Learning goals: Dissertation Research Practicum
Students who complete the dissertation practicum will be able to:

1. Demonstrate leadership in health policy in a designated practice setting for the promotion of health and elimination of health disparities.
2. Evaluate philosophically coherent and historically appropriate theory-based concepts in consultation with an expert in the student’s field of interest.
3. Assist in the implementation of research in a clinical and/or academic setting.
4. Participate in ongoing research with an expert researcher in a practice or education setting aimed at fostering a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to promote the health of people from diverse cultures.
5. Interpret roles of nurse scientists in a variety of settings.

Assessment Process

Our assessment process occurred during the summer of 2014 and early fall 2014 in the preparation of the program’s formal assessment process. The faculty and the Executive Committee had several conversations about the dissertation practicum, focusing on the learning goals and practicum and dissertation structure. Additionally, the Executive Officer shared the spring 2014 Doctoral Student Experience Survey Results for the Nursing Program for the dissertation with the faculty. This survey highlighted three areas in which the program results warranted greater attention and investigation:

1. Received sufficient advice for selecting a dissertation adviser. Result 40.0% agree
2. Sufficient pool of faculty from which to select adviser. Result 62.9% agree
3. Received sufficient guidance on dissertation process Result 61.8% agree

As a result of the concerns from faculty and these survey results. We asked guidance from our external reviewers on how best to maximize the dissertation practicum experience as well as the dissertation experience in our External Review assessment report.

The issues of concern were as follows:

a) How best to allow students to follow their current research interest even if these are non-sustainable and/or fundable?

b) How best to assign a sponsor based on a faculty-student match?
c) What type of policy should be developed for circumstances when students may need to change sponsor?

**Efficacy of Assessment Process**

We found the insights and recommendations from the external reviewers helpful and feel they promise to be effective in maximizing the dissertation experience. Our learning goals for the dissertation practicum stress the quality of scholarship and the ability of the student to evaluate theory-based concepts, assist in the implementation of research and interpret the roles of the nurse scientists. We are pleased with the input from both faculty and students regarding the dissertation practicum learning goals and the dissertation experience. At the December 2014 faculty meeting there was consensus on the need to address, revise, and restructure the dissertation research practicum and process for doctoral advisor/sponsor.

**Proposed Change**

The learning goals for the dissertation research practicum appear to work well and will not be changed at this time. However, at the December 2014 Faculty meeting, the recommendation was made to identify faculty advisors/sponsors early in the program. The timeline for the development of a dissertation topic and involvement of faculty in the process of dissertation development can now begin at the end of the first year and prior to the First Examination. Using the recommendation from the external program reviewers, the following efforts are proposed:

1. Greater efforts will be made to establish a match between the research interest of the student and the research expertise of the faculty. The process will now begin during the application process to the program. Early identification of student’s interest will naturally facilitate matching with appropriate faculty mentors. Early identification of the research focus of the students and match with faculty research has many benefits. Students can use coursework from the beginning of the curriculum to more effectively and efficiently develop their knowledge of the science and methodologies relevant to their area of research. Course content and assignment will be used to maximize to develop students’ dissertation research as well as scholarly outcomes (i.e. publications).

2. The identification of an advisor/sponsor early in the program can help the student identify relevant coursework (including electives) and craft research experiences (Dissertation Research Practicum) that will move the student’s dissertation research forward more efficiently. This will improve the student’s scholarly outcomes including dissemination activities and promote early establishment of appropriate and productive interdisciplinary activities that may ultimately lead to the identification of the dissertation committee.

3. The identification of the advisor/sponsor earlier in the program will allow for faculty and student time to form a relationship and solidify the mutual research interests and support during the dissertation practicum experience.

**Next Steps and Future Action**

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1. We are in the process with the current cohort of first year students of identifying faculty advisors based upon their research interest or topic. The format for the first examination has changed to the writing of the state of a science paper on a selected phenomenon. Students are required to submit, in writing to the Executive Officer by the last Friday in February, their topic of interest, target population, and choice of method to investigate the topic. The Executive Committee composed of the EO and DEO’s will review the submitted topics and assign the appropriate faculty member to be the student’s advisor.

2. Current students who have already successfully passed their First Examination and are currently in Dissertation Seminar I will also be assigned a faculty advisor/sponsor based on their topic or interest. It is the hope of the Executive Committee that many of the students will stay with their topic or interest that was identified in their state of the science paper (first examination).

3. Once the faculty advisor/sponsor has been identified, the Executive Officer will meet with students to discuss how the dissertation research practicum process will work with the appointed advisor/sponsor. The sponsor will be responsible for approving the student’s research practicum project and placement. Once the placement has been identified, the course faculty of the research practicum will coordinate and facilitate the practicum placement either with the sponsor or with an external researcher outside the institution.

4. The students will be informed that they will be permitted to change advisors/sponsors if needed. If there is a good match between the research interest of the student and faculty, there is not a great need for this. But, there are situations where a change in advisors is advisable (i.e. change in research focus). Students should know that this is an option. Currently, the Student Handbook indicates that both the student and faculty advisor must agree that a change is warranted. There will be a need to eliminate this process from the handbook.
First Examination Assessment Followup

The first examination is given at the completion of 20 credits and, under our present curricular model, this milestone is reached at the end of the first year. The timing, content, and format of the first examination have been continually evaluated since our program began. In our last assessment (Spring 2013) we presented our history of the first exam and expressed our concerns and proposed revisions to the first examination. We provided an update last year (Spring 2014) but not a full assessment report on the advice of Ms. Marie Burrage because we were writing our external review document (Fall 2014). We now present a follow up assessment of the revised First Examination, along with the program evaluators’ suggestions.

For clarity, these were our previous first exam learning goals:

1. Demonstrate ability to synthesize knowledge gained in the foundational first year courses.
2. Utilize competencies developed in foundational first year courses
3. Demonstrate mastery in the logical presentation of ideas using scientific writing

These goals reflected our desire to evaluate how well students had mastered the foundational courses of the first year. Until the latest revision (Spring 2014), students were provided with the questions in April and sat for the written examination together at the GC in June. The examination lasted one day and no notes were allowed during the exam. On average, 3 students yearly did not pass one or more sections of the first examination; however, over the course of 7 years, only one student did not pass on the second attempt and was dismissed from the program. Despite this, questioned whether their depth of knowledge could be adequately evaluated by this type of “comprehensive” exam.

Regarding content/format, we were unconvinced that we were effectively evaluating foundational knowledge in this manner. Moreover, we found there is no real consensus regarding content/format of comprehensive or qualifying exams in nursing doctoral programs (Mawn & Goldberg, 2012). We reasoned that students would be better served by demonstrating foundational knowledge through writing a “State of the Science” paper over the course of the summer. Thus, during spring 2014, we revised our first examination goals as stated below:

1. demonstrate a broad mastery of core content, theory, and research in a discipline;
2. select an appropriate phenomenon for an integrative literature review;
3. critically appraise empirical and conceptual literature of the selected phenomenon using articles, books, and/or dissertations
4. undertake independent scholarship.

We advised students to select a phenomenon that is closely aligned with their proposed dissertation topic. A one day workshop was provided with both nursing faculty and the GC librarian. We also provided detailed criteria and the scoring rubric (see attached). Students were instructed to conduct an integrative literature review and write the state of the science paper over the summer 2014. First examinations were due on August 15th and graded independently by two assigned faculty readers.

Results

Thirteen students took the first examination and, of these, nine students were successful on the first attempt. One of the four unsuccessful student had previously taken the first examination, had failed and had taken a leave of absence for personal reasons. This student was not successful on her first attempt this year and was dismissed from the program. The other three students were given an opportunity to review their papers with an advisor, revise and resubmit before January 15th 2015. All three students were successful on the second attempt.

Faculty met and discussed the first examination during Fall 2014 and the scoring rubric was revised to account for concerns and inconsistencies noted during the rubric’s use this past summer. We had shared our concerns with the first examination with our external reviewers and they advised us that the
state of the science paper was the best option. They also offered valuable advice concerning assignment of advisors and the advisor’s role in helping the student prepare for the first examination. We have heeded this advice and revised our advisor policy. This change is fully detailed in the accompanying report for 2015.

The Graduate Center of the City University of New York
Nursing PhD Program
First Examination Rubric
State of the Science Paper

Student Name: _______________________________
Faculty Evaluator: _____________________________

Grading Instructions:
The rubric will evaluate the student’s ability to:
1. demonstrate a broad mastery of core content, theory, and research in a discipline
2. select an appropriate phenomenon for an integrative literature review
3. critically appraise empirical and conceptual literature on the selected phenomenon using articles, books, and/or dissertations.
4. undertake independent scholarship.

*Definition: “An integrative review is a specific review method that summarizes past empirical or theoretical literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon (Broome, 1993). An integrative review presents the state of the science of what is known about the phenomenon.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Consistently Met</th>
<th>Met Majority of the time</th>
<th>Seldom Met</th>
<th>Not Met</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction of Phenomenon (10 Points)</td>
<td>9 to 10</td>
<td>6 to 8</td>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Literature Search (20 points)</td>
<td>17 to 20</td>
<td>11 to 16</td>
<td>1 to 10</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discussion (30 points)</td>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>16 to 24</td>
<td>1 to 15</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Summary and Conclusion (20 points)</td>
<td>17 to 20</td>
<td>11 to 16</td>
<td>1 to 10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mechanics of Writing (20 points)</td>
<td>17 to 20</td>
<td>11 to 16</td>
<td>1 to 10</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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Total Points of First Exam
Please see pages 2-3 for a detailed description of each of the criteria.

Criteria

1. **Introduction of Phenomenon (10 points)**
   - Concepts of interest are clearly identified
   - The target population and health care problem are clearly identified
   - The purpose of the integrative review is stated and well developed. (A properly stated, specific purpose for an integrated review will facilitate the ability to accurately identify variables and extract appropriate data from primary sources).

**Faculty Evaluator Comments:**

2. **Literature Search (20 points)**
   - The literature review process of an integrated review is clearly documented and includes search terms, the databases used, additional search strategies, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for determining relevant primary sources.
   - The review includes both qualitative and quantitative evidence with the intent to provide a broad perspective of the phenomenon.
   - The review includes the incorporation of primary sources, such as PhD dissertations.
   - The process used for compiling research-based and theoretical evidence is clear.
   - This evidence reveals a contemporary review that includes the timeframe of the studies published (a statement that includes...“the review included studies published from 1999 to 2014).
   - Database searches are clearly identified, for example: MEDLINE, CINAHL, Proquest nursing, ERIC, Journals@Ovid, PsychINFO, and ScienceDirect.
   - Categories for search terms are included.
   - Clear inclusion criteria are described for the sources included in the paper.
   - Search terms are identified and presented in a table as appendix. Students were instructed on how to use a critical appraisal for empirical literature using the Quantitative studies critical appraisal checklist from Bowling (2009) *see attached. And a Qualitative studies critical appraisal check list by Pearson (2004)* see attached.
   - The limitations of the review are clearly identified.

**Faculty Evaluator Comments**

3. **Discussion (30 points)**
   - A synthesis is formed and sufficiently supports the phenomenon under review.
   - The findings are discussed as follows:
     - Sampling frame is identified
     - Findings are succinctly stated and linked to other studies in the review
     - Appropriate statistics are presented

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consistency with prior studies with possible reasons for any discrepancies in findings,

- The implications for future research are presented and are based on the findings

**Faculty Evaluator Comments**

4. **Summary and Conclusion (20 points)**
- The summary provides a “nutshell” of the findings
- The summary includes the student’s interpretation of the literature findings
- The summary includes implications for future research including identification of the “holes” in the literature
- The conclusion is a brief summary paragraph that highlights the main findings and implications and reflects the findings relative to the stated purpose of the review.

**Faculty Evaluator Comments**

5. **Mechanics of Writing (20 points)**
- The paper is systematically organized using headings and spacing to facilitate the reader’s grasp of major elements.
- Each section of the paper is appropriately introduced
- The paragraph is the unit of composition and paragraphs include topic sentences that are fully developed within the body.
- There are transition sentences between topics and when needed between paragraphs.
- The language is clear and precise without exaggeration or superfluous wording.
- The active voice is used more than the passive voice.
- Terminology is consistent throughout the paper.
- Grammar and spelling are correct.
- References are accurate and follow APA guidelines

**Faculty Evaluator Comments**