

IMPLEMENTING PRACTICAL AND EFFECTIVE DOCTORAL ASSESSMENT

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Presentation for the University of Florida
Assessment Conference

April 14, 2025

SESSION OUTLINE

- Background
- State of PhD assessment
- New ways to think about PhD assessment
- Benefits and drawbacks
- Next steps
- Q&A

SESSION LEARNING OUTCOMES

- At the end of this session, participants will be able to:
 - Explain why traditional undergraduate assessment processes are often ineffective for PhD programs
 - Identify assessment data points and methods that are unique to PhD programs
 - Brainstorm techniques PhD programs can use to ‘tell their stories’ in qualitative and narrative formats

THE STATE OF PHD ASSESSMENT

- Most articles are pre-2010 and mostly international
- Changes in the emphasis on the parts of assessment that are important
- Personal philosophy of assessment
- “Supervision and assessment are crucial, and should be based on transparent contractual understandings between students, supervisors, and institutions.” (European University Association, 2005)

WHY PHD PROGRAMS ARE DIFFERENT

- Individualized nature of the dissertation process
- Small numbers of graduates
- Lack of standardized assessment criteria at any point in the program
- The vicious cycle: “I was never taught how to do this”

NEW IDEAS

- Set aside the more conventional assessment cycles and templates
- Use unique products of PhDs to generate *useful* data for programs to make improvements
- Break reliance on outputs; instead examine the actual progress of students

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- Foundational courses and other initial experiences of professionalization and presentation
- Take dropouts more seriously. It's not always a "personal problem".
- Do not let a qualifying exam or paper be your first point of assessment

DIVE DEEPER INTO BENCHMARKS

- Thorough and systematic examination of the important benchmarks
 - Even if qualitative, what are the general areas of strength and weakness?
- 9 out of 9 students passed the qualifying exam. 80% is passing.
 - Did they pass with an 81% or a 99%?
- Tie these back to strong learning outcomes

COMMON SOURCES OF DATA

- Annual reviews
- Course assignments
- Dissertation proposal
- Dissertation
 - Drafts
- Faculty conversations
- Lab rotations
- Placement data
- Presentations
- Professionalization activities (workshops, job talks)
- Publications
- Qualifying exams/papers
- Recruitment data
- Student-led focus groups
- Teaching preparation
 - Course evaluations
 - Syllabi

STUDENT PATHWAYS

- Focus on the realistic pathways students will take after graduation and assess based on these
- “[T]hree-way mismatch . . . between the purpose of doctoral education, aspirations of the students, and the realities of their careers—within and outside academia.” (Golde and Dore, 2001)
- Transferable skills
- Encourage the use of exit and alumni data to get to this information

FLEXIBILITY IS VITAL

- Flexibility and adaptation from assessment professionals to use formats to tell their stories is key
- Don't be wedded to templates – our adaptability is more important than theirs!
- Be okay with qualitative data.
- Sometimes an indirect measure is a direct measure.

BENEFITS

- Focuses programs on data that really matter
- Starts more useful conversations among faculty beyond just “their” students
- Identifies potential issues earlier

DRAWBACKS

- Time consuming for review and feedback
- Requires PD or individual training of programs and directors
- Can be more work for programs

TIPS FOR TRANSITIONING

- Always start with programs that are most willing
- Offer as much one-on-one discussion and training as possible
- Have a lot of examples to offer
- Encourage programs to identify an action research question that can be looked at via assessment data
- LISTEN.A LOT.

CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS

- Remember: This may not work for every PhD program!
- Don't force it – pilots are the best
- Leave compliance out of the conversation if you can