

## FACULTY DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Graduate Schools at The University of Georgia, The University of Florida, and North Carolina State University are working together to examine and optimize doctoral completion in our graduate programs. During the project, each of the graduate schools will work closely with the faculties of selected programs in assessing strengths and weaknesses and developing reasonable plans for program improvement. Additional information about the project is available at our **website** at **[www.grad.uga.edu/cgs](http://www.grad.uga.edu/cgs)**

To date, most of the project activities have been centered at The University of Georgia, where the project's Research Component is housed. The project's Research Component is charged with compiling and analyzing a variety of data, including enrollment histories, interviews with our faculty and students, and a range of programmatic information that is being collected directly from 37 participating programs from your designated contact person. Throughout the coming months, we will feed that information back via the project website ([www.gradsch.uga.edu/cgs](http://www.gradsch.uga.edu/cgs)) to participating faculties in a variety of forms including research briefs, program analyses, and recommendations for program practices. Hopefully, this information will prove useful as programs strive to improve in whatever ways they deem best.

You are one of the twelve programs at our university that has agreed to participate in the project. Our project is unique in that three universities are working together from a common research-based conceptual framework. We are convinced that meaningful program improvements at a research university can only occur with the commitment of faculty; consequently, our entire project is based on program self-examination and program-initiated change. We are asking the faculty to meet some time between now and the middle of January to take a systematic look at your program and to discover ways in which it might be improved. The following pages contain some questions to guide you in that discussion. I look forward to hearing about the results and about your plans for optimizing doctoral completion in your programs.

Sincerely  
Maureen Grasso  
Dean of The Graduate School

### A Conceptual Model for Optimizing Doctoral Completion

All of our project work is based on a conceptual model derived from the scholarly literature and from our own experiences. The model proposes four conditions that we believe optimize doctoral completion:

<b>Four Conditions for Optimal Doctoral Completion</b>	
<i>Condition</i>	<i>Description</i>
#1: The right people apply for doctoral study	Applicants must be realistic about the demands and expectations of doctoral study.
#2: The right applicants are admitted as doctoral students	Admissions committees must properly screen applicants and, upon enrollment, orient them to the program.
#3: Students and faculty form productive working relationships	Faculty members and students must interact in a mutually respectful and task-oriented manner.
#4: Students experience social support from fellow students	Students must recognize themselves as members of a community of learners facing common challenges and opportunities.

#### The Immediate Task

We're asking the faculty of each participating program to assess their program with respect to these four conditions and to develop clear strategies for optimizing doctoral completion in your program. **These plans will be submitted to the Graduate School by January 25, 2006.**

***Condition #1: The right people apply for doctoral study.***

**The Central Question:** Optimal doctoral completion starts at the point in time when potential students are deciding whether or not to apply to your program. Are the right people applying to your program?

**Some possible discussion questions:**

- When you look at your applicant pool, does it consist of the type of people you're looking for? Why or why not?
- Is accessible information about the program and its expectations sufficient to allow would-be applicants to assess their fit with the program? What needs to be added?
- Do students understand the resources that they will need (assistantships, equipment, etc.) and the extent to which your program will provide those resources? How can this information be improved?
- What actions can your faculty take to improve the quality of the applicant pool?

**Needed actions?**

***Condition #2: The right applicants are admitted as doctoral students.***

**The Central Question:** Sound admissions practices are crucial to doctoral completion. Is your program admitting the right applicants?

**Some possible discussion questions:**

- Does your program use the right criteria for doctoral admission? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your procedures?
- In general, are you confident that most of the students you admit have the capacity to complete the program? Why or why not?
- Does your program use a variety of evidence (e.g., test scores, writing samples, interviews, etc.) to predict an applicant's readiness to succeed in doctoral study? Should it? Why or why not?
- Does the admissions process encourage students to assess their own financial readiness, life situations, and psychological readiness? How can you foster such reflection?
- What actions can your faculty take to improve the quality of admissions decisions?

**Needed actions?**

***Condition #3: Students and faculty form productive working relationships.***

**The Central Question:** Faculty-student relationships are complex and take many forms. Do students and faculty members in your program generally form productive relationships?

**Some possible discussion questions:**

- Do faculty members clearly communicate what students may and may not expect in an advisor/advisee relationship? How is this accomplished?
- What measures do you have in place to ensure a satisfactory match between students and their doctoral supervisors?
- Does your program have a mechanism for recognizing and addressing non-productive advisor-advisee relationships? Should it?
- What actions can your program take to enhance advisor-advisee relationships?

**Needed actions?**

***Condition #4: Students experience social support from fellow students.***

**The Central Question:** Doctoral students are more apt to succeed if they study in a collegial and supportive environment. To what extent is your program characterized by social cohesion and student mutual support?

**Some possible discussion questions:**

- Does your program have a healthy social climate? In what way is it healthy or unhealthy?
- Does the faculty specifically encourage student interactions? Why or why not?
- What actions can faculty take to improve social cohesion among doctoral students?

**Needed actions?**