PhD Evaluation and Exam Structure, effective fall 2011

Marketing Learning Goals

1. To ensure that students are thoroughly trained in conducting scholarly research, that is methodologically sound and provides a creative advancement and contribution to the field.
2. To ensure students have strong abilities to achieve quality publications—they should have two journal publications and four or more proceeding publications by the beginning of their fourth year.
3. Students should be highly capable of producing original scholarly research in the form of a high quality dissertation, publishable in a top journal.
4. Students should be highly qualified teachers and have experience teaching at least two different courses and should receive excellent evaluations (in excess of 4.0.)

To accomplish the above goals, the screening process of the exams is focused on assessing a student’s abilities to have high quality of thought, to put those ideas to paper, to integrate disparate ideas in the literature (to identify gaps), and to be able to capably design, conduct, and follow-through on research ideas.

There are four steps to ensuring learning goals are achieved (prior to the dissertation proposal and final defense):

1. Continuing evaluation of the student’s success in the program
2. First year summer paper (written and oral)
3. Second Year summer paper (written and oral)
4. Pre-proposal defense (written and oral)

1. Continuing Evaluation of the Student’s Success in the Program

Students are continually evaluated in regards to their success in the program. Each year their contract renewal is dependent on successfully meeting our criteria in regards to coursework, research assistantships, teaching assistantships, exams, or other practices, as indicated below.

There are several forms of evaluation. One is formal procedure and one is ongoing procedure.

I. Formal procedure

Faculty are asked to give input on new students at the end of their first semester. If issues of concern are raised—students will be counseled and advised. If serious issues are raised, students may be put on academic probation or may be dropped from the program. At the end of the student’s first year, there is a formal first-year evaluation in
which faculty who have worked with the student provide input, as well, as students provide their own performance review. If there are problems at that time, students will be counseled and may be put on probation. At any point in this process (but generally during the following semester), students who are not making appropriate changes in their actions will be dropped from the program. There is also a similar evaluation procedure for second and third year students. See below for examples of problems or concerns we might have.

2. Ongoing procedure and potential termination

Students are evaluated in an ongoing manner, as well as at the formal checkpoints, to insure their successful forward progress in the program. Students may be put on probation or even dropped from the program at any point if there are major issues of concern. The committee making that decision is the evaluation committee (composed of the Department Head, the Area Coordinator, and the Doctoral Coordinator.) Grounds for termination include any of the following:

1. poor classroom performance (one or more C’s in doctoral classes or other courses or dropping below a B grade point average. See below for more details*)
2. unethical, dishonest, or highly inappropriate behavior
3. poor overall performance in classes and/or as a research assistant
4. poor performance or inappropriate actions as an instructor
5. see exam structures below for further grounds for termination or
6. any combination of the above

*A graduate student with regular status in a graduate program who drops below a “B” average (at any time after earning 6 semester hours) will be placed on probation. While on probation, the student will not be permitted to apply for admission to candidacy. Probationary status must be removed by raising the overall average to a “B” or better during the 12 hours of graduate work immediately following the period in which the probation was incurred. Failure to do so will result in the student's being dropped from the program.

A grade of “I” (Incomplete) is evaluated as an “F,” and must be removed within two weeks during the next term of enrollment if the student's overall grade point average drops below a “B” as a result of the incomplete grade. The evaluations of academic progress of students who register with “I” grades still on their records can result in academic probation or dismissal.

2. First-Year Summer Paper

I. The Proposal

There will be a meeting in January with students to address the first-year summer paper and the procedures. First-year students should start looking for a first-year summer mentor in January. Students should find a mentor (or mentors) and submit a short first draft of their ideas and topic to them by mid-April. The mentor should agree to be their mentor and give them preliminary feedback on their ideas before they submit to the committee. Then, on May 15th the student will submit a 3-page double-spaced typewritten proposal to the first year summer paper exam coordinator, along with a note
as to who their mentor is and that the mentor has agreed to work with them. If the mentor has provided feedback on an earlier draft this should be noted too.

This proposal should lay out a foundation for addressing the issues discussed below (i.e., the gap in the literature should be identified and its importance clearly noted, what variables/relationships/mediators/moderators they plan to examine, the variables of interest and their definitions, and the method(s) they expect to use.) Obviously all of these aspects will be fleshed out over time, but the proposal should demonstrate that the ideas merit further investigation. The exam committee will evaluate the proposals and render a decision about the acceptability of the topic.

If needed, a selective literature review table or an initial rough interview guide if used, and/or other materials may be placed in the appendices and are not part of the page limit. The page limit will be strictly enforced.

Note that weak proposals could require revision, which will lengthen the proposal process and shorten the amount of time available to actually write the paper – thus strong proposals are critical. Further, only two attempts at proposal revisions are allowed. If a successful revision does not occur by the third round (after two revisions) or by June 10, the student may be dropped from the program.

Students may build on work done in seminars or done in conjunction with faculty. However, the summer paper must be an advancement of any paper previously worked on. Previous papers by the student closely related to the summer paper idea should be included in the proposal and final work submitted so as to insure it is an advancement of the idea. If in doubt, students should check with the exam committee on topic/area appropriateness or closeness to their previous work ahead of time.

Students must work with their mentor(s) throughout the summer, updating them on their progress at least every two weeks. They can ask the advice of their mentors and of the exam committee, as needed, throughout the summer. The mentor(s) will evaluate the final paper and presentation and will advise the committee of their opinion but they are not an official grader.

Students should remain in Tuscaloosa for the summer to work on this paper. If students wish to leave the area for more than two weeks during the summer, they must obtain permission to do so from the first-year summer exam committee. There will also be several meetings during the summer held by a mentor or an exam committee member in which students can address the progress of their work and can get critical feedback from faculty and other students.

II. The Paper

1. General: Students will have until July 31st to complete a conceptual paper of up to 25 pages (double-spaced) not including references, tables, or appendices. (If the student does choose to collect and use data—the paper
length can be extended to 35 pages.) The paper should be in the format of their targeted journal (which should be identified). It should follow the traditional format: Define a research area of interest and importance, review the literature and identify gaps, develop and provide rationales for 3 to 8 testable hypotheses, describe the methods recommended to assess the hypotheses, and suggest clearly how they might be assessed in the appendix. Finalize by suggesting potential contributions and limitations.

2. **Content Considerations:** The following are critical to earning a passing grade on the first year qualifying exam. (Specific grading guidelines are discussed subsequently.)

   a. **A Thorough Literature and Theory Development** – While empirical data is NOT a requirement—if the student wishes to collect some qualitative or quantitative data or use some data that already exists to aid them in their theory development—this approach is acceptable, but original data and data analysis are NOT required for the first year paper.

   b. **Size/Importance of Gap** – They should identify and articulate an important gap in the literature and create a paper that fills this gap. Simply indicating that research has not been done does not justify that it should be done!

   c. **Hypothesis Development** – It is also critical that the hypotheses be developed carefully and completely. It is not enough to cite a set of related papers with little explanation and then state a hypothesis. Nor is it acceptable to simply have a lead-up section that is basically a long-winded restatement of your hypothesis. What is required is a careful and logically developed set of arguments and ideas that are linked in a coherent fashion and which build to the hypotheses ultimately made.

   d. **Mediators/Moderators** – It is also suggested that mediators (i.e., possible explanatory mechanisms) and/or moderators (i.e., possible contingency factors) be used in hypothesis development (see, e.g., Baron, Reuben and David A. Kenny (1986), “The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychology Research: Conceptual, Strategic, and Statistical Considerations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51 (December), 1173-1182).

   e. **Discussion as to How to Test the Hypotheses** — Since empirical data are not gathered, it is important for the student to fully address how s/he would go about reasonably collecting this data in the next stage this research. This discussion should appear in the appendix so as to not disrupt the flow of the conceptual paper.
f. **Quality and Format** – The expectation is that this paper will be of high enough quality to allow submission to a conference. The format should be similar to the submission requirements of those such as *JM, JMR, JCR*.

g. **Originality and Research Leadership** – The paper is the student’s work. Input from a mentor is expected, but overburdening them and leaning too heavily on them is unacceptable and will be viewed as such by the exam committee.

### III. Presentation to Faculty and Ph.D. Students

In August the student will make a 30-40 minute presentation of their work to faculty and Ph.D. students. A one-week notice is given and all marketing faculty and students are encouraged to attend. The student should obtain and respond to feedback from their mentor on a draft of the presentation. Both the written paper and oral presentation will be used to grading the student’s performance. How the student presents and responds to questions about the research is an important part of the grading process.

### IV. Grading and Revision Guidelines

1. **Multi-Stage Process** – Very few papers are accepted at journals or conferences without revisions being required, or at least suggested. A consideration in the overall examination process is how well students respond to the initial round of feedback in preparing their presentations and in revising their papers for submission. Grades are assigned with the understanding that failing marks on initial submissions can be turned into passes on revision.


   a. The paper will be deemed a pass if two of the three grades are a pass or higher. Thus, for example, a P, P, F, would be a pass. Students should respond to feedback in preparing their presentations and revising their papers for submission to conference. Revisions of papers that pass on the initial submission are not resubmitted to the exam committee.

   b. The paper is a MP/F if two or three of the grades are MP/F or if one grade is MP/F and another is F. Thus, for example, a MP/F, MP/F, P would be a MP/F overall, as would MP/F, F, P. One P out of three grades is not sufficient to overcome two grades that fail to meet passing standards. Conversely, one F or MP/F out of three grades is not sufficient to override two grades that meet the passing standards.

   c. The paper is a fail if two of the three grades are a fail. Thus, for example, F, F, P, would be a fail and students will be required to redo it or will be dropped from the program if the committee feels that a successful revision appears unlikely.
3. **First-Year Revision** – Students who do not receive a passing score (i.e., get an overall score of MP/F or F) must submit a revised paper at a date to be announced in November.

a. A passing score on the revision (two Ps or better, as discussed above) will be a pass. Students who have presented their paper to their peers and authored a successful revision will have completed their summer paper requirement.

b. Students making less than two P scores on their revised paper will be required to redo the summer paper requirement the following spring or alternatively, may be asked to leave the program if a successful revision of the already revised paper appears unlikely.

4. **Other Evidence of Proficiency** – Students who are required to redo the paper in the spring of their second year may ask the examination committee to consider evidence of their research proficiency that becomes available during the school year (e.g., papers submitted to a journal or conference). Only sole-authored work that falls within the guidelines of the summer paper project will be considered. The committee may at its discretion decide whether to (1) accept the alternative evidence in lieu of having the student redo the summer paper project, (2) modify the requirements of the summer project based on the evidence submitted, or (3) require the student to follow the project requirements with no modifications.

3. **Second Year Summer Paper (Written and Oral)**

Students should submit a plan of action relative to data collection for the second-year summer paper by April 1st (or before), which needs to be approved by the exam committee. Any needed instruments should be included. This should be a 3-page plan, not including the appendices (instruments, etc.) The student’s faculty mentor should have previously approved the data collection plan before it is forwarded to the second-year summer paper exam coordinator. (The student may have collected some or all of these data during their second year.)

This paper will be an empirical follow-up of the first-year summer paper. (If the student wishes to pursue an alternative conceptual idea to the first-year summer paper that is also acceptable.) However, the objective is to have a completed paper at the end of the summer that is both conceptually and empirically rich and potentially ready to submit to a journal. The final paper is due to the exam committee by August 10th. The student's mentor should have seen and approved the paper before it is submitted. Within a few weeks after the student turns in the paper, a presentation will be scheduled—the student will have 30 to 40 minutes to present their work.
Students are expected to remain in Tuscaloosa for the summer to work on these papers. If students wish to leave the area for more than two weeks during the summer, they must obtain permission to do so from the second year summer exam committee. There will also be several meetings during the summer held by a mentor or an exam committee member in which students can address the progress of their work and can get critical feedback from faculty and other students.

Timing is critical throughout this process—please be aware it can take up to a month to receive IRB approval during the summer—so IRB approval should be sought by early-May.

In regards to the Empirical Content – The paper must contain some form of empirical content/data/analysis. This could involve:

(1) data that already exists (i.e., secondary data). Faculty will be encouraged to suggest sources of such data in their possession during the spring. (2) qualitative interviews used as a means of discovery or justification of theory, measures, or both, (3) a data collection effort—survey, experiment, etc. that allows for an adequate assessment of at least some of the hypotheses proposed, or (4) a replication with extension—using existing data or new data.

The data collected by the student must be fully analyzed, with all supporting materials and stimuli provided with the paper.

The student will be expected to present the paper late in September or early October, after the committee has evaluated the paper. A one week notice should be given before the presentations and all marketing doctoral students and other marketing faculty will be encouraged to attend these defenses.

The student will be evaluated on the following:

How well s/he has identified the gap(s), used the theory, developed sound hypotheses with strong rationales, developed sound methodology(ies) to study the ideas and hypotheses, executed the study(ies) and the analysis appropriately, interpreted the results appropriately, and provided a full explication of the above, along with a high quality presentation of theoretical and managerial implications, future research areas, and limitations.

If the student fails the paper and/or presentation—s/he will be allowed to redo this assignment by Jan. 20th. Failure to receive a pass the second time (Jan. 20th) will lead to the student being asked to leave the program.

After a successful pass of this process, the student moves on to work on his/her formal pre-proposal—which is the paper below—after step 2 is completed, the student has 9 months to successfully do a pre-proposal defense, which is outlined below.
4. Pre-proposal Defense (Written and Oral)*

This paper should be approximately 20 – 25 pages long. Please keep to page limits. This may evolve from one of the short papers above or may be an entirely new topic. The student should develop the area theoretically and provide a review of the literature relevant to the topic. Further, initial hypotheses and/or propositions need to be laid out with some initial ideas of methodology and analysis provided. The student may obtain advice from potential dissertation advisors but will primarily work on his/her own over the summer and fall of their third year on this paper. **If the student is using the three-essay option for their dissertation, they will have three short papers here as well as an introductory and an ending segment.** It is acceptable for this paper to have evolved from previous seminars or independent study courses.

After receipt of the paper(s), the student, their advisor, and doctoral coordinator (or a substitute selected by the coordinator) will schedule their oral defense, which addresses the potential contribution of the research ideas and the student’s ability to pull the ideas together and present them cohesively. A one-week notice to interested parties is required for both steps. All marketing doctoral students and other marketing faculty will be encouraged to attend these defenses.

The student’s pre-proposal committee and doctoral coordinator (or his/her representative) will decide after the presentation whether the student has officially passed the process. Evaluation of the student’s performance hinges on both their written and oral performance related to their paper(s). If the oral exam committee decides the student has not passed, then remedial work is specified and the student will be allowed to redo the process, at which point the student must pass in order to continue in the program. The criteria for a pass will hinge on ability to integrate, create ideas/theory, recognize important gaps and appropriately lay out how to test/assess the idea/theory/gap so that makes sense for progression to the dissertation. The structure of what we are looking for is similar to what appears under the second year summer paper (points 1 – 6) but with more of the emphasis on items (3)-(6), with emphasis on details.

Assuming a successful pass, the student will have completed their pre-proposal defense and with an indication that the student is on the right track for his/her dissertation, they may now proceed to their dissertation proposal.

If the dissertation topic or direction of the dissertation changes significantly down the road the student’s advisor may ask the student to redo their pre-proposal defense. Further, if there is a substantial delay in moving forward (nine months or more), the committee may require that the student redo the pre-proposal defense.

*If agreed upon by the student, their chair, and the committee, the student may skip the pre-proposal and move directly to the proposal. In this case, the proposal defense serves as both the proposal defense and as the preproposal or “preliminary oral exam” (required by the Graduate School). In this case, the doctoral coordinator (or their
representative) will work with the dissertation chair and committee and the student’s program committee to insure that this defense serves both purposes.

Committee Structures Defined:

1. **Program Committee**: 4 faculty members including one member from the department/area primarily responsible for the minor (preferably outside of marketing) and one member from any field of C&BA other than the major field, representing the college as a whole.

2. **First-Year Summer Paper Committee** shall consist of the doctoral coordinator and the first-year exam coordinator and one or two other faculty members chosen by the doctoral coordinator and exam coordinator. Additionally input will be solicited from the faculty advisors involved in the projects.

3. **Second-Year Summer Paper Committee** shall consist of the doctoral coordinator and the second year exam coordinator and one or two other faculty member chosen by the doctoral coordinator and exam coordinator. Input will also be solicited from the faculty advisors involved in the projects.

4. **The Oral Exam Committee (for pre-proposal)** consists of the student’s program committee and/or potential dissertation committee members (plus the doctoral coordinator). The doctoral coordinator and the student’s dissertation chair will act as co-chairs of the committee. If the doctoral coordinator is the dissertation chair, then another member of the committee will serve as co-chair. Substitutions will be permitted as necessary to provide useful feedback to the student. There should be four members of this committee, and preferably it should be people who will later be on the student’s dissertation committee.

5. **Dissertation Committee**: A minimum of five members of the graduate faculty; no less than two members must be from outside the student’s major field (i.e., Marketing) and at least one member must be from outside the student’s academic department (i.e., Management & Marketing).