Crossing the Finish Line: Strategies to Support Doctoral Completion

Monday, October 21, 2019

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Presenters

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Plan for today

• **Three speakers** will speak for approximately **45 minutes** total, followed by Q & A

  • **Julia Kent** of the Council of Graduate Schools will speak for approximately **5 minutes** introducing the topic and speaking on CGS resources about supporting doctoral completion.

  • **Janet Rutledge** will speak for **15-20 minutes** on programs to support doctoral completion at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County focused on the comprehensive approach to ensuring graduate student success.

  • **Jan Allen** of Cornell University will close by speaking for **15-20 minutes** about programs on her campus, including crucial intervention points to support completion.
Technical Support

• Webinar **recording and slides** will be **emailed** to participants and **posted** on the CGS website

• Please **submit questions** through the GoToWebinar **control panel**

Audio Troubleshooting

• Having trouble hearing us? Try switching to a different audio connection. You can change from Telephone to Mic & Speakers or vice versa without leaving the session.

• If you experience trouble with a telephone connection, click “Problem dialing in?” for an alternate phone number to dial.
Introduction:
Julia Kent
Vice President, Best Practices and Strategic Initiatives
Best Practice Initiatives:
Helping Universities Support Pathways through Graduate Degrees
Recent CGS Resources for Supporting Doctoral Pathways
Crossing the Finish Line

Janet C. Rutledge, PhD
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)
Institutional Profile

- **Carnegie Classification**: Doctoral University: High Research Activity (R2); STEM-dominant

- **Graduate Enrollment**: 2,542 (19%)
  - PhD: 740 (29%)
  - Master’s: 1,621 (64%)
  - Non-degree and certificate: 181 (7%)
  - International: 716 (28%)

- **Total Enrollment**: 13,602

- **Degrees**: 90-95 PhDs; 650 Master’s; 145 Certificates

- **Programs**: 24 PhD, 40 Master’s, 22 Certificate Programs
Comprehensive Approach to Creating a Campus Environment For Student Retention and Success

- Institutionalized activities from PROMISE: Maryland’s AGEP and CGS PhD Completion Project (https://promiseagep.com/)
- Sharing of department-based activities during monthly meetings of Graduate Program Directors
- Creating learning communities
- Partnership with Graduate Student Association
- University As Mentor: Lessons Learned From UMBC Inclusiveness Initiatives http://www.cgsnet.org/Default.aspx?tabid=290
Monitoring Student Progress and Celebrating Milestones

*Lessons Five and Eight*

- Annual meeting and assessment of progress by faculty mentor and GPD required for all PhD students
- Graduate School monitors milestone deadlines
  - PhD: to reach candidacy (5 years max) and time to graduate after reaching candidacy (4 years max)
  - Master’s: 5 years max to graduate
PhD Candidacy Ceremony and Reception

- Ceremony each November: those who reached candidacy in the past year walk across the stage with their mentors and receive certificate
- Friends and family are invited and encouraged to attend
- During ceremony and in program booklet we share information on support systems for degree completion
- Students understand milestones and work to get paperwork submitted by annual deadline
Dissertation House

- Four full days – breakfast, lunch, snacks
- Break dissertation down into manageable units
- Daily goal setting and accountability
- Individual meetings with dissertation coach
- Dissertation House Online Challenges
- Overcoming obstacles to writing
- Presentations by dean, associate dean, counseling center, career center
- Follow up sessions

https://dissertationhouse.wordpress.com/
Dissertation House Outcomes

- Participating in Dissertation House increased likelihood of PhD student retention by 64% and increased the likelihood of their graduating by 92%.
- 98% of students who returned surveys said the program helped them make progress on their dissertations.
- Introduces model of doctoral dissertation supervision that involves multiple mentors across several disciplines.

The Dissertation House Model: Doctoral Student Experiences Coping and Writing in a Shared Knowledge Community

Wendy Y. Carter-Veale, Renetta G. Tull, Janet C. Rutledge, and Lenisa N. Joseph

Graduate School, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Baltimore, MD 21250; Division of Education, Downstate Graduate Programs, Alfred University, Alfred, NY 14802

ABSTRACT

The problem of PhD attrition, especially at the dissertation-writing stage, is not solely related to mentoring, departments, or disciplines; it is a problem that affects the entire institution. As such, solutions require collaborative efforts for student success. Building on Yeatman's master-apprentice model, which assumes mastering disciplinary writing in singular advisor-student contexts, and Burnett's collaborative cohort model, which introduced doctoral dissertation supervision in a collaborative-learning environment with several faculty mentors in a single discipline, the Dissertation House model (DHM) introduces a model of doctoral dissertation supervision that involves multiple mentors across several disciplines. On the basis of more than 200 students' reflections, we find that challenges in completing the dissertation extend beyond departmental and disciplinary boundaries. The DHM's multidisciplinary approach preserves the traditional master-apprentice relationship between faculty and students within academic departments while providing an additional support mechanism through interdisciplinary collaborative cohorts. Using Thoits's coping assistance theory and data from DH students over a 10-year period, the DHM incorporates Hoadley's concept of knowledge communities to establish a successful dissertation-writing intervention for graduate students across doctoral programs. Using propensity score analysis, we provide in this study an empirical assessment of the benefits and efficacy of the DHM.

https://www.lifescied.org/doi/10.1187/cbe.16-01-0081
Dissertation “Coach”

- Writing Accountability: On-going virtual dissertation coaching (e.g. skype, face-time)
- Effective schedules, outlines, literature reviews
- Time management and goal setting
- Accountability partners
- Relationships with faculty advisors
  - Understanding faculty perspective
  - Improving meeting productivity
  - Role playing
- Preparing for the defense
- Writing for publication
- Promoting wellness!
Exit Interviews As a Retention Strategy

- Compelling evidence that Ph.D. exit surveys are insufficient to help institutions understand why their students decide to discontinue their doctoral studies.
- Exit interviews alone are not enough.
- Interviews in conjunction with early and regular progress tracking reports is most effective.

Exit, Voice, Loyalty: Using an Exit Phone Interview to Mitigate the Silent Departure Phenomenon

Wendy Y. Carter-Veale¹ · Michelle Beadle Holder² · Lenisa N. Joseph³

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Abstract

Doctoral student attrition is often referred to as a silent epidemic whereby students tacitly withdraw without ever being given an exit interview or follow-up. While most studies focus on the departing students, few studies focus on the institution’s implicit and explicit policies and practices that encourage silence. Drawing upon the “Exit, Voice, Loyalty” framework, we examined how the pathways to student voice that institutions provide for departing students contribute to the silent departure phenomenon. We recommend that campus stakeholders, policymakers, and administrators solicit critical feedback from departing students and develop instruments to assess their own departure process, rather than relying on national assessments.

Keywords: Exit phone interview · Silent departure · Doctoral attrition · Exit-voice-loyalty · Doctoral training · Graduate audience

Celebrating Completion!

The Graduates

With Family
Friends
Faculty
Staff
Crossing the Finish Line: Strategies to Support Doctoral Completion

Cornell University

Jan Allen
Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs
Graduate Enrollment  4822  
  3347 Doctoral  
  577 Research Master’s  
  898 Professional Master’s  

Degrees Awarded (2017-18)  
  541 Doctoral  
  553 Research Master’s  
  531 Professional Master’s  

Graduate Programs and Degrees  
  88 degree-granting fields of study (18 minor non-degree fields of study)  
  14 degrees administered by the Graduate School  

Doctoral Funding  
  28% fellowship  
  33% TA  
  33% RA  
  6% Other
Recognizing and Supporting Student Milestones for Completion

We strive to create community and provide support at key points…

- Candidacy exam
- Writing support
- Funding support
- Wellbeing support
Candidacy Exam

- Congratulatory letter from the Dean to students upon passing candidacy exam
- Letter includes online link: *Writing from A to B: Guide to Completing the Dissertation Phase of Doctoral Study*
Writing Support

- **English Language Support Office**: Courses, tutoring, conversation groups, workshops on writing, presentations, pronunciation
- **Graduate Writing Service**: Individual in-person and on-line consultations on any type of writing
- **Fellowship Application Writing**: Workshops, panels, and peer review consultations
- **Dissertation Writing Boot Camp**: Six day event with up to 80 students in groups of ten focusing on writing productively, managing challenges, and creating community; monthly Re-Boots for Boot Camp alums to report progress, address new obstacles
- **Writing workshops and writing book clubs**
Funding Support

• **Provost Diversity Fellowship for Advanced Doctoral Students**
  One-term dissertation completion fellowship for either first-gen, URM, McNair or Mellon Mays UG Scholar, or who overcame significant challenges in path to graduate school.

• **Reduced tuition for Advanced Self-Pay Doctoral Students**
  - In Absentia tuition ($200 per semester)
  - Advanced Self-Pay Doctoral Students ($1750 per semester)
Resilience and Well-Being Support

Support Groups
- Anxiety and You
- Imposter Syndrome
- International Students
- Positive Action through Interaction

Community Building
- Pie with the Deans
- Weekly Walks
- Lab Crawl
- Student Groups and Clubs, GPSA
THANK YOU!

For more information contact jan.allen@cornell.edu
Questions?

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- Wellness

These student defined “tags” were developed from search history and reflect student needs.

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    • Thursday, October 31, 2019 | 2:00 - 3:00pm EST
  • Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning
    • Friday, November 1, 2019 | 2:00 - 3:00pm EST