Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare Assessment 2018-2019

The Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare evaluated the Second Examination for the academic year 2018-2019. The Second Examination includes a written and an oral component. The learning outcomes include the integration of content from core courses and those elective courses chosen by the student to inform a problem they intend to study for the dissertation. The Examination provides evidence that the student has mastered content in research methodology and is able independently to select a methodological approach appropriate to the current state of knowledge about research, policy, and theory related to the problem of study. In the written portion of the study, the student must provide evidence they have mastered all elements of a formal research proposal, which will include a problem formulation, review of the empirical literature, social policy related to the problem of study, the rationale for the methodology selected, and the proposed methods for a study. The written component for the Second Examination is an integrated paper, which three faculty members with expertise in the topic area review. In the oral component of the Examination, the student presents the proposal to the same expert faculty members using a media element of their choice. Following a visual presentation of the proposal, the student must respond to questions that challenge the substantiation of the selection of the study.

The primary activities undertaken to prepare students for the Examination occur in the Professional Seminar that students enroll in during their fifth and sixth semesters. Two years ago, faculty developed a rubric that are a guide for the elements students must include in the Examination and which the faculty use to grade the examination on a Pass/Fail basis. In preparation for the examination, students undertake a peer-review process through which they both offer and receive critiques from their classmates. The seminar also includes a series of
presentations by graduates of the Ph.D. program from their dissertation research and HRRP administration presentations that address human subject considerations they must include in the methodology section of the Examination. Besides specific preparation for the Second Examination in the seminar, students are expected to develop proposals and when feasible to conduct pilot research projects in their quantitative and qualitative methods courses.

The Program developed the grading rubric method three years ago and have utilized it in the past two years. Since that time, the pass rate for a first submission of the Examination was 100% in Spring 2017 and 90% in Spring 2018. We anticipate that a future outcome of this method will be a decrease in the time students take to secure dissertation committee and submit a dissertation proposal. We will track student’s time to completion of the degree with this change in examination preparation and structure.