Proposal to Reduce Number of Courses Required for Computer Science PhD

Current PhD course requirements:

[Breadth] Seven 600-800 level PhD qualifying courses over five of eight areas, with no more than three in one area
   Five A-’s and two B-’s in five semesters
   These courses must be completed to advance to candidacy

[Elective] Two 600-800 level, three-credit courses (electives) with at least B-
   These courses may be completed at any time; need not be PhD qualifying; and may be from outside the department with approval

[Other] One-credit How to Conduct Great Research Course
   This course should be completed in the first two years

PhD qualifying courses are always three credits. Thus, in practice PhD students currently must take nine, three-credit, 600-800 level courses as part of their PhD.

Concerns with current requirements:

For a number of years, many faculty members have been concerned that the course requirements place too heavy a burden on the PhD students. More specifically:

1. Over the last ten years, we have noticed that PhD students are entering the program with stronger CS backgrounds. Many incoming PhD students have taken advanced coursework, and most students have performed some research already.
2. The community’s expectation of the research output of graduating CS PhD students has become much higher in recent years. Students that have to perform more coursework, and thus have less time for research, are thus at a competitive disadvantage when they graduate.

Proposal:

To address these concerns, the following changes to the course requirements are proposed:

[Breadth] Six Seven 600-800 level PhD qualifying courses over four five of eight areas, with no more than three in one area
   Four Five A-’s and two B-’s in five semesters
   These courses must be completed to advance to candidacy

[Elective] Two 600-800 level, three-credit courses (electives) with at least B-
   These courses may be completed at any time; need not be PhD qualifying; and may be from outside the department with approval

[Other] One-credit How to Conduct Great Research Course
   This course should be completed in the first two years

Note that the MS course requirements will remain the same (ten, three-credit courses). To make up for the difference between the MS and PhD requirements, PhD students who want to get an MS “along the way” can take two, three-credit instances of CMSC 798 with their advisor.