



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

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Project Transforming Organizational Culture in Doctoral Education

New book highlights interventions to improve completion rates

Universities participating in the Ph.D. Completion Project report that it has inspired them to change their institutional culture, helping to make doctoral program completion a priority for both individual programs and the institutions as a whole.

A new publication from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) highlights policies and practices that a variety of universities have implemented to improve completion rates and reduce attrition, focusing on those interventions that seem to hold promise or are particularly innovative.

The interventions span six areas: student selection and admission; mentoring and advising; financial support; program environment; research experience; and curricular and administrative processes & procedures. Examples range from peer mentoring to teaching-improvement workshops for future faculty and dissertation-writing retreats. They also include programs' efforts to increase transparency about their completion and placement rates and to provide family and medical leave for graduate assistants.

But beyond these initiatives, evidence from the universities suggests that their participation itself has resulted in programmatic and organizational cultural changes in doctoral education.

These changes include the development of a "culture of evidence," in which institutional leaders and faculty are paying attention to the data coming out of the project and are using it as a basis for decision-making in order to improve programs, reduce attrition, and increase accountability.

The project has led to increased collaborations and the sharing of best practices between academic departments, as well as to a growing recognition that improving completion rates is an institution-wide endeavor and priority. It has brought new awareness to the role that faculty, administrators, and institutional climate play in fostering student success, offering U.S. graduate schools an opportunity to examine a new range of promising practices for their own doctoral programs.

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About the Publication

[*Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Policies and Practices to Promote Student Success*](#) is the fourth in a series of monographs from the Ph.D. Completion Project. It provides an overview of interventions being implemented by universities participating in the project as “research partners”, in six important areas that span the doctoral education process, and then provides detailed descriptions of selected examples drawn from the institutions’ proposals and progress reports.

About the Ph.D. Completion Project

The [Ph.D. Completion Project](#) is a seven-year project that is addressing the issues surrounding Ph.D. completion and attrition, in response to growing national concern about high levels of attrition from doctoral programs. CGS, with generous support from Pfizer Inc and the Ford Foundation, provided funding to 29 major U.S. and Canadian research universities to create intervention strategies and pilot projects, and to evaluate the projects’ impact on doctoral completion rates and attrition patterns. An additional 26 universities have participated in various aspects of the project.

Previous publications analyzed baseline data by program and demographics, and summarized an exit survey of doctoral program completers. In late 2010 the project will publish a culminating, comprehensive analysis of the groups of interventions that appear to have had a demonstrated effect on doctoral completion rates and attrition patterns.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of over 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Among U.S. institutions, CGS members award 95% of the doctoral degrees and 78% of the master’s degrees. The organization’s mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.*

* Based on data from the 2008 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees