Completion and Attrition in STEM Master’s Programs

Council of Graduate Schools
Annual Meeting

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Exploratory Master’s Project

- Launched April 2009
- Funders:
  - Sloan Foundation and National Science Foundation
- Goals:
  - Clarify current state of knowledge about completion and attrition in STEM master’s programs
  - Develop better understanding about why students fail to complete
  - Identify factors that lead to successful completion
Exploratory Master’s Project (cont.)

- Activities:
  - Literature review
  - Data on completion and attrition
  - Research on the characteristics of master’s programs
  - Sessions at the 2009 CGS Summer Workshop
  - White paper
  - NSF/CGS Workshop
  - Final monograph
Main Findings:

- Limited data on master’s completion and attrition
- Differing methodologies preclude meaningful comparisons
- Little research on factors contributing to completion and attrition at the master’s level
New Monograph

- Exploratory project findings summarized in:
  - The Role and Status of the Master’s Degree in STEM
  - To be mailed to all CGS members in December
New Master’s Completion Project

- New Project
  - Completion and Attrition in STEM Master’s Programs
  - Sloan Foundation-funded
  - 27-month project
  - Builds on exploratory study
New Master’s Completion Project (cont.)

- Research questions:
  - Typology, definitions and templates
  - Completion and attrition rates
  - Factors related to student success
  - Promising practices to improve outcomes
  - Larger project?
New Master’s Completion Project (cont.)

- RFP to be issued in February 2011
- Five institutions selected will:
  - Provide completion and attrition data
  - Administer student surveys
  - Host site visits
- Proposal deadline: May 13, 2011
- Awardees will receive $30,000 each
New Master’s Completion Project (cont.)

- Current activities:
  - Typology of master’s programs
  - Standard definitions
  - Factors that affect student enrollment and success
  - Criteria for selection of participating institutions

- January, convene groups of deans/experts to refine the research design
New Master’s Completion Project (cont.)

- Project timeline:
  - Proposal deadline: May 13, 2011
  - Awardees announced by July 2011
  - Site visits in September 2011
    - Interviews and focus groups
  - Field student surveys
    - Newly enrolled students in fall 2011
    - To graduates in December 2011 and May 2012
    - To non-completers during the 2011-12 academic year
New Master’s Completion Project (cont.)

- Project timeline (cont.):
  - Submit completion and attrition data in March 2012
  - Updated data in July 2012
  - Final monograph in January 2013
  - Decide on potential follow-up project
Questions?

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