



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
September 1, 2009

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Mentoring is Essential to Doctorate Completion

Survey of Ph.D. recipients identifies factors contributing to student success

Recent doctoral recipients report that the availability and quality of mentoring and advising played a major role in their ability to complete the degree, according to an analysis of exit surveys released today by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS).

A new publication from CGS's Ph.D. Completion Project shows that while the vast majority (over 90%) of survey respondents were highly satisfied with the quality of their relationship with their mentor, over a third of graduates still wanted more time to interact with them.

In addition to mentoring, the main factors identified by doctoral recipients as contributing to completion were financial support and family support; the latter's high ranking reflects the important contribution of non-academic factors to successful degree completion.

The survey also asked a number of questions about financial support, including departmental assistantships. The analysis revealed that students perceived that the type of assistantship they received affected the time it took them to complete their degree. Over 80% of students who had received a Teaching Assistantship (TA) reported that being a TA increased the length of their program. On the other hand, the majority (56%) of students who had been a Research Assistant (RA) believed that it *decreased* the length of their program.

However, there was considerable diversity of opinion depending on the student's field of study: while 70% of students in mathematics and physical sciences believed that being an RA shortened the length of their program, only 44% of students in the social sciences did so.

Other survey questions about program selection revealed that graduates were more likely to cite the reputation of their program and faculty than other factors, including financial support and the university's overall reputation, as a main reason they selected their doctoral program.

"These findings reinforce how crucial mentoring and support, from both within and outside the university, are to doctoral completion," said Debra W. Stewart, CGS President. "Additionally, the high priority students placed on program and faculty reputation speaks to how important it is for universities to maintain quality graduate programs. Continuous improvement is a hallmark of graduate education in North America," she added.

[more]

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About the Publication

[*Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Findings from Exit Surveys of Ph.D. Completers*](#) is the third in a series of monographs from the Ph.D. Completion Project. It paints a broad picture of the doctoral experience of new graduates, as reported by the graduates themselves. Responses from over 1,400 Ph.D. recipients at 18 institutions, surveyed between 2006 and 2008, were included in the book's analyses.

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. CGS, with generous support from Pfizer Inc and the Ford Foundation, has 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. Later this year the project will issue a summary of interventions being implemented by participating institutions, and in 2010, the project will publish a final comprehensive analysis and description of the policies and practices that appear to have had a demonstrated effect on completion rates.

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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 84% 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 2007 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees