

Table 1. The Characteristics of Dissertations

Below are the criteria the focus group members specified for each level of dissertation quality.

Outstanding	Very Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is original and significant, ambitious, brilliant, clear, clever, coherent, compelling, concise, creative, elegant, engaging, exciting, interesting, insightful, persuasive, sophisticated, surprising, and thoughtful • Is very well written and organized • Is synthetic and interdisciplinary • Connects components in a seamless way • Exhibits mature, independent thinking • Has a point of view and a strong, confident, independent, and authoritative voice • Asks new questions or addresses an important question or problem • Clearly states the problem and why it is important • Displays a deep understanding of a massive amount of complicated literature • Exhibits command and authority over the material • Argument is focused, logical, rigorous, and sustained • Is theoretically sophisticated and shows a deep understanding of theory • Has a brilliant research design • Uses or develops new tools, methods, approaches, or types of analyses • Is thoroughly researched • Has rich data from multiple sources • Analysis is comprehensive, complete, sophisticated, and convincing • Results are significant • Conclusion ties the whole thing together • Is publishable in top-tier journals • Is of interest to a larger community and changes the way people think • Pushes the discipline’s boundaries and opens new areas for research <hr style="width: 10%; margin: 20px auto;"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is solid • Is well written and organized • Has some original ideas, insight • Has a good question or problem that tends to be small and traditional • Is the next step in a research program (good normal science) • Shows understanding and mastery of the subject matter • Has a strong, comprehensive, and coherent argument • Includes well-executed research • Demonstrates technical competence • Uses appropriate (standard) theory, methods, and techniques • Obtains solid, expected results or answers • Misses opportunities to completely explore interesting issues and connections • Makes a modest contribution to the field but does not open it up

<p style="text-align: center;">Acceptable</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Unacceptable</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is workmanlike • Demonstrates technical competence • Shows the ability to do research • Is not very original or significant • Is not interesting, exciting, or surprising • Displays little creativity, imagination, or insight • Writing is pedestrian and plodding • Has a weak structure and organization • Is narrow in scope • Has a question or problem that is not exciting—is often highly derivative or an extension of the adviser’s work • Displays a narrow understanding of the field • Reviews the literature adequately—knows the literature but is not critical of it or does not discuss what is important • Can sustain an argument, but the argument is not imaginative, complex, or convincing • Demonstrates understanding of theory at a simple level, and theory is minimally to competently applied to the problem • Uses standard methods • Has an unsophisticated analysis—does not explore all possibilities and misses connections • Has predictable results that are not exciting • Makes a small contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is poorly written • Has spelling and grammatical errors • Has a sloppy presentation • Contains errors or mistakes • Plagiarizes or deliberately misreads or misuses sources • Does not understand basic concepts, processes, or conventions of the discipline • Lacks careful thought • Looks at a question or problem that is trivial, weak, unoriginal, or already solved • Does not understand or misses relevant literature • Has a weak, inconsistent, self-contradictory, unconvincing, or invalid argument • Does not handle theory well, or theory is missing or wrong • Relies on inappropriate or incorrect methods • Has data that are flawed, wrong, false, fudged, or misinterpreted • Has wrong, inappropriate, incoherent, or confused analysis • Includes results that are obvious, already known, unexplained, or misinterpreted • Has unsupported or exaggerated interpretation • Does not make a contribution