

**Proposed Standards for PhD Pilot Project**

*At its January 2021 meeting, the Accrediting Commission revisited discussion regarding DEAC institutions seeking to include PhD programs in their offerings. The language below outlines the standards that the DEAC will test for appropriate rigor in the review and approval process for PhD programs. Following the pilot study, the Commission may adopt, revise, or suspend these draft standards.*

*Only DEAC-accredited institutions may participate in the pilot study.*

**III. Program Outcomes, Curricula and Materials**

B. Appropriate Program Outcomes

3. Doctoral Degrees

d. The PhD is a research-oriented doctoral program designed to prepare students to conduct scholarly work that contributes new knowledge to their chosen field of study. The PhD emphasizes the attainment, organization, utilization, and dissemination of knowledge. A PhD program affords the student the opportunity for substantial mastery of the subject matter, theory, literature, and research methodologies that include both the qualitative and the quantitative. The curriculum must encompass a sequential development of research skills that lead to the capability to conduct independent research. PhD dissertations require original research that contribute new knowledge, concepts, and/or theories to the chosen field of study.

1. Comprehensive Curricula and Instructional Materials

9. PhD Programs

a. PhD programs are designed to prepare students to contribute new knowledge, concepts, and/or theories to the chosen field of study. The PhD emphasizes the attainment, organization, utilization, and dissemination of knowledge. Adequate oversight and advising are provided through all phases of the PhD program by appropriately credentialled and qualified faculty and advisors, including clinical practice or fieldwork required by the field of study.

b. The PhD requires 60 graduate-level semester credit hours or their equivalent beyond the master’s degree with a maximum of 15 total semester credit hours for the dissertation process. A minimum of 9 semester credits are devoted to advanced coursework in qualitative and quantitative research methodology. PhD programs are completed in no fewer than three years and no more than 10 years from the date of initial enrollment. PhD students who complete the coursework and a comprehensive examination are deemed PhD candidates.

c. The PhD requires a dissertation that demonstrates the candidate’s ability to produce original research that contributes new knowledge to the chosen field of study. An appropriately credentialed PhD committee with scholarly experience in the field of study reviews and approves the dissertation proposal. A dissertation manual is provided that includes guidelines on identifying, researching, writing, and presenting the selected topic. Dissertations are appropriately defended by PhD candidates before a dissertation committee via distance or in person. The PhD is awarded upon final approval by a majority of the doctoral committee.

1. If an institution has a corresponding professional/applied doctoral degree program in a similar field, the dissertation manual must address the distinctions between the research components of both programs (e.g., Ed.D and PhD in education related fields).

d. If the dissertation involves human research, the institution requires prior formal review and approval for all research involving human subjects through an institutional review board (IRB), which has been designated to approve, monitor, and review all research involving human subjects. The IRB ensures that the subjects are not placed at undue risk, that they have voluntarily agreed to participate and that they have received appropriate informed consent. The IRB meets all federal regulations, and the institution must be able to demonstrate that it is in compliance, including providing evidence that all IRB members have had appropriate training. (Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46.)

H. Examinations and Other Assessments

4. PhD Programs

The institution assesses student achievement through multiple means of evaluation, to include a comprehensive examination, and a dissertation. The institution requires students to successfully complete a comprehensive examination when all coursework is completed and prior to commencing work on the dissertation.

**VI. Academic Leadership and Faculty Qualifications**

C. Instructors, Faculty, and Staff

9. PhD Programs

All teaching faculty possess a terminal degree earned at an appropriately accredited institution in a related subject field. Faculty serving in advisory/supervision roles must also demonstrate current knowledge in the theory, literature, research methodology, and pedagogy associated with the field of study. Prior to enrolling students, the institution has in place a dedicated dean, director, or other academic officer with appropriate credentials and relevant academic experience to lead the program.

1. **Admission Practices and Enrollment Agreements**

D. ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

9. PhD Programs

At the time of admission, the institution obtains documentation that applicants possess a master’s degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution and have relevant academic experience. At a minimum, the institution verifies applicants have completed 30 graduate-level credit hours relevant to the PhD field of study prior to admission.

F. TRANSFER OF CREDIT AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

6. PhD Programs

The institution may award a maximum of 15 percent of the credits required for a PhD program (or nine semester credit hours for a 60-semester credit hour degree program) through transfer credit. Courses accepted for transfer credit are earned from appropriately accredited institution, relevant to the program of study, and equivalent in both content and degree level.

In addition to the proposed PhD specific standards sections listed above, institutions seeking to participate in the PhD Pilot would also need to demonstrate that the PhD program complies with the following Standards:

Standard III (A) – Description of Program Outcomes

Standard III (B) – Appropriate Program Outcomes

Standard III (C) – Curricula Delivery

Standard III (D) – Comprehensive Curricula and Instructional Materials

Standard III (D)(1) – Advisory Council

Standard III (E) – Curricula Development

Standard III (F) – Academic Units of Measurement

Standard III (G) – Educational Media and Learning Resources

Standard III (H) – Examinations and Other Assessments

Standard VI (B)(4) – Dissertation Supervisory Committee

Standard VI (C) – Instructors, Faculty and Staff

Standard VIII (D) (1) (2) – Admissions Criteria