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To:       Associate and Assistant Deans  
From:   James Beck, Graduate Policy Program Coordinator

Re:       Review of Doctoral Student Annual Evaluations

Date:   April 27, 2021

\*Please give careful attention to this memorandum.

A copy of this memo will be posted on the [Graduate School’s Faculty/Staff Website](https://faculty-staff.gradschool.fsu.edu/caslogin) as well as uploaded to the [Graduate Policy Database](https://policy.gradschool.fsu.edu/).

Annual reviews/evaluations are crucial to the satisfactory academic progress of a doctoral student through a graduate program, as it helps motivate and keep them on track. By providing constructive feedback and structured mentoring for improvement, advisors are setting students on a path to success during a time that can be rather stressful and quite autonomous. This process also creates a wonderful opportunity for unit’s to recognize and acknowledge the student’s exemplary performance in the program. We all benefit from meaningful encouragement.

Per university policy, all registered doctoral students must receive a timely annual evaluation. As such, it is important that the “quality” of these annual evaluations are reviewed on a routine basis by academic units, in order to ensure that they are effective and up-to-date. All graduate programs and disciplines vary greatly across campus, so it is difficult to provide specific examples or sample assessments that can be referenced for uniformity; however, in an effort to provide general guidance, I have outlined several items below that should be considered.

Programs are strongly encouraged to consider the following items when reviewing their doctoral student annual evaluations:

1. Annual evaluations should consist of a detailed, written assessment of the doctoral student’s academic progress and should be conducted by his/her primary advisor, major professor or unit head, often in consultation with a student’s advisory committee, and can be signed off by the Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair, and/or Academic Dean’s Office. Please keep in mind, the more detailed a progress report is, the more helpful it is to the student in addressing his/her timely degree progress or academic goals. Many academic units have created an annual evaluation form/template that programs can use so that all reviews remain consistent. Please avoid single word responses.
2. A self-assessment provided by the doctoral student is common and can be a useful part of the annual evaluation, but it is not required. In many ways, it is beneficial to have the doctoral student get involved and evaluate their own progress first and then have their primary advisor, major professor or unit head review their progress from the previous year.
3. The instructions and timing of the annual evaluation can be determined by each program/unit, but this information should be clearly outlined in each program’s Doctoral Student Handbook. It is also highly recommended to include a copy of the annual evaluation form/template in the Doctoral Student Handbook as well.
4. The annual evaluation should focus on the student’s degree progress and provide constructive feedback regarding the student’s strengths and deficiencies. The completion of important milestones and minimum university requirements should be addressed. It is also important to set clear expectations for the next academic year to prevent confusion or ambiguity. If units wish to incorporate additional program-specific components into the annual evaluation, they are encouraged to do so (e.g., progress related to coursework, early research projects, publications, professional development presentations, leadership experiences, fellowships, grants, foreign language proficiency, diagnostic exam advancement, etc.). If a doctoral student is ABD, the annual evaluation can include further information regarding the student’s prospectus goals, preliminary research interests, etc. which can assist advisors early-on in determining if additional foundational, pre-requisite courses are needed for the student to take for future research intentions. Moreover, if a doctoral student has passed their preliminary exam, been admitted to candidacy and is in their dissertation stage, it would be appropriate to evaluate his/her research progress and provide reminders of upcoming program, manuscript, or university deadlines.
5. A copy of the annual evaluation should be shared with the doctoral student and internally stored in the student’s academic file in the program/department. A copy should also be uploaded into The Graduate School’s Graduate Student Tracking System (GST) for reporting purposes.
6. It is highly recommended that the student receive a timely opportunity to discuss the annual evaluation, if they desire to do so, with their primary advisor, major professor or unit head (whoever conducted the evaluation).

All Academic Dean’s Offices are asked to work with their respective colleges, departments and programs to review their doctoral student annual evaluations during Summer 2021 to be sure that such reviews are meaningful, up-to-date, and providing useful feedback pertaining to the student’s academic progress in their graduate program. Transparency is important, especially once a doctoral student has proceeded beyond coursework, so it is vital that this process be thoroughly reviewed.

Once the Academic Dean’s Offices have validated this information, they are asked to send an email notification to James Beck ([jpbeck@fsu.edu](mailto:jpbeck@fsu.edu)) by **Friday, July 9, 2021**. If an annual evaluation needed to be completed during the summer, feedback would need to be provided to the student before the fall semester begins.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Thanks!

All the best,

James Beck

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