

PhD Pilot Study Procedures

Thank you for your interest in the DEAC PhD Pilot Study. DEAC currently reviews programs at the professional doctoral level and is exploring the possibility of expanding its scope of accreditation activity to include the review of PhD programs. To provide some historical background, in 2009 DEAC received approval from U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to include the review of professional doctoral degrees within its scope of accreditation review. The PhD degree level, however, was not included in this scope. This pilot will help DEAC determine whether it is appropriate to pursue the inclusion of PhD programs within the scope of its accreditation activities and formally petition CHEA and USDE. Your participation will support the important work of testing and refining appropriate accreditation standards and procedures.

The PhD is a research-oriented doctoral program designed to prepare students for scholarly work in their profession. The PhD emphasizes the acquisition, organization, utilization, and dissemination of knowledge. A PhD program must afford the student the opportunity for substantial mastery of the subject matter. The PhD curricula includes exposure to and study of the theory, literature, and methodology of a significant field of study and follows a sequential development of research skills leading to the attainment of an independent research capacity. PhD dissertations require original research that contributes to new knowledge in the chosen field of study. DEAC will examine the quality of PhD programs submitted to the pilot study within the context of the aforementioned description.

The eligibility criteria and procedures for submitting an application to the DEAC PhD Pilot Study are outlined below:

1. Only DEAC-accredited institutions may apply to participate in the study.
2. Potential applicants must be in good standing with DEAC.
3. Potential applicants must have successfully completed 1 renewal cycle.
4. Potential applicants must demonstrate that they have been enrolling students in a related-field graduate level program for at least two years.
5. Potential applicants inform DEAC Staff of the institution’s intention to participate in the pilot study. Interested parties will be asked to participate in a pre-screening conference call prior to submitting the Application for the PhD Pilot Program.
6. Institutions submit the application to demonstrate the institution’s capacity to offer a PhD program and experience offering graduate level programs of study and educational offerings information sheet (EOI) to DEAC Staff.
7. Institutions remit the $500 non-refundable application fee payment to DEAC by check or wire transfer.
8. DEAC Staff reviews the application. If the institution is able to move forward in the process, the institution will receive a letter outlining the next steps, to include a more comprehensive assessment of the program.

If the institution is able to move forward:

1. DEAC will select 50% of the program courses from the EOI submitted with the application for review. The institution will receive a memo indicating the courses required for submission and the fee.
2. Institutions submit the Educational Offerings Report – Pilot PhD Program and requisite curricular materials for review by an off-site subject specialist.
3. If the program includes an in-residence component, the In-Residence Program Companion document (and separate fee payment) must also be submitted.
4. The institution will receive an invoice for the curricular review: $2,000 base fee + $100 per course.
5. The institution will receive the subject specialist report and have the opportunity to respond to any “partially meets” or “does not meet” findings by the off-site subject specialist.
6. The DEAC Academic Review Committee will consider the entire record of the institution’s submission to the PhD pilot.
7. The DEAC Staff will communicate the results of the Academic Review Committee’s assessment to the institution following the committee meeting. If approved, the institution may launch the program.
8. The institution will receive an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the program and enrolling students.

Institutions are reminded that the DEAC scope of recognition with the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation is not yet extended to include PhD programs. The pilot project will contribute to DEAC’s application for an expansion of scope, anticipated for 2023. It is therefore crucial that participating institutions clearly disclose to students that any PhD program potentially approved by DEAC is part of a pilot project and is not included within its scope of DEAC accreditation or USDE and CHEA recognition.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions, please contact DEAC Staff.