PhD Completion Project:
Summary of Best Practices

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Background

• Attrition rates for PhD programs is a significant national problem
  – 30-50%
  – Greatest loss among women and students from underrepresented populations seen in sciences and engineering

• Fewer students from underrepresented groups enter graduate programs
  – Produce fewer faculty to serve as role models
  – Exacerbates the attrition problem

• UNC-Chapel Hill focused initial efforts on underrepresented students
National Trends

Percent PhDs by Race/Ethnicity
(National)

- AI/Alaskan Native
- African American
- Hispanic

NSF/NIH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates
National Trends

Percent PhDs by Race/Ethnicity (National)

- Al/Alaskan Native
- African American
- Hispanic
- White

NSF/NIH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates
# Graduate student distribution by race/ethnicity and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>1,624</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,442</td>
<td>2,442</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Counts include degree seeking students only. Students seeking certificates are not included. Note: Percentage calculations are rounded.

**Source:** Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (GA010)
**As of Census, September 3, 2008**
Median Years in Graduate School
2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NSF/NIH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates
PhD Completion Project: Strategic Approaches

- **Goal** - to introduce to the campus environment a set of interventions aimed to improve both diversity and PhD completion rates

- Special emphasis on those student groups at greatest risk of attrition
  - Women
  - Underrepresented populations

- Special emphasis on improving completion and time to degree
Interventions

• On-campus recruitment visits and student selection – expanded opportunities for academic programs to bring prospective students to campus for recruiting visits, with emphasis on those students from underrepresented populations

• Mentoring initiatives – aimed to reward faculty for their performance as outstanding student mentors

• Dissertation initiatives – aimed to reward students for outstanding dissertations completed in a timely manner

• Data dissemination – program review process coupled with exit survey information
Intervention Specifics

- **Recruitment** – diversity travel awards
  - Students who have been admitted
  - Director of Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention

- **Mentoring** – Faculty Award for Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring
  - Student nominated process
  - Presented at Hooding Ceremony
  - Recipient participates in new student orientation

- **Dissertations** – Dissertation Awards
  - Initiated by CGS funding
  - Presented at Annual Graduate Student Recognition Ceremony
  - Embraced by faculty in all disciplines
Intervention Results

• **Recruitment**
  – **Matching funds from University for diversity travel awards**
  – Importance of student visits recognized by faculty and senior leadership
  – Over 50 student visits/year via diversity travel awards
  – Increasing number of academic programs using awards
  – Enrollment data
    2006: 10% incoming students identified as underrepresented
    2008: 12% incoming students identified as underrepresented
    2009: 11% incoming students identified as underrepresented with additional 5% Other

• **Mentoring**
  – Faculty appreciation being recognized for effective mentoring
  – Embraced by students across discipline:
    2007: 21 nominations
    2008: 43 nominations
    2009: 37 nominations
    2010: 35 nominations
Intervention Results

• Dissertation Awards
  – Direct acknowledgement of student achievement
  – Criteria includes timely completion of degree
  – Secured by endowed gift

• Data Dissemination
  – Program review process
  – Results of exit surveys
  – Discussions with faculty
The Path Forward

• Expand the use of exit surveys for all students
  – Data provided to departments as part of review process
  – Captures student in our new alumni data base

• Travel funds now part of our permanent budget
  – Used to recruit underrepresented populations
  – Fit, fit, fit

• Continuous enrollment policy
  – Essential to track time to degree