Strategic Intervention at the University Level

Promising Practices to Enhance Doctoral Completion

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Meaningful change happens at the program level
Goals of the Ph.D. Completion Project

- To foster change in graduate programs
  - How programs thought about doctoral completion
  - How programs changed practices to improve doctoral completion

- To use doctoral completion as an indicator of program quality
Framework for Action

Four conditions necessary for optimal doctoral completion

1. The right people are . . .
   Applicants must be realistic about the demands of doctoral study

2. The right applicants are . . .
   Admissions committees must properly screen applicants and, upon enrollment, orient them to the program

3. Students and faculty form . . .
   Faculty members and students must interact in a mutually respectful and task oriented manner

4. Students experience . . .
   Students must recognize themselves as members of a community of learners facing common challenges and opportunities
CGS Study – Phase I

- Three year collaboration with the University of Georgia, North Carolina State University, and the University of Florida
- Total of 37 programs included in study
  - 12 – UGA
  - 12 – NC State
  - 13 - UF
CGS Study – Phase II

- Phase I accomplishments laid the groundwork for campus-wide improvements at UGA
- Expanded work for improving doctoral completion to a total of 90 programs
  - Ensured all graduate faculty members were informed about trends and issues
  - Provided faculty with the information to assess realistically their own program’s success
  - Supported individual programs in their efforts to improve doctoral completion
Interventions for Doctoral Completion

Strategy #1
- Shared information about doctoral completion to enhance faculty understanding

Strategy #2
- Provided specific data to assist programs in developing strategies to improve doctoral completion rates

Strategy #3
- Implemented policies and programs at the Graduate School to support program change
Strategy #1 – Shared Information

- Met with faculty multiple times in a variety of formats and settings
  - Introductory and update sessions
  - Strategy sharing workshops
  - Brown bag “best practices” lunch seminars
  - Faculty presentations
Strategy #1 – Shared Information

- Created website for faculty and students
  - ✔ Research briefs
  - ✔ Annotated bibliography
  - ✔ Strategy reports
  - ✔ Interactive forums
Assessing Your Program

Does your Program Fulfill the Four Conditions?

1. The right people apply for doctoral study
   *Do you have a high quality website?*

2. The right applicants are admitted
   *Does the admission process rely on faculty judgment and insight about applicant’s likelihood of success?*

3. Students and faculty form productive working relationships
   *How do new professors learn to mentor doctoral students?*

4. Students experience social support from fellow students
   *Do students have a location where they can interact socially?*
Strategy #2 – Provided Data

- Collected and disseminated program specific data
  - Multiple data collection points using both qualitative and quantitative methods
  - Individual meetings with each participating program to discuss specific issues
  - Discussion guides provided for faculty meetings
Strategy #2 – Provided Data

- Created a drillable database with doctoral completion figures
  - For departmental use to monitor their own completion rates
  - Searchable at the department, college, or university level for comparison data
  - Master’s completion database currently in beta-testing phase
OIR FACTS Student Retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Students in Cohort</th>
<th># Graduated</th>
<th>% Graduated</th>
<th>Median Time to Degree</th>
<th># Currently Enrolled</th>
<th>% Currently Enrolled</th>
<th># Withdrawn</th>
<th>% Withdrawn</th>
<th>Median Time to Withdrawal</th>
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<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>375</td>
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<td>179</td>
<td>31.3</td>
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<td>2000-2001</td>
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<td>400</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>192</td>
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<td>2001-2002</td>
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<td>399</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>26.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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<td>11.3</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>27.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
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<td>283</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>25.5</td>
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<td>576</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<td>162</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
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<td>85.8</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Graduate School and OIR/FACTS Degrees Conferred & SIR5
Strategy #2 – Provided Data

- Established doctoral completion benchmarks for each program
  - Individual reports prepared for all doctoral programs
  - 10-year timeframe used for tracking completion
### OIR 10-Year Snapshot

#### Doctoral Retention By Degree Programs - 10 Year Snapshot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL: ALL</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Graduate School and OIR/FACTS Degrees Conferred & SIRS

**Notes:**
1. Cohorts grouped by Summer Fall-Spring terms (e.g., Cohort 2005-2006 includes Summer 2005, Fall 2005 and Spring 2006)
2. Exception: Cohort 1998-1999 contains only Fall 1998 and Spring 1999 due to the Quarter-Semester Conversion

[Graduate School Operational Definitions](#)
Doctoral Completion Benchmarks

**Data:** During the three year period 1998-2000, A Doctoral Program admitted 23 students to their Ph.D. Program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admitted</th>
<th>Non-completers</th>
<th>Still Enrolled</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy #3 – Implemented Policy

- Established enrollment policy to track students and follow-up survey with graduate coordinators for accountability
- Included “time to degree” and completion data in new degree proposals
- Provided funds for faculty to recruit students/host visitation weekends
- Created “Outstanding Graduate Mentoring” Award
Challenges

- Ensuring continuous learning opportunities about doctoral completion because of faculty turnover

- Overcoming technical obstacles to construct a database that tracks the enrollment and completion or dropout information by cohort
Successes

- Providing a theoretical framework for understanding doctoral completion
- Ensuring that faculty examine completion rates for their programs
- Including doctoral completion data in program reviews
Successes

- Instituting an enrollment policy for tracking doctoral students
- Developing a drillable database
- Creating a mentoring award
- Including completion data in new degree proposals
Doctoral Completion Today

- All 90 doctoral programs are now involved
- Faculty have the language and the data to make doctoral completion an essential metric for graduate programs
- Departments are examining their own processes to determine their best path
- Departments look at best “fit” – not just scores – in accepting new doctoral students
Doctoral Completion – Next Steps

- The Graduate School is offering workshops to improve the understanding and use of benchmarks for individual program improvement.

- The knowledge and strategies gained from working on doctoral completion is being extended to all graduate degree programs.
Resources

- CGS Doctoral Completion Project at UGA
  http://www.uga.edu/gradschool/cgs/

- Program Accomplishment Report