Preparing for Qualifying Exams

I recently saw Ed.D. student, Art Christian, just minutes after he had turned in his last QE question. Other than having a little less behind in his britches than when he went in, he looked pretty good! I asked him what he thought about the QEs and he said, “It was one of the most intense academic exercises I have ever undertaken.”

I thought about saying, “Just wait for the dissertation!” But since I knew Art was a man of strong faith, I didn’t want him to lose any of his religion right there in my office! Besides, he would need all of it for his dissertation!

Really, I know that Art did well, because he prepared well. In fact, we had just recently corresponded a bit about the QEs, and I gave him some advice about how to prepare for this 12-hour test of knowledge! I know it works, because it worked for me way back when QEs were really called Comps, and no professor gave you a question ahead of time or any study advice. Ahh… the good ol’ days … but I digress.

So how does one reasonably go about studying for a test that is over material taken in up to 36 hours of course work? Well … it is rather like the old joke: How do you eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time.

To prepare for this elephant of a test, take one bite at a time.

(My recipe is on the next page.)
1. Take your course notes for your courses to be assessed and take a green highlighter and highlight the things you are confident that you already know. **DO NOT study what you already know!**

2. Then take a yellow highlighter and highlight those things you are not sure of.

3. Now your studying is focused on those things you are not sure of.

4. Continue to study and re-study those things until you are confident that you know them.

5. When you are confident that you have a concept down, take a blue highlighter and go over the yellow highlight from before. Waala! It is now green (yellow + blue = green!).

6. When you have winnowed all your notes down to green highlights, you are good to go!

7. Employ the strategy Ronald Reagan used with the Soviets – trust (yourself) but verify!

One bite at a time,

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P.S. If you have QE hints, be sure to send them to me for the next newsletter.

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**Views from the Field**

_A monthly interview with a recent Ed.D. Grad_

Scottie Stamper is an Undergraduate Advisor in the office of Teacher Education Advising, Licensure and Recruitment. She will graduate this spring.

1. **Introduce yourself; tell our readers what were doing before you enrolled, and why you chose the UNCC doctoral program in Educational Leadership.**

   Before enrolling in the UNC-Charlotte Educational Leadership doctoral program, I was working full-time as a hospice chaplain. In order to enhance my work as a chaplain, I decided to pursue my doctorate so that I might add a research component to the spiritual leadership (and to tell the truth, a break-up inspired my desire for personal reinvention, but that’s another story for another day.) One of my ministerial colleagues was enrolled in UNC-Charlotte’s program, and I saw the difference it was making not only in his ministry, but in the larger community (his dissertation topic was related to community engagement.) I started the program as a post-baccalaureate student, found I thoroughly enjoyed it, applied, and was fully engaged in the program the following semester.

2. **What advice would you give students at the beginning of their program?**

   There are two pieces of advice I would offer students who are beginning their doctorate in Educational Leadership:

   - **Invest in relationships**—with fellow students and your professors. The collegial experience will motivate and encourage you. Better still, it will give you opportunities to be an encourager and motivator. The leadership development piece of the program is invaluable.
   - **Schedule time with the Educational Leadership librarian.** She will share tools that will help you keep thorough notes . . . efficiently. Try to see the librarian during your first semester. You’ll begin building a library of information that will be helpful for your qualifying exam and the dissertation phase of the program.

3. **How does a doctoral student get the most benefit from their Ed.D. experience?**

   - **Narrow your dissertation topic early so that you will be able to tie your coursework to your topic.**
   - **Talk with other students about their areas of study.** Another variation of this point: read previous students’ dissertations. Pay attention to the form, as well as the content.
   - **Write. Write. Write. Seek opportunities for publication.**
This is another area in which collegiality (with students and professors) is beneficial.

- Develop an ongoing bibliography, preferably annotated. Keep a list of “looking forward to reading” books too.

4. **Everyone fears the Qualifying Exam and the Dissertation. How did you approach each?**

   The qualifying exam and dissertation are frightening . . . if you allow them to be frightening. The thing to remember is this: everyone around you wants you to be successful.

   In preparing for the qualifying exam, take thorough notes and put your coursework into practice in your work world. When it’s time for you to sit for the exam, review your notes. For some classes/professors, you’ll have an opportunity to prepare your answer ahead of time. In actuality, it was one of the most affirming experiences in the program.

   In approaching the dissertation, find a topic that piques your curiosity and your passion. Try to name it early in your doctoral studies. It might morph a bit as you go through your coursework, but at the very least, name the general area of your study. When you take your research classes, think about the research questions you want to explore in your dissertation. Being able to ask the research question(s) is about 50% of the process. From the first day of your proposal class, write pieces of your dissertation every day. It might just be a sentence or two, but keep progressing. You’ll begin to see the proverbial light at the end of tunnel sooner than you think.

5. **What would you tell someone considering taking the next step and enrolling in our doctoral program?**

   UNC-Charlotte’s Educational Leadership program appealed to me because it allowed me to develop within my own area of study. The Community track of the Educational Leadership doctoral program opens the door of opportunity to study educational AND leadership aspects of just about anything. In my time as a student, I applied my coursework to models of wellness, church work, non-profit organizations, healthcare, higher education, transitional coaching, and corporate education. The only question I would ask someone considering our program is, “What are you waiting on?”

6. **What is your current job and how has the Ed.D. helped you in that position?**

   I am currently working as an Academic Advisor in the UNCC Teacher Education, Advising, Licensure and Recruitment Office in the College of Education. Dr. Mark D’Amico says that when passion meets vocation, it’s "synergy". Listening, coaching, and encouraging undergraduate students to develop in all dimensions is both a passion and a job. The Educational Leadership doctorate has enhanced my ability to ask powerful questions, conduct research, and to be self-reflective-tools I hope to pay forward in meaningful ways.

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**Recent Student Survey Results**

*If you are interested in viewing results from recent student surveys select the icons below or the url next to each one.*

- Program Improvements: [https://docs.google.com/a/uncc.edu/forms/d/16sjr0rUysbM303_P170r9dj5_HNq8FgxLkxxAI0gwBkI/viewanalytics](https://docs.google.com/a/uncc.edu/forms/d/16sjr0rUysbM303_P170r9dj5_HNq8FgxLkxxAI0gwBkI/viewanalytics)

- K-12 Course Request: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Vya88w8gDtg-z7WF5ELTuHR0YifpugneUBKnS9vk4/viewanalytics](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Vya88w8gDtg-z7WF5ELTuHR0YifpugneUBKnS9vk4/viewanalytics)

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