Introduction
The Curriculum Committee of the PhD Program in Urban Education decided that for the 2015-16 assessment cycle that it would review the goals for the Second Examination. The Curriculum Committee is made up of three faculty, three students, and the Executive Officer.

The stated goals of the Second Examination are:
A. Students will demonstrate written and oral fluency and in depth knowledge of a broad range of scholarship in their chosen field of study.
B. Students will initiate and sustain a dialogue with their supervisory committee about salient academic work relevant to their chosen field of study (as the field is agreed to by the student's supervisory committee).
C. Students will demonstrate high levels of written and oral competence regarding theories, methods, and research that are germane to their dissertation topic.
D. Students will initiate and sustain a dialogue with their committee regarding the salient values, ethics and morals associated with the research they propose to undertake for the dissertation. Through written and oral comments a student will demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the tenets of informed consent and the necessity to conduct research involving human subjects to provide participants with a sense of autonomy, beneficence and social justice.

To gather data for this assessment, a report (see attached) was prepared based on surveys distributed to 44 students of the PhD program in Urban Education – 24 who had passed the Second Exam and 20 preparing to take the exam in the next year. Of those, 16 students who had taken the exam responded (a 66.7 percent response rate) and 14 students preparing to take the exam responded (a 70 percent response rate). All of the students who had taken the exam had passed it and all of the students preparing for the exam plan to take it within the next year, with most having begun their preparation less than three months ago. The survey consisted of Likert scale and open answer questions that reviewed several aspects of the Urban Education program’s Second Examination process - including the structure of the second exam, the process of development, advisement, the role of the committee, and (for those who had taken the exam) the oral defense. In addition to the surveys, in-person interviews were conducted with four students who expressed interest in speaking further about their experience. Three of the students interviewed were in the process of preparing for their Second Exam and one had taken and passed the exam at the time of the interview.
Findings

Key findings from the survey include.

Structure and Process

- Of the students who had passed the second exam, the majority (68.8 percent) were satisfied with the process over all. Slightly fewer of the students preparing for the exam (57.1 percent) were satisfied with their process so far.
- The majority of both groups – 68.8 percent of students who had passed and 78.6 percent of students who are preparing – found useful the process that they and their chair had used or were using to develop the exam. 81.3 percent of students who had taken the exam said that the process prepared them well to go on with their research.
- Students cited several factors that made the second exam process difficult. To quote: “Several mentioned in their comments either not understanding how to choose committee members or not finding appropriate committee members readily available to them (i.e. faculty who represent varied research interests. Issues of race, gender, and critical theory were mentioned specifically). Many students commented on the challenge of developing a second exam, given that the format is flexible, and expressed wishes for more guidance through the process. One student referred to second exam preparation as a “mystical process” and said she received different guidance from different people. Another student said that there was an assumption in the program that students understood the purpose of the second exam and how to go about preparing for it, when that was not always the case. Some recommendations resulting from student comments and interviews are included at the end of this report.”

Advisement and Committee

- Most students (87.6 percent) who had passed the exam felt supported by their committee members while preparing for the exam, while only 42.8 percent of students preparing for the exam felt that way.
- 82.5 percent of students who had passed the exam felt that differing perspectives of their committee members benefited their process, while only 35.7 percent of those preparing for the exam agreed with that statement.

Oral Defense

- Students who had passed the exam seemed satisfied with their experience of the oral defense.
81.3 percent of students agreed that they were prepared for their defense.
93.3 percent of students agreed that the suggestions for edits and critiques given during the defense made their work stronger.

The Curriculum Committee discussed and reviewed these findings. The issues that were raised in the report were further discussed at a meeting of the Curriculum Committee on March 10, 2016. The report was accepted and the following courses of action will be implemented in response to the report’s recommendations.

1. The language of the Student Handbook that specifically relates to the Second Examination will be reviewed and revised as needed.
2. A keyword search mechanism will be evaluated and implemented on the Program’s website pending technical support that would allow students to better understand the skills and interests of college-based faculty. This would allow students a more efficient method of finding faculty who have expertise in their Second Examination topics.
3. An event(s) would be developed that would:
   a. feature college-based faculty scholarship;
   b. feature students who had recently successfully passed the Second Examination;
   c. allow prospective Second Examinees the chance to ask questions regarding the process.

In summary, the Curriculum Committee concludes that the Second Examination is accomplishing the Program’s assessment goals and objectives. Attempts will be made to fine-tune the Second Examination experience in the areas mentioned above.
Appendix

Urban Education Program Second Exam Survey Report
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Cohort 11 (5th year)
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Survey Overview and Respondents

The second exam surveys consisted of Likert scale and open answer questions that reviewed several aspects of the Urban Education program’s second exam process - including the structure of the second exam, the process of development, advisement, the role of the committee, and (for those who had taken the exam) the oral defense. The surveys were distributed to 44 students of the PhD program in Urban Education– 24 who had passed the exam and 20 preparing to take the exam in the next year. Of those, 16 students who had taken the exam responded (a 66.7 percent response rate) and 14 students preparing to take the exam responded (a 70 percent response rate). All of the students who had taken the exam had passed and all of the students preparing for the exam planned to take it within the next year, with most having begun their preparation less than three months ago (70.1 percent).

The three strands of the program (1. Language, Context & Culture, 2. Learning Sciences, 3. Urban Education Policy Studies and Leadership) were well represented by the respondents, with the most respondents (12 in total over the two surveys) in the policy strand.

In addition to the surveys, in-person interviews were conducted with four students who expressed interest in speaking further about their experience. Three of the students interviewed were in the process of preparing for their second exam and one had taken and passed the exam at the time of the interview.

Structure and Process

Of the students who had passed the second exam, the majority (68.8 percent) were satisfied with the process over all. Slightly fewer of the students preparing for the exam (57.1 percent) were satisfied with their process so far (see Figure 1). When asked, several people who were preparing to take the exam indicated that they were anxious about the process. Presumably, people who had already passed the exam were no longer experiencing that anxiety. The second exam is the first experience for most students of designing a research project and student comments indicated that the process is challenging and stressful.

The majority of both groups – 68.8 percent of students who had passed and 78.6 percent of students who are preparing – found useful the process that they and their chair had used or were using to develop the exam. 81.3 percent of students who had taken the exam said that the process prepared them well to go on with their research.

Students cited many factors that made the second exam process difficult. Several mentioned in their comments either not understanding how to choose committee members or not finding appropriate committee members readily
available to them (i.e. faculty who represent varied research interests. Issues of race, gender, and critical theory were mentioned specifically). Many students commented on the challenge of developing a second exam, given that the format is flexible, and expressed wishes for more guidance through the process. One student referred to second exam preparation as a "mystical process" and said she received different guidance from different people. Another student said that there was an assumption in the program that students understood the purpose of the second exam and how to go about preparing for it, when that was not always the case. Some recommendations resulting from student comments and interviews are included at the end of this report.

Figure 1: Student satisfaction with process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparing for exam:</th>
<th>Passed the exam:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the process of developing my second exam</td>
<td>I was satisfied with the process of developing my second exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advisement and Committee

Most students (87.6 percent) who had passed the exam felt supported by their committee members while preparing for the exam, while only 42.8 percent of students preparing for the exam felt that way. Similarly, 82.5 percent of students who had passed the exam felt that taking into consideration the differing perspectives of their committee members benefited their process, while only 35.7 percent of those preparing for the exam agreed with that statement. Those preparing for the exam seemed to be having difficulty choosing their committee members, with only 35.7 saying that it was an easy process and 28.5 percent saying that it was not (see Figure 2). A few students who were interviewed commented on their lack of understanding about the guidelines and rules for selecting committee members. Others (either in comments on the survey or in interviews) expressed frustration about the difficulty of finding committee members who shared their interests.
It does seem that once students pass the exam, they are more satisfied with the process, with 100 percent of those students agreeing that the working relationships of their committee members were positive and 87.6 percent of them saying the second exam process pushed their scholarship to higher levels.

**Oral Defense**

Students who had passed the exam seemed satisfied with their experience of the oral defense. 81.3 percent of students agreed that they were prepared for their defense and 93.3 percent of students agreed that the suggestions for edits and critiques given during the defense made their work stronger.

**Recommendations**

Students would prefer a more structured process when preparing the second exam. While students did not ask for a set format, they did express that the process was lacking in proper supports and suggested a variety of aids that would be helpful to them during their preparation.

Students believed that there should be more scaffolding built into the process. While several acknowledged the important role of informal advisee groups or student-led writing groups, many would have preferred that there was more formal direction from the program. A few possibilities for formal supports that could be offered include:

- A written statement of purpose for the second exam which makes clear that the process is an exploration and looks different for each student
- Revision of the current student handbook to include more specifics about the second exam process
- Utilization of the colloquium to explain the goal posts of the program, demystify some of the processes (including the second exam, IRB, timelines, etc.) and explain where to look for more information
• A second exam seminar offered by the program that explains the process – i.e. how to develop a second exam, examples, peer feedback, watching recorded defenses
• More strategic use of consortial faculty as committee members – the Learning Sciences strand has made some strides in this area
• Encouraging targeted feedback from committee members with the idea that the second exam should fold into the dissertation
• A program of student mentorship (perhaps matching students who have the same adviser)

While students who passed the exam seemed to be generally satisfied with their process once it was over, the above listed supports could be relatively simple for the program to put in place and would provide scaffolding and clarity around the goals and expectations of the second exam.