

Improving the Candidacy Process in the Interdisciplinary Ed.D. Program in Leadership

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Abstract

The Interdisciplinary Ed.D. Program in Leadership is working to improve the program's candidacy process. Passing candidacy is a requirement in the program. To pass candidacy, students must demonstrate graduate level writing skills, higher order thinking skills, and ability to apply their knowledge to address real-world problems. Candidacy is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their preparedness to complete the dissertation phase of the program. In the past, the program's candidacy process was an assessment of the student's attainment of the program's learning outcomes up to that point in the program.

Recently the program's core faculty identified an opportunity for the candidacy process to be an assessment *for learning for both faculty and students rather than just an assessment of learning*. This evaluation project followed a three-step process: (1) a new candidacy process (Process 3) was pilot tested; (2) a focus group with core faculty members was conducted; and (3) core faculty participated in a rubric validation exercise to test the authenticity and reliability of the new rubric. The evaluation findings provided (1) descriptive data with which to evaluate candidacy outcomes compared to the candidacy process used previously, (2) qualitative data with which to inform program decisions about further adaptations related to the candidacy process, and (3) process data which will continue to drive the logic and reasoning that informs our teaching and learning practices as they relate to preparing students for candidacy. Core faculty used the findings to create action items including a learning protocol for the candidacy process so the process and outcomes of candidacy can be used by both students and faculty to learn and grow.

Candidacy in the Ed.D. Program

- Students must achieve candidacy to proceed to the dissertation phase of the program
- From 2012—2016, students submitted a portfolio of course papers and other artifacts.
- Portfolios were evaluated using a rubric with 13 (later 12) concepts matched to program learning outcomes. We refer to these as **Process 1 and 2**.
- In 2016, acting on feedback from students and faculty, the program adopted a new strategy akin to comprehensive exams. We refer to this approach as **Process 3**.
- Students are now evaluated on a rubric that employs 5 criteria. In all three processes, candidacy submissions were and are evaluated by two full-time faculty members in a double blind fashion.
- In Process 1 and 2, students were required to achieve an average score of 3.5 on a 4 point scale. In Process 3, students must achieve a score of 2/5 or higher on a 4 point scale from both reviewers—and no student may have a score of 1 on any of the 5 criteria on the rubric.
- Students who do not pass are allowed a 2nd attempt.

Candidacy: First and second attempts by process

Candidacy Attempt	Process			Total
	One	Two	Three	
1st	176	256	98	530
2nd	26	34	17	77
Total	202	290	115	607

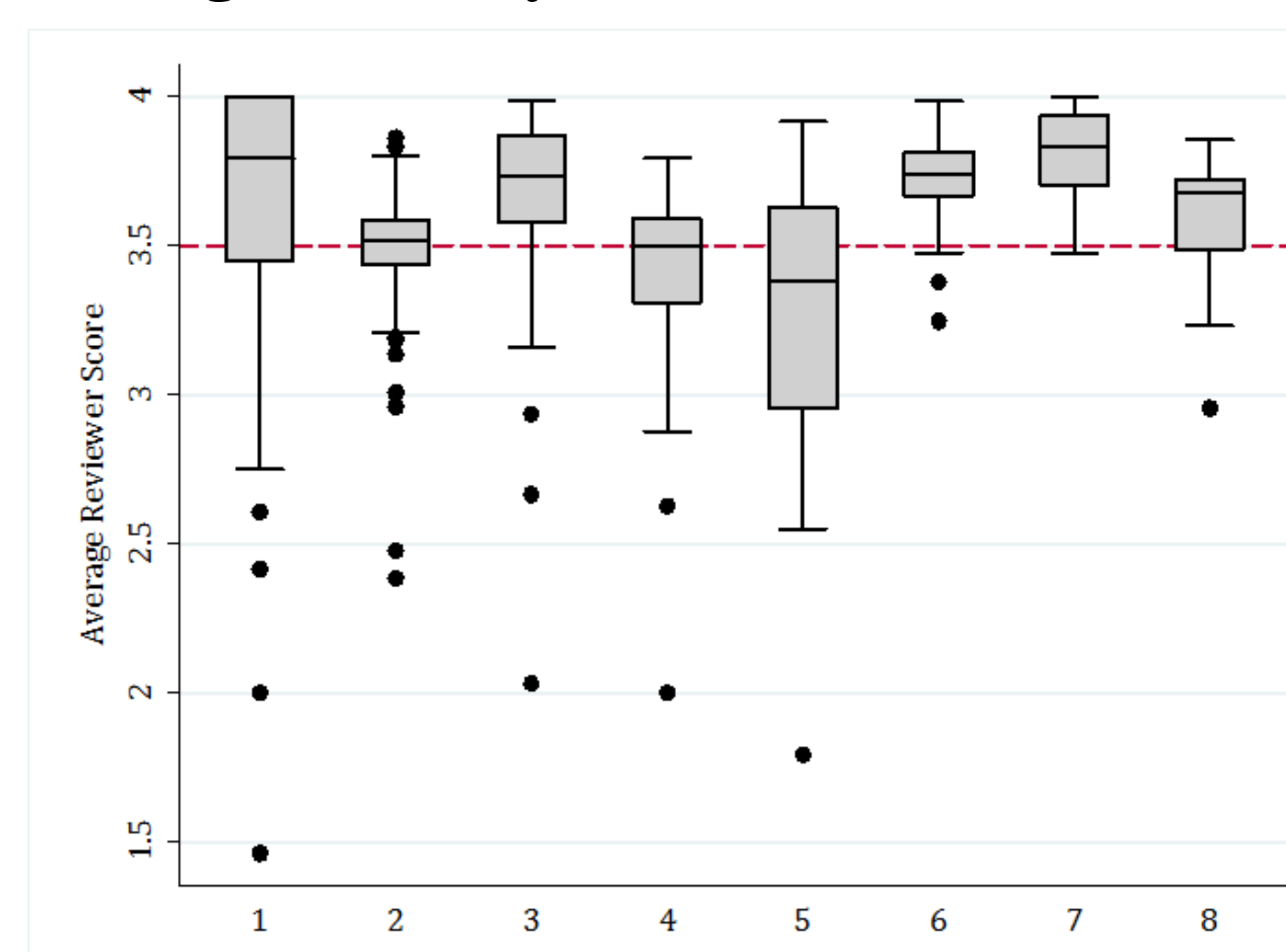
Candidacy: First attempt pass rates by process

First Attempt: Recommendation for Candidacy	Process			Total
	One	Two	Three	
No	23%	24%	36%	26%
Yes	77%	76%	64%	74%

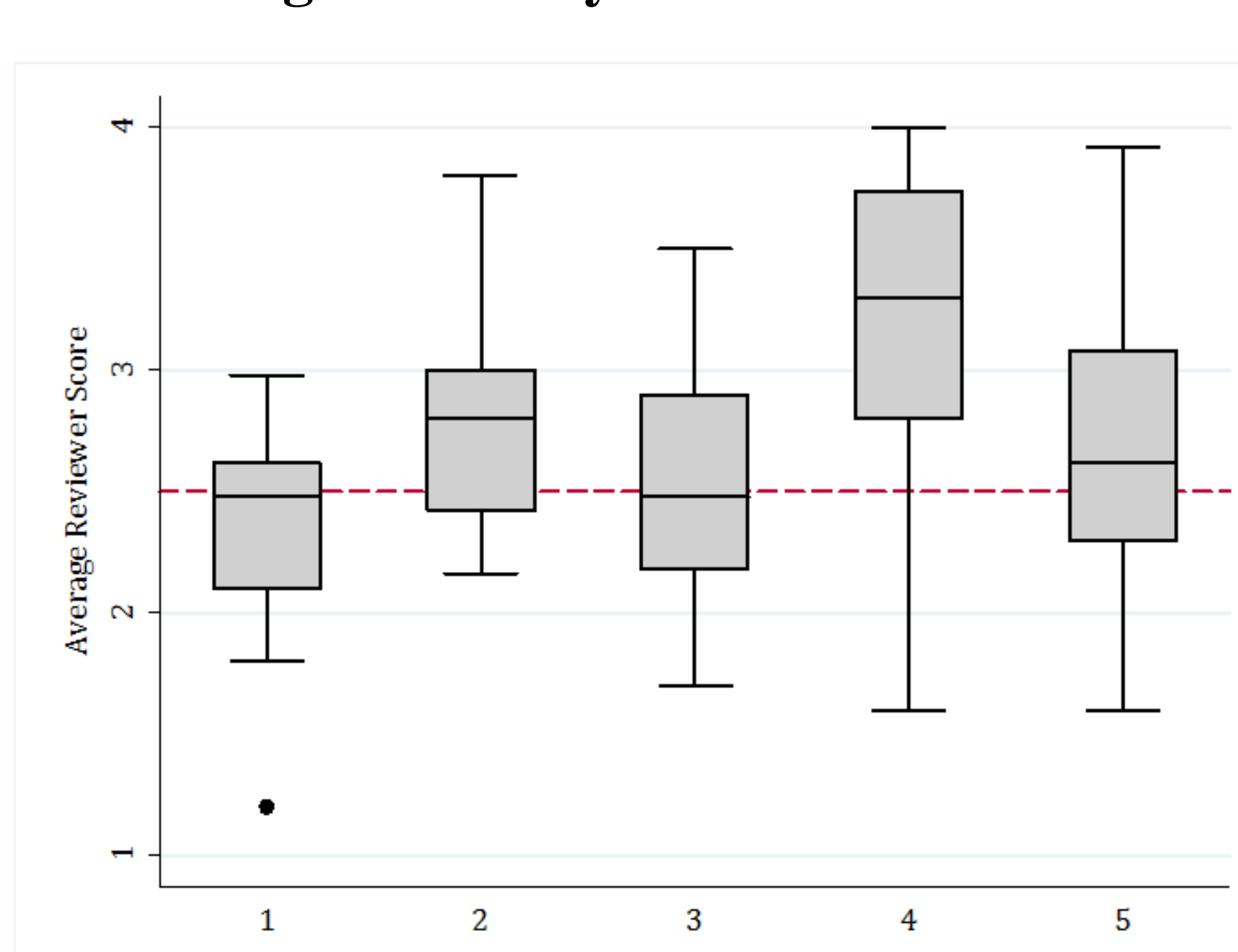
Methodology

- Data were drawn from assessment data on candidacy attempts from 2012—2017
- Descriptive data were assembled, comparative statistics and figures were developed
- ANOVA tests (with Tukey tests) were used to test for scoring differences between reviewers and between processes
- Analysis focused on first attempts
- Additionally, a focus group was used to gain qualitative context on the use of the rubric by reviewers in Process 3

Average Scores By Reviewer: Process 1 and 2



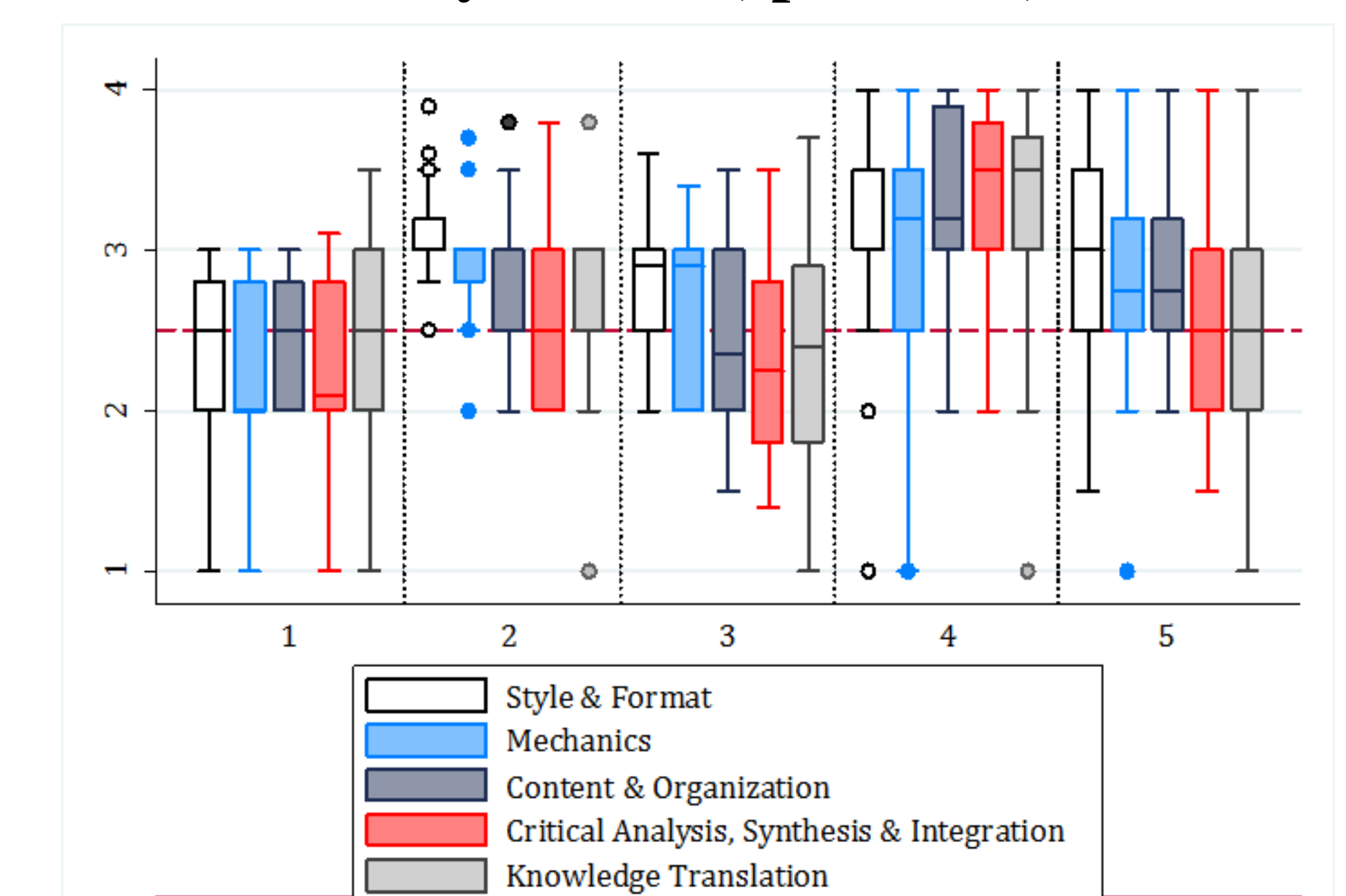
Average Scores by Reviewer: Process 3



ANOVA Test: Average criteria scores by reviewers, process 3, first attempts

Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	Prob > F
Model	8.28	4	2.07	7.29	p = .01
Reviewer	8.28	4	2.07	7.29	p = .01
Residual	26.40	93	.28		
Total	34.68	97	.36		
N	98				
Root MSE	.53				
Adj. R-squared	.21				

Outcome scores by reviewer, process 3, first attempts



Focus Group Results

- Focus group comprised of core faculty members.
- An exercise: Sample papers evaluated by core faculty members using the Process 3 rubric.
- A comparison of scores and discussions was held after the exercise.
- This approach revealed that core faculty members viewed some of the concepts in the rubric in different ways, leading to variance in scores between reviewers (particularly in the Knowledge Translation & Critical Analysis scores).
- The evidence clarified the concepts in the rubric for reviewers, and was used to modify the language used in some of the instructions (for students and reviewers).

Conclusions and Implications

The results provided program faculty with a snapshot of how many students have attempted and completed candidacy in the Ed.D. program and a picture of how the different core faculty in the program have scored student candidacy projects over time. The descriptive data indicated inconsistency across faculty in their use of rubrics which contributed to a significant amount of variance in the overall student scores. These results coupled with the process data collected during the qualitative phase of the project inform the need for program faculty to continue to dialogue about their interpretations and use of rubrics in the evaluation of candidacy essays. Future analysis of the evaluation project data, including the examination of the qualitative data, will help core program faculty make decisions about further adaptations related to the candidacy process and the a construct to help faculty to continue to learn and grow in their use of rubrics as evaluation tools.