

PhD Education

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Note: the statements in this document were numbered by me to facilitate discussion of statements in this document. They were not part of the original document. -kk

The Nature and Purpose of a PhD Program

1. The Doctor of Philosophy degree is the highest academic degree granted by North American universities. (p.1) It is a research degree and is to be distinguished from other doctorates such as the M.D., J.D., or Ed.D. degrees, which are designed for professional training or which focus on applied rather than basic research. (p.1)
2. The PhD program is designed to prepare a student to become a scholar, that is, to discover, integrate, and apply knowledge, as well as communicate and disseminate it. The program emphasizes the development of the student's capacity to make significant original contributions to knowledge in a context of freedom of inquiry and expression. (p.1)
3. Such skills may lead to careers in social, governmental, business, and industrial organizations as well as in the university and college teaching, research and administration. (p.1)
4. A well-prepared doctoral student will have developed the ability to understand and evaluate critically the literature of the field and to apply appropriate principles and procedures to the recognition, evaluation, interpretation, and understanding of issues and problems at the frontiers of knowledge. The student will also have an appropriate awareness of and commitment to the ethical practices appropriate to the field. (p.1)
5. It is accomplished [through] apprenticeship to, and close association with, faculty members who are experienced in research and teaching. (p.1)
6. A central purpose of scholarship is the extension of knowledge, and students in a doctoral program become scholars by choosing an area in which to specialize and a professor with whom to work. Individualized programs of study may then be developed and committee members selected cooperatively as course work is completed and research undertaken. (p.1)
7. When all courses have been taken, the research finished, the dissertation written, and all examinations passed, the student should have acquired the knowledge and skills expected of a scholar who has made an original contribution to the field and has attained the necessary expertise to continue to do so. (p.1)

Advising & Mentoring

8. The aim is to provide the extra stimulation and passion for learning that lead to socialization into the academic climate of the discipline and to the development of "a community of scholars." (p.8)
9. Good advising alone is insufficient for a good graduate program. Other aspects of retention include the building of an esprit de corps among graduate students and professors. (p.8)
10. The sense of common purpose can be encouraged by joint research projects, or by seminars in which the students present reports on the literature or on their own research, and where faculty are free to interact with other faculty and graduate students. Such projects and seminars may play a far more significant part in the training of graduate students than regular classes. In particular, they provide good job preparation for budding scholars and teachers, and can lead to important improvements in the student's research. (p.8)
11. Doctoral programs usually also make provisions for colloquia or seminar series in which students can hear distinguished visitors from other institutions, and discuss their own work with these visitors. (p.8)
12. While it is the responsibility of the faculty to provide guidance to students regarding their academic career, it is equally the responsibility of the graduate student to consult with the advisor and provide information about work done, problems which have arisen, and plans for study. (p.14)

General Nature of the Program

13. A doctoral program is an apprenticeship that consists of lecture or laboratory courses, seminars, examinations, discussions, independent study, research, and, in many instances, teaching, designed to help the students make significant contributions to knowledge in a reasonable period of time. (p.14)
14. The first year or two of study is normally a probationary period, during which most of the effort of doctoral students will be devoted to acquiring a working knowledge of the field through study of the literature, taking formal courses and seminars, learning research and experimental techniques, problem-solving, and beginning to teach and do research. (p.14)
15. After being admitted to candidacy students devote essentially full time to completing the dissertation research planned with the major advisor, and the

dissertation committee. dissertation committee.
(p.14).

16. Preparation of the dissertation usually occupies one to three years, depending on the field. An oral defense of the research and dissertation by the candidate before a graduate committee and sometimes other persons invited to attend constitutes the final examination. All requirements for the degree should be available to the student in written form. (p.14)
17. Programs are usually arranged so that well-prepared and self-motivated students can complete all requirements in four to five years of full-time study and research beyond the baccalaureate degree in the sciences, somewhat longer in other areas. In the recent years the total time required to complete the degree has tended to expand. The reasons for tendency need to be studied carefully and controlled where this is feasible; they may include laissez-faire advising, inadequate funding, uncontrolled expectations regarding the amount of teaching to be done; inappropriate expectations regarding the extent of the dissertation; and external factors such as changes in the job market. (p.14)
18. It often takes longer for students with heavy teaching loads or those working on dissertations that require extensive field work, to complete degree requirements. (p.14)
19. Some students have to leave campus entirely and take full-time employment before finishing the dissertation; this inevitably delays completion of the Ph.D., and sometimes disrupts the expected career plan. (p.14)

Comprehensive or Qualifying Examinations

20. Regardless of its title, its purpose is to determine the student's readiness to undertake independent research. (p.19)
21. In many institutions students are essentially on probation for the first two years of graduate study. They are "admitted to candidacy" for the doctoral degree by the end of the second year or the beginning of the third after a number of qualifying procedures have been satisfactorily completed. (p.19)
22. Admission to candidacy means that, in the judgement of the faculty, the doctoral student has an adequate knowledge of the field and the specialty, knows how to use the academic resources, has potential to do original research autonomously, and presumably will complete the dissertation. (p.19)
23. The qualifying procedures may include one or more of the following: formal course work; proficiency

examinations in language and/or other research tools; comprehensive (or general) written and oral examinations; one or more research papers showing evidence of the ability to do original work (examples include papers presentable at a professional conference, "mini grant proposals"), and an accepted doctoral dissertation proposal. Research, advanced seminars, optional courses, and in some fields, further examinations, occupy the student's attention from this point until the dissertation has been written and the final oral examination has been passed. (p.20)

The Dissertation

24. Doctoral research should be a mutually energizing experience between student and adviser; the student should therefore participate actively in identifying a good research topic. (p.21)
25. It fulfills two major purposes: (1) it is an intensive, highly professional training experience, the successful completion of which demonstrates the candidate's ability to address a major intellectual problem and arrive at a successful conclusion independently and at a high level of professional competence, and (2) its results constitute an original contribution to knowledge in the field. (p.21)
26. There is no assurance that, having completed the course work, seminars, examinations, teaching and research requirements, the student will be awarded the degree, since the quality of the dissertation and the significance of the contribution to knowledge are important considerations that must be weighed by the committee in making the final recommendation for award of the Ph.D. (p.21)

Administration of PhD Programs

27. Graduate departments should set forth explicit guidelines and procedures for completing degree requirements so that the students and faculty know and understand their opportunities, duties, and responsibilities. These guidelines include: objectives of the doctoral program; departmental requirements beyond those of the graduate division; reading lists for comprehensive examinations, if relevant; testing dates; course and seminar offerings; research specialties offered; and the faculty responsible for each. In addition, departments, in cooperation with the graduate division, provide information on sources of funding, both within and from outside the university. (p.5)