



Student-Identified Requirements for Persistence in a Limited Residency Ph.D. Program

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Abstract

The attrition rate for students in traditional doctoral programs hovers around 50%, while students in limited-residency and online programs tend to leave programs at rates 10% to 20% higher. Other than a student's intrinsic motivation, prior research with the population studied in this program has not uncovered factors that may be predictive of attrition. The goal of this study was to better understand this phenomenon from the perspective of this population. Analysis from interviews with graduates of such a program yielded a set of best practices, focused primarily on assisting students as they prepared for their dissertation. The development and application of policies, procedures and tools based on results of this research may help administrators and faculty address the additional 10% to 20% they have historically experienced.

Main Arguments

Method

- A qualitative, phenomenological approach was taken to understand a group in a particular setting.
- Participants had matriculated from the University's limited residency doctoral program between 2010 and 2014.
- A non-random sample of 7 participants were interviewed. Data saturation was reached after approximately five interviews.

Data Analysis

Analysis surfaced and refined themes from initial open codes, to axial codes, then narrowed to focus on several best practices.

Open Codes

Initial analysis resulted in 150 open codes.

Axial Codes

7 codes were identified through the process of axial coding:

- Desired Student Characteristics at Matriculation
- Reasons for Attending the Chosen University
- Students' First Impression When Coming to Campus
- Coursework
- The Dissertation: Preparation and Process
- Suggestions for Changes by the College
- Advice for Current and Incoming Students.

Best Practices

The axial codes generated best practices in three areas:

- Admission and Initial Entry
- Best Practices for Coursework
- Best Practices for Beginning and Continuing Through the Dissertation Process.

Conclusion

Recommended Best Practices

1. Applicants should be better screened before admission.
2. Applicants should be counseled about the differences between a Master's program and a doctoral program.
3. The college should provide a website page for each faculty member with their education, experience, research interests and publications.
4. Applicants should be required to identify a research area of interest and a potential research advisor.
5. At their first on-campus meeting, new students should attend an orientation that details the entire program process.
6. New students should be assigned a faculty advisor or student advisor.
7. The advisor should maintain contact with new students during the first year.
8. Coursework should be kept current.
9. Coursework should prepare students for the dissertation by embedding a research focus when applicable.
10. Students should take research methodology courses in quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods as well as multivariate statistics.
11. At the end of each term, a list of students eligible to begin work on their dissertation should be published.
12. A handbook outlining all aspects of the dissertation process should be provided and the development of communities of practice should be supported.
13. A dissertation guide with examples of the component parts of the dissertation should be made available to students.
14. Faculty should schedule regular synchronous meetings for connectivity.
15. A synchronous meeting should be scheduled between the Dissertation Chair and student to discuss dissertation feedback.

Problem Statement, Purpose and Research Question

Problem Statement

The attrition rate of students in the information systems limited residency doctoral program at the university where the study was conducted is significantly higher (i.e. 60% - 70%) than the 50% attrition rate of traditional doctoral programs.

Purpose and Research Question

- The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of students who had graduated from a limited-residency systems doctoral program. The study was guided by this overarching research question:

What are the factors and experiences you believe contributed to your persistence in a limited-residency doctoral program?

References

- Terrell, S.R., Lohle, M. & Kennedy, D.H. (In Press) Predictors of doctoral student success in a limited-residency Ph.D. program. *Proceedings of the International Institute for Applied Knowledge Management KM Conference 2016, Lisbon, Portugal.*