

Doctoral Program Overview — The Research Doctorate in Capture Management, Government Business Development, and Business Structuring

“The undergraduate tier teaches what the discipline is. The master’s tier teaches how to do the discipline. The doctorate exists to ask what the discipline knows — and to prove the answers.”

Program level: research doctorate (PhD) · **Post-master’s course numbers:** DL 901, DL 902, DL 903 · **Dissertation research:** DL 990 · **Audience:** doctoral students and the faculty who advise them.

This document is the front door to the doctoral tier of the Dream Pursuit Doctrine curriculum. It is written for a prospective doctoral student, a dissertation chair, or a program committee deciding whether this discipline deserves a research seat at their university. It tells you what the program is, who it is for, how it is structured, and what a graduate is expected to contribute.

1. What this program is

This is a **research doctorate** in a discipline that has surprisingly little published research: the craft of winning federal and government business. Capture management, government business development, grants strategy, and the business structuring that turns a pursuit into a durable entity are practiced at scale — thousands of firms, billions of dollars — and taught in certificate programs and master’s tracks, but the field is empirically thin. Almost nobody has published systematic evidence on the questions its practitioners argue about every day:

- Does a disciplined probability-of-win estimate actually predict who wins?
- Which factors in a win-probability composite matter most — and do the weights hold across agencies?
- Do the published review criteria of a funding agency predict the proposals it funds?
- Does an organization that gates its pursuits honestly outperform one that chases everything?
- Do organizations that measure their outcomes actually learn from them?

The doctorate exists to convert these practitioner arguments into **research questions, study designs, and evidence**. It does not train a better capture manager — the master’s tier does that. It trains a **researcher of capture**, someone who can design a study, gather outcome data, analyze it with graduate-level statistics, and publish a defensible contribution that the discipline can build on.

2. Where the doctorate sits in the curriculum

The curriculum has a ladder, and each tier has a distinct relationship to knowledge:

Tier	Relationship to knowledge	What a graduate can do
Bachelor's (Dream Foundations)	<i>Consume</i>	Read a solicitation, trace the money flow, understand the market's shape.
Master's (Curiosity in Action)	<i>Apply</i>	Build an ORBITAL, score a pursuit, make a bid/no-bid call, run a gate.
Doctoral (Visionary Leadership)	<i>Generate</i>	Design and execute research that tests the doctrine's claims, then publish it.
Global Impact (Post-doctoral & Executive)	<i>Steward</i>	Lead the field: set research priorities, govern the discipline's evolution, mentor the next cohort.

The doctoral tier is where the discipline becomes a **science** — where its durable concepts (doctrine/01–08) stop being assertions and start being hypotheses with evidence behind them. That is the one-line mission of this program: **test the doctrine so the doctrine can be trusted.**

3. Who it is for — entry requirements

The program admits working professionals and early-career researchers who bring three things: a **master's foundation**, **research aptitude**, and a **question worth answering**.

Required:

- A **master's degree** — MBA, MPA, MS, MA, or equivalent — from an accredited institution. The specific field is less important than the foundation: the student must already understand business structure, public administration, or a cognate discipline well enough to operate at the graduate level.
- **Evidence of research aptitude**, documented by at least one of:
 - a completed empirical thesis, research capstone, or evaluation project at the master's level;

- graduate coursework in statistics and research methods with a transcript showing B+ or better;
- a rigorous writing sample (an evaluation, a market study, a policy analysis) that demonstrates disciplined argument from evidence.
- **Letters of recommendation** — at least two, with at least one speaking directly to the applicant’s capacity for sustained independent research.
- A **research statement** (2–4 pages) proposing a question the applicant would like to pursue, grounded in the research agenda (`../modules/doctoral/research-agenda.md`). The statement does not need a finished design — it needs to show that the applicant can pose a researchable question.
- An **interview** with the program committee.

Valued but not required:

- Professional experience in capture management, business development, grants management, procurement, or federal program management. Such experience is an asset — the field’s best research questions come from people who have felt the practitioner problems — but it is not a prerequisite. A quantitatively strong student without industry experience can design excellent studies of the public data that the discipline runs on.

The honest entry test. The committee is not looking for the applicant who already knows the answer. It is looking for the applicant who can *hold a question open long enough to answer it fairly* — who will let the data disagree with the doctrine, and who will publish the disagreement.

4. The research identity of the discipline

A doctoral student needs to know what kind of science they are joining. Three characteristics define research in this field:

1. **It is an applied, design-heavy discipline.** The object of study — a pursuit, an award, an organization’s decision — is a designed artifact made by humans under rules. The best research combines the *measurement rigor* of quantitative social science with the *contextual depth* of case research. There is room for both, and the strongest dissertations usually mix them.
2. **It is data-rich on the public side and data-poor on the decision side.** The federal government publishes an extraordinary record: solicitations, awards, review criteria, outcomes. What it does *not* publish is the decision side — the probability estimates, the bid/no-bid calls, the gate deliberations, the internal budgets. That asymmetry is the field’s central research problem and its central research opportunity: the public record is the ground truth, and the decision side is what must be studied carefully, often with organizational data collected under ethical protocols.
3. **It has a young empirical base.** This is a feature. A young field means open questions are plentiful, published literatures are thin enough

to master, and a single well-designed study can be a real contribution. The doctoral student is not joining a crowded arena; they are helping to build it.

5. The degree at a glance — credit and benchmark model

The program is structured around **milestones and gates**, not seat time — the discipline’s own doctrine teaches that gates with written criteria beat unstructured enthusiasm (doctrine/04). But universities need credit equivalences, so each milestone carries a credit-equivalent weight. The model below is a reference; a host institution maps it to its own credit rules.

Component	Credit-equivalent	What it is
DL 901 — Research Methods I (course/doctoral-research-methods-i.md)	3	Research design and measurement for procurement/capture research.
DL 902 — Research Methods II (course/doctoral-research-methods-ii.md)	3	Statistics, econometrics, and causal inference for win/loss and award data.
DL 903 — Empirical Study-Design Seminar (course/doctoral-empirical-design.md)	3	Turning the discipline’s empirical machinery into research designs.
Research apprenticeship	2–4	Sustained supervised work on a live research question (a faculty project or a laboratory rotation).
Comprehensive examination	0 (gate)	A written + oral benchmark proving mastery of the discipline’s literature and methods before candidacy.
Dissertation — DL 990 (course/doctoral-dissertation-sequence.md)	24–40	The research contribution: proposal → defense.
Publication milestone	0 (gate)	At least one article submitted to a peer-reviewed venue before the defense.

A typical post-master’s total is **60–90 credit-equivalents** spread over **four to five years** — roughly one to two years of coursework and apprenticeship, then candidacy and the dissertation. The doctorate is a marathon with gates; the gates are what keep it honest.

6. The course sequence

Three doctoral courses form the coursework core. They are sequenced — Methods I before Methods II — and the Empirical Study-Design Seminar can be taken alongside Methods II.

Course	Focus	The deliverable that proves mastery
DL 901 — Research Methods I: Design and Measurement	What makes a researchable question in this field; how to design an observational, quasi-experimental, or case study; how to turn slippery constructs (pWin, win rate, gate discipline, value) into measurable variables.	A complete study design for one question on the research agenda, with constructs operationalized and a sampling plan.
DL 902 — Research Methods II: Statistics and Causal Inference	Graduate-level statistics for binary and continuous outcomes; calibration and reliability measurement; the causal-inference toolkit; and the field’s central inferential hazards (selection, survivorship, confounding).	A preregistered analysis plan plus a completed methods section, executed on a real public dataset.

Course	Focus	The deliverable that proves mastery
DL 903 — Empirical Study-Design Seminar	The seminar studies the discipline’s own empirical machinery as a research object — win-probability estimation, factor composites, agency win patterns, calibration and drift monitoring, and end-to-end verification — and trains students to design the studies that test it.	A seminar research design that one of the machinery’s claims be tested, defensible to a skeptical panel.

All three courses are **stack-agnostic** (doctrine/08). They teach concepts, designs, and methods. No course requires the student to operate any product. When the seminar studies the discipline’s machinery, it studies it as *concepts* — what the machinery claims, and how you would test the claim.

6.1 The C.A.S.E.-adjacent advanced seminars (course/doctoral-advanced/)

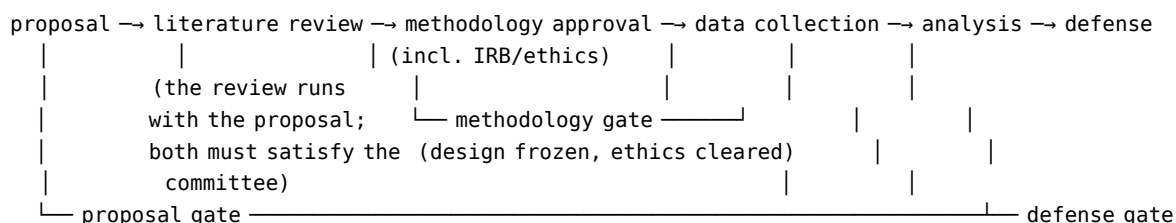
Alongside the three methods courses, the doctoral tier offers three **advanced research seminars** — the “advanced modules” the degree crosswalk promises at L3 Architect / L4 Networker. Where DL 901–903 build the research *methods*, these seminars turn the discipline’s own machinery and craft into *research objects*: each is a five-session seminar that ends in a design workshop and contributes to a research-question bank a dissertation can build on.

- **AI Systems in the Pursuit Discipline** — one doctrine, two renderings: what the machine rendering encodes (rules, formulas, playbooks, prompts, retrieval corpus), how to evaluate its outputs, and where the human stays Accountable — the Dream Gate as a research object.
- **Advanced Capture Management as a Research Domain** — the bid/no-bid decision as a decision problem, the capture organization as a unit of analysis, the pWin estimate as an instrument to calibrate, and price-to-win as a construct to measure.
- **Partnerships and Ecosystems as a Research Domain** — alliance-formation theory, workshare dynamics, the ecosystem as a unit of analysis, and whether partnerships perform after the award.

All three are stack-agnostic (doctrine/08) and pair with the ORBITAL Outcome-Data Research Agenda as their dissertation springboard.

7. The dissertation sequence — overview

The dissertation is the degree. It is a multi-year research program executed through a sequence of gates, each with written criteria, an owner, and a deliverable (see course/doctoral-dissertation-sequence.md for the full treatment):



The stages, in one line each:

1. **Proposal** — a defensible research question, a review of what is already known, a design, and the contribution the study will make.
2. **Literature review** — the published record of the field and its neighbors, mastered and mapped.
3. **Methodology approval** — the design frozen and the measurement plan approved, including data sources, sample, and ethics.
4. **Data collection and IRB/ethics** — the evidence gathered lawfully and ethically; for public data, a rigorous provenance discipline; for organizational data, confidentiality and consent.
5. **Analysis** — the preregistered analysis executed, reported honestly, and stress-tested for the field's bias traps.
6. **Defense** — the contribution defended before a committee, and the pathway to publication set.

Every stage has a **gate**: a written criterion, a named decision owner, and a formal milestone. The gates mirror the discipline's own doctrine — criteria written before the work begins (doctrine/04).

8. The contribution thread — the outcome-data research agenda

A doctorate must contribute, and this program gives its students a **shared agenda** to contribute to: the outcome-data research agenda in `../modules/doctoral/research-agenda.md`.

The agenda's organizing insight is that the discipline generates a **prediction-and-outcome record** — for every pursuit, someone estimated a probability of winning, and then the market produced an actual award. That pairing of *predicted* and *observed* is the single most underused asset in the field. Every prediction-and-outcome pair is a data point about whether the doctrine works. The agenda organizes the field's open questions into research threads:

1. **Prediction and calibration** — do probability-of-win estimates actually

predict awards, and are they *calibrated* (a 0.7 estimate wins roughly 70% of the time)?

2. **Factor validation** — of the factors that compose a win-probability estimate, which actually predict wins, and do their weights hold across agencies and funder families?
3. **Agency win patterns** — do agencies’ published review criteria predict the proposals they fund, and which narrative patterns reliably appear in winning proposals by agency?
4. **Decision and governance** — does honest bid/no-bid gating, threshold discipline, and portfolio allocation improve outcomes?
5. **Learning and evolution** — do organizations that measure outcomes, learn from losses, and compound past performance actually improve over time?

A dissertation is normally a deep contribution to **one** of these threads — one question, answered well. The agenda tells the student where the open questions are, what designs tend to fit each, and what data each thread needs. It is the program’s way of ensuring that a student’s original research is also *useful* research.

9. Degree milestones

The degree is earned through a fixed sequence of formal milestones. Each is a gate with written criteria and a committee decision.

#	Milestone	Deliverable	Gate question the committee asks
1	Admission	Application, research statement, references, interview	“Can this applicant pose a researchable question and sustain independent work?”
2	Coursework complete	DL 901, DL 902, DL 903 passed with the three mastery deliverables accepted	“Has the student mastered design, measurement, statistics, and the field’s methods?”
3	Research apprenticeship	A supervised research product (analysis, replication, or data audit)	“Can the student do real research under supervision?”

#	Milestone	Deliverable	Gate question the committee asks
4	Comprehensive examination	Written exam + oral defense of the field's literature and methods	"Does the student command the discipline's knowledge well enough to begin original work?"
5	Advancement to candidacy	Dissertation committee formed; topic approved	"Is this a researchable question worth a dissertation?"
6	Dissertation proposal	Full proposal: question, literature, design, contribution	"If executed, would this constitute a defensible contribution?"
7	Methodology approval	Frozen design, sample plan, ethics approval, data-access plan	"Is the design sound and the evidence obtainable?"
8	Data collection complete	The dataset built, documented, and provenance-registered	"Is the evidence real, lawful, and clean?"
9	Analysis complete	Preregistered analysis executed and honestly reported	"Does the analysis answer the question without overclaiming?"
10	Dissertation defense	The full dissertation defended publicly before the committee	"Is this an original, defensible contribution to the field?"
11	Publication milestone	At least one article submitted to a peer-reviewed venue	"Has the contribution entered the public record where the field can build on it?"

10. Advisor and committee roles

The doctorate is supervised, and the supervision structure matters as much as the coursework.

- **Dissertation chair** — the primary intellectual partner. The chair reads every draft, argues the design, holds the student to the schedule, and is the person who says the hard things early. The chair is the gate owner for most milestones.
- **Committee members** (typically two to four) — bring complementary expertise: one methodologist (statistics/design), one domain expert (capture, grants, or procurement), and — where possible — one outside reader from a neighboring field (economics, public policy, organizational behavior). The outside reader is the defense’s insurance against insular thinking.
- **Methodology advisor** — often a committee member, the person who signs off that the measurement plan and the statistics are sound.
- **Ethics / IRB liaison** — for studies using organizational data, the person who ensures consent, confidentiality, and provenance discipline.
- **External examiner** (optional, at defense) — a scholar from outside the home institution who tests whether the contribution stands on its own merits.

The advisor relationship is itself a gate discipline: a student should never discover at the defense that the chair had a different expectation of the dissertation. Milestones exist so disagreements surface at proposal time, not defense time.

11. A timeline that fits a working professional

Many doctoral students in this field work while they study. The default timeline below assumes part-time study in years one and two, then full-time dissertation work. A full-time residential student compresses years one and two into a single calendar year.

Year	Work	Milestones crossed
1	DL 901; begin DL 902; begin the research apprenticeship; draft the research statement into a topic.	Coursework starts; apprenticeship begins.
2	DL 902; DL 903; complete the apprenticeship; prepare for the comprehensive examination.	Coursework complete; comprehensive examination; advancement to candidacy.

Year	Work	Milestones crossed
3	Form the committee; write the proposal and literature review; defend the proposal; secure data access and ethics approval.	Proposal gate; methodology gate; IRB/ethics approval.
4	Collect and clean the data; execute the preregistered analysis; begin writing chapters; submit the first article.	Data collection; analysis; publication milestone.
5	Finish the dissertation; rehearse and hold the defense; revise for publication.	Defense.

12. Assessment and benchmarks beyond the courses

The courses are graded like courses (see each course file for its grading contract), but the degree’s real assessment is the **milestone gate**. The program’s assessment philosophy is the doctrine’s own: **criteria written before the work begins**. Every gate above has its criteria published in the course and dissertation files *before* the student reaches it, so the student always knows what “excellent” means in advance. There are no surprise rubrics at the doctoral tier.

Two benchmarks deserve emphasis:

- **The integrity benchmark.** The field runs on trust in a published, documented process — and so does the doctorate. Fabricated evidence, invented awards, or misrepresented data fail the relevant milestone outright. The doctoral tier’s non-fabrication standard is absolute: the discipline’s own research corpora already model this (they distinguish documented fact from clearly-labeled illustrative material, and never attribute invented specifics to real organizations). A dissertation carries the same discipline.
- **The replication benchmark.** A doctoral contribution that cannot be reproduced is not a contribution. Every analysis must be reproducible from its documented data and methods — even when the data itself is confidential and only the analysis path is public.

13. Mapping to the fellowship ladder

The doctoral tier is the research counterpart of the **Architect** and **Networker** levels of the Innovator’s Launchpad ladder — the levels where a practitioner stops following the doctrine and starts designing the system that enforces it. Where the fellowship’s Architect builds and governs, the doctorate’s student

tests and publishes. The two are complementary postures, not competing ones: the discipline needs both people who build the machinery and people who prove whether the machinery works. A doctoral student who also works the practitioner ladder brings the best of both — the practitioner’s questions and the researcher’s standards.

14. The stack-agnostic promise at the doctoral tier

The doctrine’s core rule — concepts are durable, tools are swappable (doctrine/08) — holds *especially* at the doctoral tier. A doctoral student must be able to study the discipline without depending on any product, and must be able to publish findings that remain true after every tool is replaced. Every course in this program is therefore designed so that:

- the **research questions** are about the discipline, not about software;
- the **data** are the public record and ethically-collected organizational data, not proprietary product output;
- the **methods** are the graduate methods of the social sciences, applied to a new domain;
- the **machinery** of the field is studied as a *conceptual object* — what it claims and how to test the claim — never as a set of files to operate.

If a lesson at the doctoral tier seems to require operating a specific tool, that is a bug in the lesson, not a feature of the discipline.

The program in three sentences

The master’s tier taught you to run the pipeline. The doctorate asks you to prove the pipeline works — and to publish the proof. This program gives you the methods, the sequence, the committee, and the agenda to do exactly that. **Test the doctrine so the doctrine can be trusted — that is the doctoral contribution.**

Reflection questions for the applicant

1. Which claim of the doctrine would you most want to test — and why that one?
2. What data could you plausibly obtain to test it, and what is the ethical path to that data?
3. What would a skeptical committee need to see before they believed your answer?