Introduction to the Doctoral Learning Contract

The road to a PhD degree is a long and difficult one. To aid in planning the road ahead, and to help keep the student on some sort of a schedule, WCIU has adopted the use of a Doctoral Learning Contract (DLC).

The DLC specifies the student’s individualized study program. It is designed by the student’s Doctoral Committee under the leadership of the Major Advisor, in consultation with the student. It then goes to the Graduate Programs Director, who will get the necessary approvals or suggestions for revision from WCIU. In case of later substantial changes in the DLC, a similar procedure is followed.

The DLC model provided is arranged in sections described below. You can write right on the form (adding extra pages for the various courses selected for the program), or you can create your own document, but these subject areas must be covered.

Section 1. Summary of Major Focus. Outline the major areas to be covered in the Doctoral Qualifying Examination (toward the end of the study program) and the research focus of the Doctoral Dissertation, as far as is known at this time. The individualized study program is to be designed keeping in mind these topics and the student’s Specialization within International Development.

Section 2. Background Information. List learning outcomes, educational resources, and basic strategies for the doctoral program being proposed.

Section 3. Required Courses. These courses ensure a master’s level understanding of the broad field of International Development.

The DLC is written during the course Intl Dev 574 – Research Design.

Section 4. Individualized Courses. These courses focus on studies in the Specialization and supporting disciplines. They can be taken at any educational institution, or they can be especially designed by the student’s own Committee as individualized study courses from WCIU. In either case, a Course Outline must be submitted and approved before enrollment in each course.

At least thirty units of the Required Courses and Individualized Courses must be WCIU courses.

Section 5. Other Requirements. Indicate other types of learning expected of the student, such as foreign languages, mentoring experience, professional contacts, journals, etc.

When the student has completed all Required Courses, the DLC has been finalized, and the Doctoral Committee has been confirmed, the student’s status is changed from Tentative Graduate Associate to Graduate Associate.

Note that many courses at the individualized study level are in the form of directed readings or field research. They are designed to help Associates become thoroughly acquainted with the scholarship in their field, as well as to prepare them for their more narrowly focused
dissertation research.

While many of the specific activities in the doctoral program will become known only gradually as each step is taken and as the student becomes acquainted with the field of study, designing the DLC at the start provides an outline guide to follow. The student and all Committee Members can see the entire program at a glance and can monitor progress more readily.

Ideally, there should be no hidden requirements that appear without warning late in the student's program. Changes in anticipated time schedules for courses, language study, exams, and the dissertation do not require approval by WCIU, unless an extension of time beyond the ten year maximum is required. Changes in courses or other significant modifications of requirements do require approval from the Graduate Programs Director.