BROADENING THE DISSERTATION

WHY?

HOW?

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UBC - Public Scholars Initiative
- 2015-present

CAGS Task Force on the Dissertation
- 2018
# Broadening the dissertation - why now?

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<tr>
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<th>19th-20th C</th>
<th>21st C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge creation, mobilization</td>
<td>Mode 1 (linear)</td>
<td>More Mode 2 (contextual, multi-sectoral, iterative)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of university in society</td>
<td>‘Ivory Tower’</td>
<td>‘The Engaged University’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Societal, environmental problems</td>
<td>Approached through disciplinary lenses</td>
<td>Not solvable by single disciplinary or epistemological approaches</td>
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Traditional Problem  Wicked Problem
# Broadening the dissertation - why now?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PhD employers</strong></td>
<td>Academy</td>
<td>Academy plus private &amp; public sectors, NGOs, self</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PhD careers</strong></td>
<td>One / lifetime Job-based</td>
<td>Many / lifetime Portfolio-based</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PhD modes of work</strong></td>
<td>Often alone</td>
<td>Usually collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PhD breadth of focus</strong></td>
<td>Single discipline</td>
<td>Disciplinary and transdisciplinary</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PhD communication modes</strong></td>
<td>Scholarly papers</td>
<td>Scholarly papers Public/multi-media Technical reports…</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PhD scholarship</strong></td>
<td>Mostly discovery</td>
<td>Discovery, integration, applied, engaged, teaching</td>
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</table>
21st century graduates therefore need to be able to:

- Discover, synthesize, and critically assess knowledge
- Communicate to peers
- Ask important questions

- Create and mobilize knowledge in the context of problems
- Integrate knowledge and practice across disciplines
- Communicate to and with diverse audiences for diverse reasons
- Adapt to different ways of working, different types of questions, different approaches, different environments
- Perceive and understand diverse perspectives
- Engage and collaborate across sectors and disciplines
21st century graduates therefore need to be able to:

- Discover, synthesize, and critically assess knowledge
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Higher order cognitive, emotional, ontological, practical attributes

- Not generally taught, facilitated, valued, assessed; don’t ‘count’ as contributing to PhD
- Distinct approaches required to develop these
The PhD

New knowledge → academic papers

Reimagining the PhD

New knowledge(s) Mobilized/implemented Interdisciplinary → Contextualized Collaboratively-gained academic papers other - multiple audiences policy papers, syllabi, art, reports…
The PhD

Reimagining the PhD

New knowledge → academic papers

New knowledge(s)
Mobilized/implemented
Interdisciplinary
Contextualized
Collaboratively-gained

academic papers
other - multiple audiences
policy papers, syllabi, art, reports…
Reimagining the dissertation at UBC

- Is it possible? Across all disciplines?
- Will it be acceptable to the broader academy?
- Can the grad school lead? How?
- How to ensure quality? (and what *is* quality?)
- How to overcome barriers? e.g.
  - Master-apprentice paradigm (esp. sciences)
  - Practical considerations
  - Conservatism

\[ $$\text{Scholarly approach, pilot} $$ \]
Reimagining the dissertation at UBC

- Idea proposed to provost, deans – 2014
- ‘Reimagining’ symposium (national/international speakers) – 2014
- Pilot: Public Scholars Initiative – 2015
  - Support for PhD students to undertake multisectoral, multidisciplinary dissertation research & mobilization for the public good
- Tweaked dissertation guidelines and examiner instructions
- Sought continuing culture change: exemplars, news pieces, scholarly arguments, presentations, publicization of leadership buy-in, integration with other activities/initiatives
- CAGS task force consultations – 2016
- Follow-up symposium – 2017
- PSI embedded in UBC Strat Plan – 2018
- 2 new grad programs planning ‘reimagined’ dissertations from start; recruitment tool

Reimagining the PhD will require imagination from all of us, and an openness to new ideas – UBC President
• Tweaked dissertation guidelines and examiner instructions

Dissertation body:
1. Introduction
2. Research/Scholarship Chapters
3. Conclusion

One or more chapters may consist of material published (or submitted for publication) elsewhere, or other artifacts (e.g., film, application-oriented documents) placed in a scholarly context.

On non-traditional work and products: UBC values all forms of rigorous scholarship, including those oriented to discovery, to application, to teaching and learning, and to integration. All should be assessed as described above, with the understanding that the forms of knowledge contributed by the work will vary by the scholarly approach used. Doctoral students may include diverse scholarly products such as film or other recordings, policy papers, professional reports, websites, curricula, etc., as integral components of their dissertations. Such components are expected to be properly contextualized and analyzed within the overall scholarly arc of the dissertation. As much as you are able, please evaluate these components using the above criteria for rigor and integrity, with a focus also on potential implications and limitations for the intended applications.
Public Scholars Initiative

- Research allowance or stipend for (preferably) intersectoral, broadened scholarship
- Professional development (e.g. communication, policy, ethics)
- Community, peer mentors
- Talks for the general public
- Profiles and blogs
- Academic support for non-traditional dissertations

150 PhD students
>100 partners outside the academy
>20 defended dissertations
Non-traditional dissertations (or plans)

- Applied scholarship
- Community-engaged scholarship
- Collaborative scholarship
- Teaching and learning scholarship
- Participatory action scholarship
- Interdisciplinary scholarship
- Art-based scholarship

In fields where they aren’t the norm

- Film
- Websites
- Policy briefs
- Community reports
- Syllabi
- Exhibit material
- and others

In fields where they aren’t the norm
PSI Grads

Paige, Environ. Sciences

*Environmental values and financial incentives in conservation efforts*

Non-traditional content: ‘Grey literature’

NGO report as a chapter

Miranda, Botany

*Xylan synthesis in Golgi and teaching problem-solving in the undergraduate classroom*

Non-traditional content: Teaching and learning research in a science dissertation

Sarah, Interdisciplinary

*Decision-making for births after caesarean*

Non-traditional content: Knowledge mobilization - collaborative policy paper

The report…is in line with UBC’s policy (which I support) that applied publications aimed at a wide audience can be valuable components of a dissertation…its insights are…important to real-world applications

I really appreciated the chapter on the evaluation of various instructional practices for developing problem solving skills…the findings are/will be significant

This thesis is an example of integrated knowledge translation, which is, to my knowledge, a novel (and commendable) approach for a doctoral thesis and is likely to have an impact.
PSI Students

Experience of place in Russian émigrés
Non-traditional content: art installation
(shown in 3 cities)

Gregory, Anthropology

Film as research: women organizers
of the farmworkers movement in B.C.
Non-traditional content: documentary film

Ajay, Asian Studies

From Graphic Violence to Graphic Novel:
Engaging Art as Public Pedagogy to
Disarm Public Mass Gun Violence
Non-traditional content: graphic novel

Stephanie, Education
Higher order cognitive gains:
• gained new perspectives on my work
• now I understand what my research is really about
• inspired me to make new [intellectual] connections

Moral development:
• increased my awareness of societal responsibility as a researcher
• made me think critically about my responsibilities as a researcher

Identity development, excitement:
• gave me the courage to approach more difficult problems
• provided a sense of backing and seriousness - I become something more than just a student
• helped me take ownership over an academic identity that I was shy or reluctant to admit to
• the ‘crowning jewel’ of my PhD

New skills:
• profoundly changed the way I communicate my research
• allowed me to develop innovative methods in my research

Career development:
• allowed me to imagine possible career paths
• my career will have multiple dimensions as a result of being part of the PSI
**Deepened/broadened research:**
- has opened up a vast and rich research terrain that I never anticipated
- took my previous work to the next level
- brought a tremendous deepening of what I can bring to my dissertation

**Increased research impact:**
- it is directly impacting policy
- my work is really emerging in a public sphere in new unprecedented ways!
  - [95% of partners agreed that the work has significant impact]

“Keep pushing – this is gold. This is the future.”
CAGS task force on the dissertation

Susan Porter (co-chair), UBC: Pathology
Lisa Young (co-chair), U of Calgary: Political Science
Lonnie Aarssen, Queen’s University: Biology
Robert Gibbs, University of Toronto: Philosophy
Raymond Klein, Dalhousie University: Psychology
Anthony Paré, UBC: Education
Anna Ryoo, PhD student, UBC: Education
Paula Wood-Adams, Concordia: Engineering

Green Paper
Consultations across Canada
CAGS
Draft report
CAGS
Final report
CAGS

2016
2018
What did we ask?

Given the dissertation communicates an *original and significant contribution to new knowledge*:

1. Unified?
2. Acceptable forms of scholarship (beyond disciplinary norms)?
   What is ‘original’, what is ‘new knowledge’?
3. Acceptable forms of communication?
4. Criteria for inclusion, assessment?
5. Concerns?
6. Recommendations?
What did we find?

Students > Graduate Deans > Faculty

“It’s tried & true – don’t change it!”

“Maybe we should think about it…”

“Let’s do this!” (or “we’re already doing it”)
What did we find?

Excited but nervous

- ↑ breadth
- ↑ creativity
- validation/use/greater understanding of knowledge
- expands a ‘privileged way of knowing/communicating’
- multidisciplinary, collaborative
- relevant to world, careers

- ↓ depth
- apprentice paradigm
- mentorship & assessment
- risk to students
- ‘not how it’s done’
- ‘dumbing-down the PhD’
Recommendations

- Encourage broadening of the dissertation – move towards perspective of ‘actual anticipated needs of the student, the workplace, and society’
- Continue to value traditional/basic scholarship
- Encourage expansion of mentors as appropriate
- Provide learning support as needed
- CAGS should coordinate activities, resources, support; grad schools can provide support
- Encourage recognition of alt-scholarship in faculty reward systems and hiring practices
- Keep talking!

*It is not enough to rethink the doctorate. We have to rethink the faculty.*

- Yehuda Elkana, 2006