GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES:
TESOL MA COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
California State University, Los Angeles
(Updated October 2010)

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Purpose: The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination (CE) is to assess the M.A. TESOL candidates’ knowledge in all required areas of the TESOL Program. Candidates’ knowledge will be assessed through their analytical and pedagogical skills in the form of written responses as applied to the questions posed.

2. Frequency: The CE will be offered twice a year during Fall and Spring quarters.

3. Scope: The scope of the CE will be broad and cover all areas in the TESOL Program. Candidates should prepare for the CE by reviewing all assigned materials provided in the required classes offered by the TESOL Program. Students may use materials from elective classes to enhance their responses.

4. Mode: The mode of the CE is open-book and take-home, timed and written. Open book means candidates are free to refer to any relevant texts or journals, and take-home means candidates can respond to the questions at home. Timed refers to the duration of the CE, and written means the CE is a written exam. No oral examinations are held.

5. Examination parameters: The CE will consist of two questions from the knowledge base of the TESOL Program. The knowledge areas are described in Section D (Comprehensive Examination Areas) below. Candidates are expected to respond to both questions with equal attention and detail. Responding to only one question will not result in a passing grade.

6. Duration: The duration of the CE will be four days, from Thursday afternoon to Monday afternoon. The exact time frame will be announced in letters to CE candidates early in the term.

7. Consultation among candidates: Since the purpose of the CE is the assessment of individual knowledge, consultation among candidates in the writing of the responses is not allowed. The University’s guidelines regarding cheating will apply. According to the University’s General Catalog, the term “cheating” includes, but is not limited to: plagiarism, receiving or knowingly supplying unauthorized information during an examination, taking an examination for another student or having another student take an examination for you, etc. See the University’s General Catalog for details.

8. Plagiarism: Plagiarism is not permitted. Plagiarism refers to representing somebody else’s words or ideas as one’s own. Paraphrasing an author’s idea or quoting even limited portions of his or her text without proper citation is also an act of plagiarism. See the University’s General Catalog for details. To ensure that students do not plagiarize, all written CE responses will be checked using the software program Turnitin.
9. **Referring to authors’ materials**: Since the CE is an open-book, take-home exam, less credit will be given by the faculty readers for the recopying of large pieces of information from well-known authors, textbooks, or journal articles without accompanying analysis. Credit will be given for demonstration of analytical ability as well as the ability to apply knowledge to the classroom setting.

10. **Make-up examination**: A make-up CE will only be allowed in extreme cases and on a case by case basis.

11. **Notification of results**: The results of the CE will be available from the AASE office staff on the date announced to candidates. Official notification will also be mailed by the AASE Office soon after. Results will not be publicly posted in the AASE Office or on the M.A. TESOL Home Page.

12. **Grading procedures**: All responses submitted in response to the CE questions will be read blind (without any candidate identification such as name, student ID, etc.) by at least two TESOL faculty readers. The following categories will be assigned by the readers for each response: Pass with Distinction, Pass, and No Pass. A pass in both questions is necessary for an overall pass. If both readers agree with the grades, the result will be final. If there is disagreement among the readers regarding a candidate’s results, a third reader will adjudicate. This result will then be the final result.

13. **Review of grades**: A review and discussion of the results assigned by the readers is available to all candidates, especially those who feel that the results they received were lower than their expectations. Such candidates should make appointments with all TESOL faculty members who were readers for the CE.

14. **Retaking the CE**: Candidates who were not successful in the CE, may retake the CE the next time it is offered. A total of two retakes is allowed by University regulations. If the retake date causes undue hardship to a candidate (e.g., returning to home country for international students), the candidate may petition the TESOL program coordinator for a make-up CE. The conditions for this allowance will be the same as for the make-up CE. In the retake exam, candidates must respond to both questions, even if one was passed in a previous CE.

15. **Adjustments for candidates with disabilities**: The TESOL Program fully supports the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Reasonable accommodation will be provided to any student with a disability who is registered with the Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) who needs and requests accommodation. The OSD may be contacted to verify the presence of a disability and confirm that accommodation is necessary. The OSD will arrange and provide for the accommodation. Reasonable accommodation may involve allowing a student to use an interpreter, note taker, or reader, or to be given additional time. The intent of the ADA in requiring consideration of reasonable accommodation is not to give a particular student an unfair advantage over other students, but simply to allow a student with a disability to have an equal opportunity to be successful.
B. PROCEDURES

The procedures for the CE will be as follows:

1. Candidates are expected to register for the CE (TESL 596) by using the standard registration procedures for the term they wish to take the CE.

2. Candidates will receive the Guidelines and Procedures for the CE in the mail or at a scheduled CE orientation meeting. These Guidelines and Procedures are also available with the AASE Office (KH C2098).

3. Candidates will need to go to the AASE Office on the specified date and time to pick up the questions for the CE (This will typically be the 5th or 6th Thursday of the Quarter between 3 pm and 6 pm). Exam dates may vary, however; candidates should verify dates with the AASE office.

4. Candidates will need to go to the AASE Office on the specified date to return their responses. (This will typically be the 5th or 6th Monday of the quarter by 6 pm).

5. NO LATE RESPONSES WILL BE ACCEPTED and NO MAILED or FAXED responses will be accepted.

6. All responses should be typed, double-spaced with a 12-point font size on standard US letter paper (8.5 x 11 inches). Two copies of all responses must be submitted to the office.

7. No name, student ID, or any other identification should be provided on the response pages. The only identification number used on your written answers should be one given to you by AASE office staff when you pick up the CE.

C. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

1. Preparation: Preparation for the CE is very important. Start your preparation at least one quarter prior to taking the CE by organizing class notes, assignments, and term papers. Then read texts and journal articles carefully with a view to understanding and organizing the material. If you find that you do not have key papers or articles, make sure you copy them and file them appropriately. This is very crucial as in an open-book, take home CE your organizational abilities will help you a lot during the exam days.

2. Exam days: After you return home with your questions, quickly figure out the sources you need to refer to for each of the questions. Make sure you have them at home; if not, go to the library and copy them immediately, then start planning your responses. Set aside one day for each of the two responses and the extra time for revisions. Do not work round the clock; take frequent breaks and get sufficient sleep during this period. Also, save your work on the computer frequently.
3. **Length of responses:** Your response to each question should not exceed 12 double-spaced pages with 12-point font size on standard US letter paper (8.5 x 11 inch). For both questions, your responses should not exceed 24 pages, including any tables or figures (if necessary). References should appear after each question on a separate page. The References are not included in the page limit.

4. **Format of responses:** Your responses should be formatted as follows: Margins should be set at no less than 1 inch on all sides. The first page of each response should include the candidate’s assigned identification number and the current quarter and year in the upper left-hand corner. A title for each response should be centered at the top of the first page. The pages should be numbered separately for each response.

5. **Printing your responses:** Your responses should be printed out clearly. This is very important because no matter how well written your responses are, the printed version should be clear. There is no need to use color printing and other graphic representations when the information can be conveyed through standard text.

6. **Hand-in time:** Follow the hand-in time carefully. Allow sufficient time to drive to campus, park, and arrive at the AASE office before the deadline. Late responses will not be accepted by AASE Office staff or the TESOL faculty.

**D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION AREAS**

1. The purpose of the CE is to assess the M.A. TESOL candidates’ knowledge in all TESOL areas but in order for this to be manageable, the following division is made. It is not necessary to take all the classes listed under each area for you to be successful on the CE. See the TESL 560 syllabus to review the TESOL Knowledge Base and listing of selected readings.

I. **TESOL Foundations and Research Methods.**

   A basic introduction to linguistics and applied linguistics forms the basis for TESOL professionals in training. This includes a broad understanding of the core branches of linguistics (phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics, discourse, language variation, among others) and how these fields of study are applied in educational social contexts. Inquiry is encouraged across the curriculum. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are stressed.

   **Primary Classes:** TESL 400, TESL 561, ENGL 401, ENGL 405, EDFN 500, EDFN 452

II. **Second Language Acquisition Theory and Research.**

   The study of second language acquisition includes an understanding of innatist, cognitivist, functionalist, and interactionist perspectives on how languages are learned in a variety of settings inside and outside the classroom. The research areas which will be examined include, among others, universal grammar, individual differences, affect and motivation, learning strategies, communication strategies, social factors, instructional contexts, input and interaction,
and language transfer.

*Primary Classes*: TESL 560, 573A

III. Second Language Pedagogy and Policy.

Instruction in second language pedagogy is designed to provide students with an understanding of how to apply integrated approaches to the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar in the second language classroom, making use of the full range of technological tools. The classroom teaching methodologies covered include Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, the Natural Approach, Communicative Language Teaching, Content-based Instruction, Task-based Learning, and multiple literacies.

Emphasis is placed on the view that language learning needs to be integrated across the curriculum and on the notion of language teacher-content instructor collaboration. Moreover, learner needs in K-12 classrooms and academic or vocational settings must be taken into account in course and curriculum design. Second language pedagogy prepares language teachers to meet the needs of a diverse cross section of students such as those placed in K-12, adult and community college ESL and English for Academic Purposes programs, and English as a Foreign Language contexts.

*Primary Classes*: TESL 562, 564, 569, 572, 575, 565, 568

IV. Language Assessment.

The study of language assessment includes an understanding of the different approaches to assessing first or second language ability for educational or employment purposes through formal and informal measures. Analyses of teacher-made tests and standardized tests will be given priority. Incorporated into these analyses will be test quality concepts such as validity and reliability of test scores, fairness of test use, and testing for linguistically diverse groups and test takers with disabilities.

*Primary Classes*: TESL 567a, 567b, 573A

V. Sociolinguistics.

The vast range of cultural, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds of language learners is reflected in their sociolinguistic diversity. In order to meet their needs, a foundation in sociolinguistic theory and research introduces students to both macro- and micro-sociolinguistic concepts including language standards, planning, and policy; language variation and language change across regions and time; language and interaction; and language and social identity. These concepts are applied to issues language learners face in institutional and non-institutional settings, including intercultural communication, test-taking, classroom language learning, job-interviewing, and gender-related (mis)communication, to name just a few.

*Primary Classes*: TESL 570, 571, ENGL 403

2. **Two questions** which cross over the five areas listed above will make up the CE. You should respond to both questions with equal attention and detail. You cannot receive a passing grade on the CE by only responding to one of the questions.
3. These areas will be used when CE questions are written but questions could be cross-cutting and may require knowledge from other areas to be used. Also, the areas and classes are listed as a guide not a comprehensive and definitive listing of areas and classes.

E. SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Sample questions and responses are available on electronic reserve on the JFK Library home page. Access the samples by going to TESL 596. The password is: tesl596 (not case sensitive).

F. STUDY GROUPS

If you wish to form a study group, go to the AASE division office or email the division secretary for a list of student who have signed up to take the exam.