Are you to be a PhD Candidate?
A self assessment

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Introduction

This document is written in response to demand of both PhD committees who look after PhD candidates and students who are interested in joining PhD program in the Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies. It provides ideas on how they can preliminary assess who would be suitable for the program before they start to spend their money and times. The basic justifications are presented but the lists are not exhausted. The author hopes that this document would help people understand more about PhD life and what it takes to achieve a PhD.

General Requirements

Qualifications

The candidate must hold a Master degree or equivalent (a person with first class honor of a bachelor degree is eligible for applying for PhD at the Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies) with knowledge and a strong interest in environmental issues and related research areas are expected.

The candidate must be interested in extending knowledge in the field of environmental management by conducting an original research and publishing the results.

Language Skills

The candidate must pass the English test before applying to the course. They should be fluent in written and spoken English or at least are willing to work hard on it.

Self Assessment Test

Have you ever been seriously thinking of why you want to do a PhD? The following sections give you a set of questions for you to answer.

Ask yourself why you want to do a Ph.D.

What does a Ph.D. mean to you? Does it mean anything to you in particular? Or rather, it means so much to your parents, to your institution, to your boss or subordinates at your work place or etc.

No matter what the answer would be, be true to yourself because it is important to find out why you want to do it before you spend your life on it.

- I want to do a PhD because I cannot get a good job.
- I need to be promoted in my work and one way is to do a PhD.
- I want to further my study and contribute some knowledge to the field.
• My dad wants me to do a PhD so that he will be proud of me.

• My organization has collaborated with a funding agency, and a task under the agreement requires a PhD to do it. It happens that I’m the only person who is good enough for PhD. That is why I must do it.

**Ask yourself further with the following questions**

**Do you want a research profession?**

Working on a Ph.D. is like training for professional researcher. If you like researching and research is a goal in your life, doing PhD will lead you to it. You don’t have to stick to the same field that your thesis is about for the rest of your life, though. But researching is the spirit of every “doctor”. Thus, if you want a non-research job, Ph.D. is definitely not worth your while.

**Have you got a research topic yet?**

If you have one or several topics, it means that at least you have something you are interested in. You’ve been reviewing literatures and you know what are still not known in the field. In some instances your supervisor may want you to do what he is interested in or you may want your supervisor to tell you what topic you should work on. In which case you would jump into it willingly because you can expect that he will frequently tell you what is the next step to do. Well if that is the case you should get back to the first question and try to answer yourself what PhD means to you and what do you want from PhD.

**The next important question is do you have what it takes?**

**Intelligence:**

This doesn’t mean that only a person with honors can do Ph.D. In fact, you don’t need to be closer to the top of your class. But there are a lot of times that you need to be able to learn new things by yourself. Basic knowledge and understanding of science and apply mathematics would help a lot.

**Do you have time to pursue it?**

PhD is a full time research work, not a part time, sometime or free time job. If you haven’t realize this you will be amazed how time passes by so quickly that you haven’t achieved what you expect for. Make sure that you have enough time out of the routine job that earn your living and out of your demanding family.

**Are you tough enough to work under PhD pressure?**

A lot of hard work just to obtain all related literatures, data, etc let alone learning new theories and skill such as using a statistical package or understand behavioral science. Get along with your supervisor is another thing. Your hard work does not meet or even close to your supervisor’s expectations. Can you take that? It doesn’t mean every supervisor is nasty. It is the combination of a lot of things; yourself, your topic, your supervisors, your stubbornness or his ignorant.

**Originality and plagiarism.**

Originality is a buzz word and it doesn’t mean that you have to create something totally new. What you need to do is to understand why we got stuck with something or know what is going on that is not correct or not very efficient and provide new solution for it.
But remember don’t cheat people, especially yourself by claiming someone else’s superb ideas as yours.

**Systematic thinking and critical thinking**

Not only must a PhD candidate be able to think by himself but also thinking systematically. Thinking systematically means you take the whole picture and see relationship of factors involved, understand the system behavior and able to predict what would be if… That seems to be too much but at least you should be able to see factors related to each other. Critical thinking is another property that you must have.

**The power of stay and struggling along**

Fighting, no I don’t mean fight with your supervisors unless he has a bad intention. You’ve got to stay with your research, just don’t burst out or give up. You can give up alright if you don’t want to do it anymore but don’t give up because it is too difficult or you don’t know what to do next and you are being despair. That doesn’t help because it’s going to stay at the back of your head throughout your life that you cannot finish your PhD. Day in and day out you must do it. It’s a tiring job. Taking a rest when you feel so, then contemplating about it, get another approach in doing it, and try it again!!!

**Maturity and self-motivation**

Maturity and self motivation and the ability to work both independently and as a team player in local and international research teams are expected. Are you self-motivated enough to keep working toward a goal without your supervisor’s day-to-day encouragement? At the same time, be real. Don’t set a very big and difficult goal of changing the world or become the most famous researcher for the field. It would come as a result of hard work only, not by dreaming on it. You will also have more freedom to determine your daily schedule and set your own goals. A lot of students spend their times enjoying socialize activities. Being a Ph.D. candidates is blessing for the others and you may like to appear in social functions. But are you prepared to accept the responsibility that comes with such freedoms? Your success or failure in Ph.D. research depends on it.

**Creativity**

Theses and discoveries often arise when old facts are scrutinized and looked at in a new way. Are you delighted when solving problems? Or most of the time you are good at avoiding problems. Do you like brain games and puzzles? Did you find logical thinking enjoyable or boring? Do you often see things that most people could not see or tend to ignore? Ask yourself sincerely.

**Sense of wonder**

Have you always been trying to understand things going on around you and to find out how things work? A sense of wonder and curiosity is the spirit of researching. Do you find yourself always arguing for minimum requirements or you find that thing just get too interesting so that you explore further on your own?

**Adaptability:**

Most students understand Ph.D. study vaguely. It is an abrupt and unexpectedly change from course work. Suddenly students fall into a question in which no one knows the answers, students sometimes frustrated and burst out. Can you adapt to new ways of looking at things? Are you willing to search for answers even when no one knows the precise questions?
**Competitiveness:**
If you choose to enroll in a Ph.D. program, you will compete with others at the top. More important, once you graduate, you will be amongst the brightest people in the world and you will be judged in comparison to them. Ph.D. is not the end result. Rather, it is a starting point and there is a never ending path ahead of you. Are you willing to compete with yourself at the Ph.D. level?

**Cautions:**
Some students found out that they enroll in a Ph.D. program for the wrong reasons. Before starting one should be aware that a Ph.D. is not:

- A way to impress your family or friends
- A way to tell people how smart you are
- Prestigious thing to be achieved
- A guarantee of respect from your community
- The only research topic you will ever pursue
- An entry pass to easy money jobs

Understanding of things will make us more capable of dealing with them. Understanding Ph.D. life would certainly help you making more realistic decision for yourself. Whatever decision you will make, Good luck!!!