Qualifying Exams and Dissertation Student Learning Outcomes

NOTE: The purpose of this document is to make transparent the student learning outcomes for each stage of the process. Each graduate program is encouraged to refer to one of the following publications by Barbara E. Lovitts and Ellen L. Wert (www.Styluspub.com): Developing Quality Dissertations in the Sciences, Developing Quality Dissertations in the Social Sciences, and Developing Quality Dissertations in the Humanities. These booklets contain rubrics for evaluation that should be shared between the primary advisor, committee members and the student. Each graduate program is encouraged to tailor the rubrics more specifically to the standards and requirements of their discipline and program.

The purpose of the academic doctoral program is to prepare students to be professional in, and contribute to, the discipline. There are two key benchmarks en-route to the doctoral degree. The first is to pass the Qualifying Examination. The second is to successfully complete the Dissertation.

The objective of the Qualifying Exam is twofold; first is to determine that the student is able to undertake the work of the dissertation, and the second is to assess the student’s mastery of the factual information, the theoretical concepts, and the methodological approaches in his/her field.

The Qualifying Exam provides evidence the student is able to:

- Critically read, understand, and evaluate current literature in the discipline
- Integrate and synthesize ideas within the field
- Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the literature in the field
- Critically evaluate empirical evidence
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of techniques critical to scholarship in the field
- Communicate clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences

The purpose of the dissertation is both process and product. Through this preparation the student both learns and demonstrates the ability to conduct independent, original, and significant research.

The dissertation provides evidence the student is able to:

- Identify/define problems
- Generate questions and/or hypotheses
- Review and summarize the literature
- Apply appropriate research methods
- Collect data systematically
- Conduct research responsibly and ethically
- Evaluate, interpret, and analyze a body of empirical data and evidence
- Discuss findings in the broader context of the field
- Develop and sustain an evidence-based argument
- Write and speak critically and coherently
- Produce publishable results