

QUALIFYING EXAM GUIDELINES

PhD Program in Technology in Education and Second Language Acquisition (TESLA)

The Nature and Purpose of the Qualifying Exam

The qualifying examination for the Ph.D. program in **Technology in Education and Second Language Acquisition** (TESLA) reflects the guiding principles set forth in 2006 by the College of Education. In particular, it foregrounds the College's position that the exam "...represents a terminal performance where students demonstrate a level of scholastic mastery that allows them to begin the task of independent research." As the College of Education guiding principles themselves remind us, "The QE represents an experience that is greater than the sum of the coursework that precedes it." The focus of this evaluation is not on testing the student's accumulated content-specific knowledge but on determining if he or she has the requisite skills to produce a successful dissertation.

The program-specific qualifying examination for the Ph.D. program in TESLA takes its direction from the program's core values of (1) interdisciplinarity (i.e. integration of SLA and IT), (2) collaborative professional development, (3) state-of-the-art scholarship, and (4) principled pedagogical application. Tasks drawing on these elements will allow program faculty to assess examinees' foundational knowledge, critical thinking skill, academic written and oral expression, and understanding of research design.

Description of Learner Outcomes

As TESLA is an interdisciplinary doctoral program bringing together the fields of Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology and administered by the College of Education, the ability to **integrate information from different disciplines** constitutes a key competency of a successful TESLA doctoral student. In these disparate fields, we expect students to demonstrate knowledge of the major theories of language learning, best instructional practices, and the contexts and underpinnings of foreign and second language education.

We also look for the **articulation of a critical position** regarding select aspects of the field, and such a stance should be carefully and convincingly integrated into the discussion of the professional knowledge base. Related to an understanding of the relative merits of one concept or construct vis-à-vis another is the ability to **apply theory to practice**.

Likewise, our exam places high priority on the **conceptualization of research in action** and the operationalization of the various steps involved in carrying out an effective study. Not only do we expect students to describe the components of a viable plan but to offer a cogent rationale for their inclusion.

Another essential learner outcome concerns control over the **conventions of written academic discourse**. This competency reaches beyond linguistic facility and organization of the text needed to communicate in this special genre. The examinee's ability to accurately and ethically present and defend an argument in a written scholarly context is crucial as well.

Finally, the doctoral committee will have the opportunity to engage the examinee in an organized face-to-face feedback session. Its purpose is to provide the candidate with dynamic and productive feedback. The meeting shall be between the candidate and his/her committee chair. It shall be the candidate's responsibility to arrange the meeting date and time.

Procedures for the Qualifying Exam

- a) The student will meet with his or her assigned doctoral committee chairperson at least one semester prior to taking the qualifying exam. The purpose of this meeting will be to identify subject areas of expertise and interest within the following three concentrations: (1) second language acquisition, (2) instructional technology, and (3) teacher education. The doctoral committee and student may modify the student's suggested topics if the members of the doctoral committee find them to be inappropriate for the exam.
- b) The "Application to Take Doctoral Qualifying Examination" form will be completed and submitted to the College of Education's Office of Graduate Studies by the deadline stated on the College website. Students may not sit for the qualifying exam without written approval from this office.
- c) The doctoral committee will prepare three task prompts based on the areas of expertise and interest suggested by the student.
- d) The qualifying examination will be scheduled for a 3-week period beginning on the same date as the officially posted College of Education (i.e., college-wide) exam. The TESLA exam period will end 3 weeks later at 5:00 pm. (e.g., exam begins Wednesday, October 4 and ends Wednesday, October 25). *Qualifying exams may not be scheduled during the summer unless all members of the student's doctoral committee agree to participate during summer session.*
- e) The exam questions will be emailed to the student on the first day of the three-week exam period. As the exam will not be proctored, the examinee's work must be completed independently. There is to be no discussion of the substance of the qualifying exam with the members of the doctoral committee during this period, although at the outset of the process, the chair of the doctoral committee may provide procedural clarification. Examinees may not seek assistance from peers or faculty at USF or any other institution, and are strongly urged to review the online plagiarism tutorial created by the Center for 21st Century Teaching Excellence which can be found at <http://www.cte.usf.edu/plagiarism/plagindex.html>.
- f) On the final day of the examination period, the student will submit his or her written responses to the chair of the doctoral committee and will also send electronic copies of the written responses via email attachment to all members of the doctoral committee.
- g) Within two weeks after the end of the written exam period, each member of the doctoral committee will submit the three task evaluations for each candidate to the chair of the doctoral committee. Lack of consensus among committee members will be collaboratively resolved through discussion led by the committee chair.
- h) Students who fail any of the tasks on the written exam must sit for a different written exam no sooner than ten weeks after the end of the initial exam period. A review session with the doctoral committee and student will be convened within two weeks of the committee's decision to review areas of the exam that exhibited substantial weakness. A student may retake the written exam only once. Failing the exam a second time will result in dismissal from the program.
- i) Students who pass all three tasks on the written exam must schedule the feedback session with their committee chair.
- j) Following the feedback session, and for administrative purposes, the committee chair notifies the College of Education and the TESLA Director of the results.
- k) Before students can be admitted to candidacy, Supervisory Committee members must complete a "Verification of Doctoral Qualifying Examination Results" form and submit it to the COEDU Coordinator of Graduate Studies (EDU 106); original signatures are required.

- l) After the feedback session, students who pass the QE must submit application for candidacy to the COEDU Coordinator of Graduate Studies (EDU 106) and, upon approval, may proceed to the preparation of the dissertation proposal.

QE Written Format and Evaluation

The examinees will be given three distinct tasks. Each task will integrate the topics identified by the student and his or her doctoral committee chairperson from the general fields of Second Language Acquisition, Foreign Language Education, and Instructional Technology. Required sections for each task will be discussed specifically in the written exam prompt.

The format described below will be used for the preparation of the qualifying exam responses. Students are expected to put forth a scholarly effort. This effort should demonstrate the breadth and depth of the student's knowledge of the designated topic and address its significance to the broader fields of Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology. The written document should provide the exam committee with sufficient evidence to judge the student's intellectual potential to be an independent researcher.

APA format should be followed for all aspects of the written responses. Each task response (3 total) should consist of a **minimum of 20 and a maximum of 25 double-spaced pages**, excluding pages designated for works cited but including figures and tables. (If at all possible, such figures/tables should be placed at appropriate places within the text.) Text should appear in Times New Roman size 12 font with margins of 1 inch on all sides.

The doctoral committee will evaluate the student using the following rubric for each of the three tasks.

	Evaluation Criteria for Written Exam	Yes/No
Foundational Knowledge	Candidate demonstrates expert or near expert knowledge of relevant theories of language learning, best instructional practices, and the contexts/underpinnings of foreign and second language education	
Critical Thinking	Candidate clearly articulates and defends a critical position which is successfully integrated into discussion of the foundational knowledge base	
Application of Theory to Practice	Candidate skillfully applies theoretical constructs to practical settings	
Research Design	Candidate insightfully and thoroughly conceptualizes a research plan based on a topic of his or her interest	
Written Expression	Candidate exhibits a high degree of control over the conventions of written academic discourse and argumentation*	
OVERALL TASK	Candidate passes task	

** no bulleting of points, use of excessive quotes to advance an argument, or use of excerpts from work previously submitted or published by the student*

QE Face to Face Feedback Session

Upon receiving notification from the doctoral committee chairperson that he/she has successfully passed the three written exams, the student will have a face-to-face feedback session with his/her committee chair. The chair of the committee will discuss with the student all the written reports/critiques submitted by each member of the committee. Should the chair deem it necessary that the full committee participate in the feedback session, he/she will notify those concerned, and the meeting will take place. The meeting itself should last about an hour.