

## Rubric for Dissertation and Defense

This evaluation tool is designed to assist faculty evaluate whether the graduate student has successfully completed a body of original research in his/her discipline, under the guidance of all members of the supervisory committee. This rubric is also a useful tool for students in preparing for their dissertation review and the oral defense, as students should aim to meet the benchmarks outlined below at least at the level of “strong” for all criteria. Faculty will use a condensed version of this document during the defense that indicates whether a student met expectations (strong), exceeded expectations (exceptional) or did not meet expectations (marginal and unacceptable). Students should note that this rubric is not used to “score” their performance.

### Considerations for review of Dissertation Document

| Assessment criteria  | Exceptional<br>(Exceeds expectations)   | Strong<br>(Meets expectations)  | Marginal<br>(Does not meet expectations)  | Unacceptable<br>(Does not meet expectations)   |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Quality of the Scholarly Work</b>   |   |   |   |  |
| <b>Mastery of fundamental knowledge in the field</b>   | Consistently applies fundamental and advanced concepts to topics in the subject area  | Frequently applies fundamental and advanced concepts to topics in the subject area  | Somewhat applies fundamental and advanced concepts to topics in the subject area  | Does not apply fundamental and advanced concepts to topics in the subject area   |
| <b>Ability to access and integrate information into a cohesive overview of current knowledge. Ability to critically evaluate the meaning, value and contribution of published literature in the field.</b> | Shows command and understanding of the current scholarly literature in the field, as well as essential seminal works foundational to the field. | Relates and understands the current scholarly literature in the field, as well as essential seminal works foundational to the field   | Shows awareness of the current scholarly literature in the field, as well as essential seminal works foundational to the field.       | Knowledge is unrelated to the current scholarly literature or foundational literature in the field.                              |
| <b>Imagination and originality of thought</b>  | Problem and purpose of study very creative or original with new and innovative ideas; explored original topic and discovered new outcomes.      | Problem/purpose of study original or creative; design/approach appropriate or innovative.   | Problem/purpose of study moderately original or creative; design/approach moderately appropriate or innovative.                       | Problem/purpose of study lacked creativity or not new; duplication or only incremental advancement of previous work.             |
| <b>Ability to design and implement an appropriate collection and analysis of data.</b>   | Data interpretation is appropriate and creatively uses correct methodologies; identifies weaknesses or limitations in interpretation.           | Data interpretation is appropriate and uses mostly correct methodologies; identifies some weaknesses or limitations in interpretation | Data interpretation is appropriate and uses limited correct methodologies; identifies no weaknesses or limitations in interpretation. | Data interpretation is inappropriate or uses incorrect methodologies; identifies no weaknesses or limitations in interpretation. |

|  |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Ability to draw reasoned conclusions from a body of knowledge</b>     | Discussion was superior, accurate and engaging; conclusions/summaries and recommendations appropriate and clearly based on outcomes.   | Discussion sufficient with few errors; greater foundation needed from past work in area; conclusions/summary based on outcomes and appropriate; included some recommendations.   | Major topics or concepts inaccurately described; considerable relevant discussion missing; conclusions/summary not entirely supported by findings/outcomes   | Little discussion of project findings/outcomes; displayed poor grasp of material; conclusion/summary not supported by findings/outcomes.  |
| <b>Contribution to Discipline</b>  |  |  |  |   |
| <b>Impact of research on the field</b>                                   | Dissertation is very relevant or has high significance and will make an important contribution to the field.   | Dissertation has fair relevance or significance and will make a good contribution to the field.  | Dissertation has only moderate relevance or significance and will make a nominal contribution to the field.  | Dissertation has little significance and little relevance and will make little contribution to the field.   |
| <b>Publication potential</b>   | Work from the dissertation has high potential to be published in high impact (top quartile) journals; work is expected to result in multiple research articles.  | Work from the dissertation has high potential to be published in moderate impact (top 50%) journals; work is expected to result in multiple research articles.   | Work from the dissertation has moderate potential to be published in a scholarly journal; work is expected to result in limited number of articles.  | Work from the dissertation has low potential to be published in a scholarly journal; work is expected to result in no publications.   |
| <b>Quality of Writing</b>  |  |  |  |   |
| <b>Skilled at scientific/technical writing</b>                           | Author demonstrates excellent ability to write clearly and convincingly at a high professional level.  | Author demonstrates good ability to write clearly and convincingly at a high professional level.   | Author demonstrates fair ability to write clearly and convincingly at a high professional level.   | Author demonstrates no or little ability to write clearly and convincingly at a high professional level.  |
| <b>Organization, sentence structure, grammar, mechanics and spelling</b> | The author demonstrates highly logical organization of information; sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length; the author makes no errors in grammar, mechanics and/or spelling. | The author demonstrates logical organization of information; most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length; makes a few errors in grammar, mechanics and/or spelling, but they do not interfere with understanding. | Some sections are not well-organized; most sentences are well constructed, but they are similar in structure with little variation; the author makes several errors in grammar, mechanics and/or spelling that interfere with understanding. | Most information is not well-organized; sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive or are difficult to understand; the author makes numerous errors in grammar, mechanics and/or spelling that interfere with understanding. |

## Considerations for review of Oral Defense

| Assessment criteria   | Exceptional<br>(Exceeds expectations)   | Strong<br>(Meets expectations)   | Marginal<br>(Does not meet expectations)   | Unacceptable<br>(Does not meet expectations)   |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Quality of Presentation</b>  |   |  |  |  |
| <b>Presentation design</b>  | The design is polished with a very professional appearance; slides/sections are visually pleasing and aid the viewer in comprehension of presented material; figures, tables and other diagrams are quickly interpreted and appropriate to the topic discussed.                       | The design is polished; slides/sections are visually pleasing and aid the viewer in comprehension of presented material; figures and other diagrams are included.  | The design is not offensive, but does not look polished or professional; use of figures, diagrams and tables does not facilitate understanding of the material presented.  | The design detracts greatly from the presentation content and/or is not visually pleasing; use of figures, tables and/or diagrams is poorly executed and does not facilitate understanding of the material presented.  |
| <b>Content and organization</b>   | Presentation is highly organized and logical, with appropriate time devoted to sections (introduction, main findings, conclusions); content is informative and conveys key information from dissertation; content is carefully tailored to the audience.                              | Presentation is organized, with appropriate time devoted to sections (introduction, main findings, conclusions); content is mostly informative and conveys key information from dissertation; content is appropriate for the audience. | Presentation is somewhat organized, but imbalanced with respect to time spent on certain sections; content is somewhat informative and occasionally conveys useful information from dissertation; content is somewhat appropriate for the audience.  | Presentation is not organized and poorly balanced with respect to time spent on certain sections; content is not informative and does not convey useful information from dissertation; content is not appropriate for the audience.  |
| <b>Presenter skills</b>   | Speaks easily with confidence, enthusiasm and authority on the topic; shows high engagement with the audience through frequent eye contact; keeps on topic and spends an appropriate amount of time on each slide/figure; the presenter appears very comfortable with the technology. | Speaks easily on the topic; presenter spends an appropriate amount of time discussing each slide/section; shows appropriate eye contact with audience; presenter is comfortable with technology.                                       | Appears unrehearsed and unfamiliar with some presentation content; spends too much time on some sections of the presentation; does not show much engagement with audience through eye contact; presentation too short or too long for expected duration; presenter has difficulty working with the technology. | Becomes flustered or agitated during presentation; unfamiliar with presentation content, tends to read text directly from the slide/sections; fails to engage with audience; presentation much too short or much too long for expected duration; clear difficulty working with the technology. |
| <b>Breadth and Depth of Knowledge</b>   |   |  |  |  |
| <b>Defends, clarifies, and expands upon written dissertation with further evidence and argument</b> | Demonstrates a very high level of confidence and competence indicative of an expert in the discipline; uses presentation resources as a guide, gives detailed explanations, is easily understandable.   | Shows a high level of confidence and competence; uses presentation resources as a guide, gives moderately detailed explanations, is understandable.  | Lacks confidence and/or competence; uses presentation resources too extensively, occasionally gives unclear explanations, is sometimes not easily understood.  | No evidence of confidence and/or competence; relies excessively on presentation content, often gives unclear explanations, is often not easily understood.   |

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Demonstrates knowledge of dissertation subject, primary sources, and background scholarship; demonstrates ability to synthesize dissertation topic with broader topics in the discipline</b> | Demonstrates a high-level understanding of past and current literature and brings together concepts to think deeply about the research topic.   | Appropriately puts the work in perspective of past and present studies in the literature and is capable of introducing and explaining necessary scientific principles.   | Neglects some key perspectives and only partially places work in perspective of past and present studies; inadequately explains some key scientific principles.   | Failure to adequately understand/explain necessary scientific principles and/or background information and/or failure to put the work in appropriate perspective.   |
| <b>Quality of Responses to Questions</b>  |   |  |   |   |
| <b>Directly and correctly answers the examiner's questions</b>  | Masterfully defends research by providing accurate, clear and insightful answers to questions.  | Competently defense research by providing very helpful answers to questions.   | Adequately defends research; answers questions, but often with little insight or inaccuracies; frequently shows a need for deeper reflection on minor points; may respond defensively to probing questions.   | Does not adequately defend research; does not answer key questions or inaccurately answers questions; frequently shows a need for deeper reflection on key points; often responds defensively to questions.                           |
| <b>Shows evidence of critical thinking and an awareness of the limits of his or her knowledge</b>   | Responses to questions reflect deep understanding of field and implications of his/her work; shows critical thinking by linking concepts with evidence; clearly articulates limits of the methodologies and/or his/her interpretations of the findings. | Responses to questions reflect understanding of field and implications of his/her work; shows critical thinking by linking concepts; is aware of the limits of the methodologies and/or his/her interpretations of the findings. | Responses to questions suggest a shallow understanding of the field and limited understanding of the implications of his/her work; does not clearly link concepts; lacks awareness of the limits of the methodologies or his/her interpretations of the findings. | Responses to questions are obtuse or confused; limited evidence of understanding of the field; no ability to link concepts; no apparent awareness of the limitations of the methodologies or his/her interpretations of the findings. |