



Procedural Guidelines for Examining Professional/Competency-based Doctoral Theses

Purpose: This paper is to create procedural guidelines for examining Professional/Competency-based Doctorate Theses. This concern was raised by an External Examiner engaged by the Mona Campus who felt that his instructions and guidance for examining a professional doctorate was inadequate from The UWI. Due to this concern the matter was brought to the relevant authorities who requested the creation of this paper to address the issue.

The professional doctorate usually refers to a terminal degree that is different to a PhD, and may also be called “applied” degrees or “practitioner” degrees. The professional doctorate is a research-based degree, and it emphasises looking at an existing bodies of knowledge and raising questions for the purposes of solving a problem and applying theories to a real-world setting.

A professional doctorate candidate enters the programme already well-established as a professional in their field. The acquisition of a professional doctorate is seen as “value added” to their capacity to provide leadership in their field contributing to solutions for complex issues, practical problems and improving professional standards.

Method: Consultation and meetings occurred with the coordinators of the existing professional doctorates on the Mona Campus. These meetings were to identify and define the concern raised and to seek the guidance of the coordinators. Once this was established, an expert Dr. Carol Hordatt Gentles. Senior Lecturer, Teacher Education & Teacher Development Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Specialist was invited to work with the committee.

Once the draft instrument was created, consultation occurred with various groups for comments, which included, coordinators of the existing professional doctorates, Campus Committee members and Faculty Boards. The document will now be shared at the Directors’ meeting who will share with their Campuses.

Results: The creation of a rubric for marking the professional doctorate thesis which is attached to be used both in marking the written work as well at the oral defence.

GUIDELINES

This rubric is intended as a guide for evaluating a professional doctoral thesis. Please use the outcome to assist you in making a recommendation as follows:

Differences between a professional doctoral and a PhD thesis

Professional doctoral thesis

In a professional doctoral programme, courses are designed and sequenced to help candidates acquire specific professional competences. Ideally, the learning outcomes of courses are clearly linked with the acquisition and demonstration of professional competences.

The thesis for a professional doctoral programme evaluates *one set* of professional competences - a candidate's competence for conducting research – demonstrating the application of acquired research skills “aimed at solving real -world problems” in their area of practice. The focus of their research is to “apply existing knowledge in new ways to solve problems”. This requires candidates to acquire and demonstrate the acquisition of the:

- Skills and capacity to conduct research and scholarship in their field of study/ area of professional practice
- Capacity to recognise, explain, describe, and discuss how their research results can be applied and contribute to their area of professional practices, skills, techniques, or theories within their organisation or professional context
- application of knowledge
- Capacity to recognise, explain and discuss the limitations of their research results in contributing to their area of professional practices, skills, techniques, theories within organisation or professional context
- Communication Skills consistent with exemplary academic and /or professional writing.

PhD thesis

By comparison, the primary purpose of a PhD programme is to help candidates create new knowledge by conducting original research. To do this they are expected to produce a thesis, which demonstrates the:

- Acquisition and interrogation of theoretical knowledge of their field of study
- Development of a deep, critical understanding of methodological theory
- Application of these in developing and conducting original research

Rubric Descriptors

Attempted but Unacceptable:	Thesis includes this element, but it is not presented at the level expected at the doctoral level
Weak:	Quality of presentation barely meets standard of doctoral level work
Acceptable:	Quality of presentation meets minimum standard of doctoral level work
Good-Very Good:	Quality of presentation is quite high and above minimum standard of doctoral work
Excellent:	Quality of presentation is exemplary

LEVEL OF COMPETENCE							
Depth and breadth of knowledge of field of study/area of professional practice							
	1	2	3	4	5	Score	Comments
Research problem is clearly articulated, justified and relevant	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
Theories, concepts, models are used appropriately to ground the work	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10		Comments
Literature review shows acquisition and deep understanding of a body of knowledge at the forefront of the area of professional practice AND to critically appraise the literature to identify relevant gaps	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
SUBTOTAL						/20	
Competence for Research and scholarship - conceptualisation, design and implementation of the research/project							
	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	Score	Comments
Selection of Research approach, methodology, instrumentation, sampling procedures and protocols, data collection, data analysis are aligned and appropriate to produce answers to research questions	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		

<i>Conduct of Research</i> (instrumentation, sampling, procedures and protocols, data collection, data analysis) was conducted appropriately in keeping with principles and guidelines consistent with selected research approach, methodology	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
<i>Ethical practices</i> Issues relating to issues of ethics and rigor have been considered, adhered to and addressed	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
SUBTOTAL						/30	
Application of knowledge							
	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	Score	Comments
<i>Identifies and describes</i> new knowledge developed as contribution to professional practices, skills, techniques, theories within organisation or professional context	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
<i>Demonstrates understanding of</i> how new knowledge developed can contribute to area of professional practices, skills, techniques, theories within organisation or professional context	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		

Awareness of limits of knowledge							
	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	Score	Comments
<i>Recognition and discussion of limitations of research results in relation to complexities in body of knowledge informing area of practice</i>	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
SUBTOTAL						/30	
Communication Skills							
	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10	Score	Comments
<i>Clear, effective, cogent communication of complex and/or ambiguous issues and ideas</i>	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
<i>Proper use of required stylistic conventions and uses a lively, intelligent voice</i>	Attempted but Unacceptable	Weak	Acceptable	Good-Very Good	Excellent		
SUBTOTAL						/20	
TOTAL						/100	

COMMENTS:

What are the strengths of the thesis?

What areas of the thesis need to be developed more?

If any areas are unacceptable, please explain your reasons for this assessment. What can be done to improve this section?

A written mark of $\geq 80\%$ may be considered eligible for high commendation pending deliberation at the Examiner's meeting following the oral examination.

Adapted from:

EdD Doctoral Study Procedures and Documents. Center for Research Quality. Walden University.

<https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/research-center/program-documents/edd>

Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents' Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Level Expectations

Appendix One. <https://oucqa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/APPENDIX-1.pdf>

UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (October 2014).

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>