

GUIDELINES FOR SHIPS QUALIFYING PAPER

Goals of the Qualifying Paper

The faculty would like second year students in the SHIPS doctoral program to be able to demonstrate that they can write a research paper using qualitative or quantitative data.

The objectives of the qualifying paper are as follows:

- To demonstrate the candidate's proficiency in framing a research question.
- To demonstrate the candidate's proficiency in conducting a thorough, critical and succinct review of relevant literature.
- To demonstrate the candidate's proficiency in developing a conceptual framework to analyze the research question.
- To demonstrate the candidate's proficiency in using qualitative or quantitative evidence to support the case the candidate makes in analyzing the question.

Contents of the Qualifying Paper

The qualifying paper should have the same contents as any standard journal article:

- A statement of the research problem and statement of the research question.
- A brief review of the relevant literature that speaks to the research problem, including the justification for your approach to the research question.
- The conceptual framework and methodology you will use to address the research question.
- The qualitative or quantitative evidence you will use to make the argument.
- An analysis of the evidence.
- Discussion of the conclusions reached, including limitations.

Each component has some major functions that are delineated below.

The *statement of research problem* and *statement of research question* should:

- Clarify the problem and the research question to be investigated.
- Show how the research question relates to the published literature on the topic (e.g., fills a gap, solves a puzzle, confirms an important finding, overcomes major conceptual or methodological limitations of previous research on the topic).
- Justify the practical and/or theoretical importance of the question to be investigated.

SHIPS QP Guidelines

The QP also includes a critical review of the literature on the chosen topic. This should not be descriptive summary. In some cases, several literatures are relevant.

The *critical review of literature* should:

- Identify and comment on the theoretical or conceptual approaches that bear on the treatment of this topic.
- Distinguish clearly between objective and data-based literature and the prescriptive or advocacy literature on the subject.
- Synthesize the major findings with the conceptual and methodological features of prior research, as well as the findings.
- Identify the major limitations of previous research on the topic.

The *conceptual framework* should:

- Identify the relevant concepts and theoretical perspectives.
- Make explicit the proposed linkages between concepts (e.g., correlation, causal) and justify those proposed linkages using knowledge from prior research or practice.
- Show the connection between the research question and the data you will use.

The *methodology* should specify the research design (model) and method(s) that you will use to address the research question. In methodology section should also include:

- A description of the evidence or data used to address the research question and why these data or evidence are appropriate for investigating the research question.
- The advantages and limitations of the approach and the data/evidence in addressing the research question.

The *analysis of the evidence* should present the results of applying the qualitative or quantitative data or other evidence to the conceptual model. The analysis should focus on making the argument regarding the research question. In the analysis of the evidence, the researcher tries to anticipate challenges to the analysis' validity and to show how the analysis meet those challenges.

The *discussion section* should summarize how the analysis of the data/evidence relates to the research problem and the *limitations* of the analysis.

The best models for a good research paper are stellar published journal articles in the research area being addressed. Students should model their QP paper on such

journal articles. Once you have picked your topic, your advisor can point you to such model papers.

Qualifying Paper Format Length and Due Date:

Typed, double spaced, twelve-point font, conventional reference style.

- ✓ Approximately 25 pages (references and appendices not included in determining length). Confer with primary advisor on expectations for length, as there is variation among faculty. Journal article length is usually about 35-40 pages including tables, references, and endnotes.
- ✓ Due prior to the first day of autumn quarter of year 3. See section in Doctoral Handbook for Sixth Quarter Review for more information.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING THE QUALIFYING PAPER

A. CLARITY AND IMPORTANCE OF PROBLEM STATEMENT

Is it clear what new knowledge is needed, what problems need to be solved, or what theory needs to be tested/developed, and why? Has the writer connected the reader quickly with the research problem or question?

B. CLARITY OF RESEARCH QUESTION

Is it clear precisely what this study is intended to accomplish (e.g., is the purpose confirmatory, discovery or exploratory)? Is it clear how the study will advance our understanding of some education-related phenomena?

C. ADEQUACY OF LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Is the context and “intellectual ancestry” of this study described in a clear, comprehensive, and coherent manner? Are the following things achieved?

- Conceptual framework is clearly identifiable with concepts and constructs defined.
- Research question is linked to conceptual framework
- Literature review is appropriately critical and selective.

D. METHODOLOGY

Is the proposed research design/methodology section clear? Is there a clear and convincing rationale for the appropriateness of the data? Are limitations or trade-offs identified?

E. ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE/DISCUSSION

Is the analysis of the evidence presented in a convincing fashion? Does it focus on the research question? Are potential challenges to the validity of the analysis adequately addressed? Does the discussion section address how the analysis of the evidence relates to the extant literature and the limitations of the findings?

F. QUALITY OF WRITING

Is the prose clear, succinct, and coherent? Additional considerations: Writes in a succinct manner, avoids repetition, integrates different parts of proposal, uses adequate citations, provides specificity without making the document overly lengthy.

G. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALIFYING PAPER

Not a summation or average of ratings of A-F, but an indication of the reader's overall impression of the quality of the qualifying paper. The QP will be deemed one of the following: acceptable as is; acceptable with minor revisions or addendum; acceptable if a revised and resubmitted paper is approved by the committee; or unacceptable. [See procedure for sixth quarter review.]