions and frequent conferencing before the *final* chapter one is approved. It is not unusual to spend a good, deal of time trying to narrow your topic and fleshing out precisely what the study is intended to investigate. Perhaps the most daunting aspect of this major phase is selecting a workable problem for investigation and identification of the variables and how they are related for investigation.

To assist students in this phase, a thorough review of the literature in their area of interest is an imperative. Students should consult refereed journal articles, empirical studies conducted in their area of interest as well as expert opinion by scholars and practitioners. Facility with online databases, searching strategies, and referencing citations is critical.

What is presented in Chapter I directly impacts the content and form of chapters two and three. Appendix E identifies the Thesis Proposal Guidelines (TPG) that serve to guide the student in the development of each chapter. Students will note from the TPD that a working reference section is submitted with the development of each chapter. Thus, the references are developed, updated, and responded to throughout the process.

### **Chapter Two**

Preparation of chapter two requires an extensive review of the literature, which is essential prior and during the proposal phase. Students must survey and read the literature to gain knowledge of research in their area(s) of interest. Organizing studies by purpose, sample, methodology, and findings, enable the student to see similarities, differences, and trends in findings and methodology. This will be especially useful for the establishment of background information for the investigation and the literature review chapter. It is also important in the discussion chapter the student compares his or her findings to that in the literature. The American Psychological Association (APA) manual is required for the preparation of the thesis. It presents guidelines for the preparation of chapter two.

### **Chapter Three**

Preparation of chapter three is contingent upon the plan set forth in chapter one. This chapter focuses on the research design or methodology and discusses the proposed sample, setting, procedures for data collection, instrumentation, and proposed analysis of the data. The

instrument is a critical mechanism in this chapter as it is the venue through which the data are collected. Construction of the instrument is a significant undertaking. If a nonstandardized instrument is being used, a pilot of the instrument is recommended. In such cases, a description of the pilot and its effects on the final instrument must be included in the proposal as well. A copy of the instrument forms a part of the thesis proposal. This is also one of the requirements for inclusion to the VIDOE. Appendix F presents some guidelines for conducting and reporting pilot results. While variation is natural in guiding students through the thesis process, graduate should expect these as endemic to the guidance they receive. Students should seek and expect substantive feedback on all documents presented to the thesis advisor and should work diligently to address all issues.

In general, the development of chapters one, two, and three represents the total thesis proposal process. Students should not be writing the thesis proposal as though it is a term paper. It is a guided process that involves collaboration and approval of each chapter by the thesis committee.

Once a workable problem of investigation has been established and the thesis chair has reviewed the drafts of chapter one, a second reader is selected to provide additional guidance through the process. While the precise point of entry for the second reader into the process varies, the general rule of thumb is as soon as possible and prior to the completion of Chapter 1. The second reader is a qualified professional in or outside the School of Education. This person is selected by the thesis Chair in consultation with the student.

### **Thesis Committee**

The Thesis Chair and second reader comprise the thesis committee. Graduate students should submit all revisions to both committee members throughout the process and seek direction from both persons. It is important to note that the thesis Chair is the main individual who receives compensation through allotted credit for the development of the thesis. In instances of discrepancies in advice may be given, the student is advised to comply with that of the thesis Chair. However, faculty should discuss these discrepancies openly, and resolve them in clear knowledge of the student. The Thesis Committee members form should be completed and submitted to the Office of the School of Education upon establishment of the thesis committee.

### **Thesis Proposal Guidelines**

Upon the initial meeting with the thesis Chair, the student should be given the Thesis Proposal Guidelines (TPG). Attention to the form may not be addressed immediately unless discussions with the student review a workable problem investigation. Students should use the TPG to assist them in preparing each chapter of the Proposal as directed by the thesis Chair and thesis committee. Though the student receives the TPG from the onset, each chapter is developed individually at the direction of the committee. Though the guidelines are not exhaustive, they represent the major ideas requisite for the preparation of the thesis proposal.

### **Thesis Development: Phase One**

A well-prepared proposal is the first major phase of the process and represents a major portion of the work. Upon completion of the proposal, the committee registers the Thesis Proposal Approval form identified in Appendix H in the office of the School of Education. Approval of the thesis proposal authorizes the student to collect data. Prior to data collection, the student must receive approval from the Virgin Islands Department of Education to conduct research in the public schools. The pertinent forms to begin the process can be secured from the office of the School of Education, your thesis Chair, or the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDOE). Students and faculty are advised to follow the timetable established by the VIDOE for research proposals and pay special attention to time frames for responding. This should be considered in planning the timetable for program completion. A signed COPY of the Thesis Proposal Approval form should accompany *Your* research Proposal request to the VIDOE.

### **Thesis Development: Phase Two**

The second major phase involves preparation for and collection of the data. Students are required to follow the plan set forth and approved in the proposal to avoid any difficulties later with this phase. Students are expected to follow ethical principles in data collection and not fabricate or knowingly misrepresent information.

### **Thesis Development: Phase Three**

Once the data are collected, organization of the data, and statistical analyses and interpretation of the data are another major phase in the process. This is another time consuming phase that involves putting data into the computer, running analyses on the data, analyzing Output, and finding patterns and statistical results as appropriate. Preparation of the results in a fashion that is understandable and consistent with the purpose and research questions or hypotheses tested can be a formidable task. This often requires frequent and multiple revisions to present the data in an organized meaningful fashion.. This culminates in Chapter four, the Results of the Study chapter.

### **Thesis Development: Phase Four**

The final phase of the thesis process is the submission of the completed document, preparation for the thesis defense, and submission of the final corrected document. Students are reminded to write the document in the past tense including the Proposal chapters.

It is important that students keep the deadlines dates for final defense date as described earlier in the document. Guidelines for the thesis defense are discussed elsewhere in this handbook. Students wishing to complete the thesis to meet graduation requirements either in the Fall or Spring semester should follow the timelines established by the university.

### **Thesis Examiner**

Securing a thesis examiner is the responsibility of the Thesis Chair. She or he should request an examiner from the Dean of the Division of Education no later than two weeks prior to

the anticipated date for the defense. That two-week courtesy allows the examiner to prepare for the defense. This is consistent with requests from examiners and the practice within the division. To ensure your timely defense examination, students should target to complete the process around the mid-semester or soon after.

### **Thesis Defense Process**

When the thesis committee determines that the thesis is ready to be defended, the thesis Chair requests an examiner from the Dean. Once the examiner is secured, the Thesis Chair arranges the **time, date**, and **venue** for the examination in consultation with the second reader. The candidate then completes the first portion of the Petition for Defense of Thesis form and gives it to the Thesis Chair who, in turn, sees to the completion of the form and submits it to the Dean. This should be on file no later than two weeks before the scheduled defense date. The examiner may be from any unit within the university with expertise in the area of study and a doctorate from an accredited institution. However, if the second reader is from outside the unit, the examiner must be selected from within the unit. The thesis defense date must be set for no later than April 15 in the spring semester and November 15 in the fall. If either of these dates falls on the weekend, defense date will be set for the first working day thereafter.

### **Thesis Defense**

In preparation for the defense, the student submits two copies of the thesis to the thesis chair and a copy to the second reader. The unit Dean forwards the thesis to the examiner at least two weeks in advance. The Thesis chair directs the defense meeting initially and then turns it over to the examiner. The Thesis chair is not to assume a role of defending the thesis or the candidate. Guests are invited to observe the process at the request and or approval of the candidate. Graduate students are encouraged to invite other students to observe the process and help demystify the defense meeting. Generally, the candidate presents a brief overview of the thesis (purpose, questions/hypothesis, significance sample, findings). The examiner then assumes a major role in the meeting and asks questions of the candidate. He or she may invite the committee to do so as well. At the end of the examination process, the candidate and guests depart and the examiner offers a decision on the thesis and defense. The following categories are used in making decisions about the defense:

**Pass- unqualified.** (No corrections except for minor and limited editing).

**Pass -conditional** (Correction of substance and editorial changes must be made and submitted to the Thesis Chair for approval)

**Pass - qualified** (Corrections of substance and editorial changes must be made and submitted to the Thesis Committee and Examiner for approval)

**Fail**

Once one of the above categories is decided upon, the Chair invites the students into the meeting room and informs him or her of the decision. The Thesis Chair is then responsible for ensuring that all corrections to the document are understood and that the corrected final documents reflect all changes. Depending on the category, the Thesis Chair ensures that the revisions are made and submitted to the office of the Dean. Four originals are to be submitted to

the Thesis Chair for distribution to:

1. The Office of the School of Education
2. The Ralph M. Paiewonsky Library (St. Thomas or St. Croix). A copy will be made by the campus library for the other campus.
3. Thesis advisor and second reader

Students are urged to check with the library to ascertain the specific procedures for binding their theses. The cover of theses will be hardbound black, with the title and name of the author on the front cover and the identification on the spine.

### **Summary Steps for the Thesis Option**

#### **Steps**

- Student assigned a project advisor upon registration in the course.
- Student initiates contact with advisor and establishes schedule for conferencing.
- Student meets with advisor to identify a workable problem investigation.
- Student prepares Chapter I in consultation with advisor.
- Second reader is selected.
- Thesis Committee Form is filed in the office of the division
- Student develops thesis proposal as directed by committee.
- Thesis Chair submits Thesis Proposal Approval form to the unit.
- Student requests permission to conduct research from the V.I. DOE as appropriate.
- Student conducts research upon approval.
- Student completes Chapters 4 and 5 and revises 1-3.
- Chair requests examiner for thesis.
- Student petitions for the defense.
- Defense meeting is conducted.
- Student submits corrections and thesis chair reviews changes.
- Thesis Chair submits grade for course