

The nature of a significant contribution

The extract below is from:

Lovitts, B.E. (2007) *Making the implicit explicit: creating performance expectations for the dissertation*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. (pp33-34)

“The key distinguishing feature of a significant contribution is that it has consequence. The contribution has to be of interest and importance to the community and has to influence the field by changing the way people think (see Table 3.3).

“Although significance is frequently stated as a requirement for the PhD, faculty [in this study] do not expect graduate students to make significant contributions. Indeed, they noted that graduate students rarely made them. Instead, faculty looked for evidence that the student has the ability to make a significant contribution in the future.”

TABLE 3.3.
The Nature of a Significant Contribution

- A nontrivial to very important, original breakthrough at the empirical, conceptual, theoretical, or policy level
- Is useful and will have impact
- Is publishable in top-tier journals
- Is of interest to people inside and possibly outside the community and causes them to see things differently
- Influences the conversation and peoples' research and teaching
- Has implications for and advances the field, the discipline, other disciplines, and/or society

What do you think about the importance of a significant contribution at the doctoral level?