Characteristics of a Graduate Education
The University of New Orleans
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Graduate education is the beginning point for mastery of an academic discipline. While an undergraduate education provides a general overview of the components and cognitive areas of a discipline, graduate education is characterized by specialized training in the discipline's literature, theory, research methodology, application, and critical analysis. Graduate education is characterized by study of the discipline in depth as well as breadth.

Since graduate education is concentrated, learning is more self-directed, and involves more individualized instruction and mentoring. A graduate degree provides students with the skills necessary to generate new and apply existing knowledge. It also provides students a deep understanding of a discipline's professional ethics and values.

Graduate degrees can have a variety of orientations or goals. Some degree programs stress theory and basic research. Other programs are designed to meet professional goals and emphasize theory, skills, and applied research. Regardless of the purpose and goals of a graduate degree, all programs share common characteristics. A high quality graduate program will have:

1. **Clarity of Purpose.** Program outcomes are clearly articulated, assessed, and revised as needed.
2. **Core Knowledge** of the theoretical underpinnings, literature, knowledge, skills, research practices and methodologies of the discipline to support the entire learning experience.
3. **Rigorous Curriculum** that teaches advanced knowledge, skills, tools, literature, methods and practices. Through structured or independent learning, students learn how knowledge is created, applied, and evaluated in the discipline.
4. **Immersion** in the discipline that is deeply engaging and promotes creativity, dedication, and collegiality.
5. **Critical Engagement** with faculty and colleagues, where assumptions are tested and re-tested.
6. **Application of Knowledge** through internships, practica, essays, reports, portfolios, examinations, exercises, laboratory work, assistantships, fieldwork, and other experiences that enhance the learning process.
7. **Culminating Experience** that reflects the student’s gained knowledge and abilities. Whether through such activities as a thesis or dissertation, thesis project, recital, exhibit, internship, or case study, students should demonstrate their understanding of the discipline’s literature, theory, skills, and methods.