

Supporting Doctoral Students Post-Qualifying Exam: A Guide for Faculty

The period following a student's successful completion of their Qualifying Exam (QE) is crucial for their development as a researcher and scholar. This guide outlines strategies for faculty to effectively support and mentor their doctoral students during this critical phase.

Understanding the Post-QE Landscape

After passing the QE, students typically:

- Feel a sense of accomplishment and relief
- May experience temporary loss of direction
- Begin to transition from course-taker to independent researcher
- Start focusing more intensely on their dissertation research

MCIP-Specific Requirements for Students after QE

1. The chair of the dissertation committee (e.g. Major Professor) should meet with the student at least quarterly, although more frequent meetings (e.g. weekly/biweekly) are strongly encouraged
2. The full dissertation committee should meet with the student annually, ideally before the due date for the Student Progress Assessment, which occurs annually from May 1st to June 30th (additional meetings are encouraged)
3. Dissertation committee members are expected to read and comment on the dissertation within four weeks of its submission

Key Areas of Support

1. Research Development
 - Refining Research Focus: Help students narrow down their research questions and develop a clear, feasible research plan
 - Methodology Guidance: Assist in selecting and mastering appropriate research methodologies
 - Literature Review: Guide students in conducting comprehensive literature reviews and staying current in their field
2. Academic Writing and Publication
 - Dissertation Proposal: Support students in crafting a strong dissertation proposal
 - Publishing Opportunities: Encourage and guide students in publishing parts of their work in academic journals or conference proceedings

- Grant Writing: Assist students in identifying and applying for relevant grants and fellowships
3. Professional Development
 - Conferences: Encourage participation in academic conferences and help prepare presentations
 - Networking: Introduce students to key figures in their field and teach networking skills
 - Teaching Experience: Provide opportunities for teaching or TA roles, if appropriate
 4. Time Management and Goal Setting
 - Creating Timelines: Help students create realistic timelines for their dissertation work
 - Milestones: Set clear, achievable milestones to maintain steady progress
 - Work-Life Balance: Emphasize the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance
 5. General Support
 - Regular Check-ins: Schedule regular meetings to discuss progress and challenges
 - Addressing Imposter Syndrome^{**}: Help students recognize and overcome feelings of inadequacy
 - Stress Management: Provide resources for managing stress and maintaining mental health

Best Practices for Faculty Mentors

1. Personalized Approach: Tailor your mentoring style to each student's needs and personality
2. Clear Expectations: Establish clear expectations for communication, progress reports, and deadlines
3. Constructive Feedback: Provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback on their work.
4. Encourage Independence: Gradually increase the student's autonomy in research and decision-making
5. Interdisciplinary Exposure: Encourage exploration of interdisciplinary connections when relevant
6. Career Guidance: Discuss various career paths, both within and outside academia.
7. Role Modeling: Demonstrate good research practices, work ethics, and professional behavior

Addressing Common Challenges

1. Loss of Momentum: Help students maintain motivation and progress post-QE euphoria

2. **Research Setbacks:** Guide students through inevitable research challenges and setbacks
3. **Balancing Commitments:** Assist in managing research, teaching, and other academic responsibilities
4. **Funding Concerns:** Help navigate funding options and budgeting for research expenses

Creating a Supportive Culture

1. Organize regular seminars or workshops for post-QE students to present their work
2. Facilitate peer support groups or writing circles
3. Ensure departmental policies and resources are clear and accessible

Conclusion

The post-QE period is a transformative time for doctoral students. As faculty mentors, your guidance and support play a crucial role in shaping their academic journey and future careers. By providing structured yet flexible support, you can help your students navigate this challenging phase successfully and emerge as independent, confident researchers.

More information about this can be found in the [MCIP degree requirements](#).