To: PhD students in our lab.

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What constitutes a completed PhD?  The guidelines set by the UCSB Graduate Division for a PhD dissertation identify significance (which we interpret as quality and quantity) and independence. Apart from that, the guidelines make it clear that the decision to accept a dissertation is a consensus of the individual committee members. To help you understand what we expect, we have put our standards in writing:

At your orals, you propose, and we approve, the main dissertation chapters. You can modify these chapters later (subdivide, fuse, replace) with committee approval, but we will not approve changes that reduce the quantity of research below the traditional minimum of three substantial/important (main) chapters. As for independence, the student should earn the first authorship of papers that result from the main chapters in the dissertation, unless (rarely) the committee supports another place in the authorship chain. We will sign off on a PhD dissertation when all main chapters are of sufficient quality that each could be submitted to a well-regarded peer-reviewed journal.

FAQ:

**What is meant by “could be submitted”?**Despite it being in your best interest, the committee cannot force you to submit a chapter to a journal, or dictate the journal, or expect the chapter to be accepted by a journal prior to filing your thesis. And the chapter does not need to be formatted for a particular journal (the only formatting criteria are the library’s); but the chapter needs to be good enough to submit. In other words, the chapter should be a final draft of a significant contribution, lack logical flaws, be well written, and be packaged in a way that meets conventional journal standards (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion). Although you do not need our approval to submit a paper on which we are not authors, simply submitting a paper to a journal does not mean that we will agree that it was good enough to submit. As editors and referees, we see submitted papers that should not have been submitted. We pass our own papers through many rounds of revision prior to deeming them ready for submission, and this takes time, so don’t wait until your last year to start writing. *The best way to demonstrate that a paper could be submitted to a journal is to submit it after getting comments from at least one committee member who acknowledges that it is ready for submission to a journal.*

**What is meant by a well-regarded journal?** There are now many pay to publish journals and pseudo journals. Some of these are even indexed. By well regarded, we are talking about indexed journals with a reputation of rigorous peer review. Ask us if you are not sure about a particular journal.

**I only have to do three chapters?**  Not quite. The number of chapters is laid out in your orals, and thus agreed on by you and the committee in advance. It is common to add or subtract or change chapters after your orals. But please make these changes in consultation with your committee. And, while you might be given approval to drop a chapter or two, don’t cut chapters at the end just to finish by a certain date. Three chapters is the conventional minimum for a PhD. To be competitive on the job market, shoot for more than three published papers from your dissertation and collaborate on a wide range of papers beyond your dissertation. The strongest collaborations will often be among your lab-mates. Our ethos is to be strongly collaborative, enabling all of us to do grander, more innovative and sometimes riskier projects.

**What can be in a dissertation that is not a main chapter?** The dissertation is a useful place to put things that would not, on their own, merit submission to a journal due to issues like scope, quality or size.  For instance: overviews, raw data, maps, computer code, statistical tables, descriptions of failed experiments, poetry, memoirs, illustrations, photographs, extensive acknowledgements, etc. Set these up as appendices. But keep in mind that they should not be called chapters and they don’t count toward the minimum standard for completion.

**When would another person end up a first author on a paper coming from my dissertation?** Here is an example. Let’s say one of your chapters was mostly data oriented, and you collaborated with someone that analyzed those data and wrote up the results. The subsequent paper will have been much more than your dissertation chapter, and the final authorship could reflect that.

**What about the data?  Who owns it when I’m done?** Because we have invested years of time and money in your dissertation, when you leave the lab, you leave a copy of your data and metadata with us (if it is not published as an appendix to your dissertation), and agree that, although you have the first right to publish papers from these data, we retain the right to make use of the data if you do not within three years.

**What about my other committee members’ expectations?** You need to satisfy them all. Here are some examples of things that come up. Some members expect that there is an experiment. Others will want an overview chapter. One might focus on statistical details, or experimental design, or methods. Some will care about the writing style. A few won’t bother to read it at all. Be sure to ask about expectations before having someone join your committee.

**What about coauthors; do they need to approve the dissertation chapter?** Even though your dissertation will not be coauthored, it is a general standard that collaborators should be given an opportunity to approve the final draft of a published work, whether this is a dissertation chapter or journal paper. This is most important for cases where a collaborator has had substantial intellectual input. If a key collaborator has not commented on a chapter that is ready for submission, consult with us and demonstrate that you have given them a reasonable opportunity to comment. We may be able to help you prod.

**But I’ve been in graduate school a really long time, doesn’t that count?** A PhD is not like a football game that you win once the clock runs out. It is more like golf (with us as your caddy). You have to play the whole course to finish, but you also need to reach the 18th hole before dark. If you do not meet the minimum standards by the time set by the university or your personal life, you will leave with a Master’s degree, provided that you have passed your orals, and paid the requisite filing fee to the University.

**What are you going to do to help me finish?** Finishing requires your dedication and determination, but we will: (1) provide a suitable workspace, (2) foster an intellectual atmosphere of interactive colleagues, (3) make time to meet at your request, (4) negotiate a proposed timeline, and advise you on how to best use your limited time, (5) suggest relevant papers to read and subjects to learn, (6) guide you in developing professional skills and habits, (7) help you determine the proper scope of your dissertation proposal, especially its tractability, risk of failure, and its potential importance, (8) protect your dissertation topic as your intellectual territory – i.e., we won’t poach it ourselves or give it away to others to work on and we will strongly support you if others unfairly intrude, (9) help you seek funding and look for ways to support your research from resources that we might have access to, (10) provide examples of how to write a proposal and a scientific paper, (11) potentially collaborate with you as coauthors, (12) read your drafts in a timely manner and give you constructive feedback to help move toward a version that we agree meets our stated standards, (13) help you with contingencies if things fail.