

The Ph.D. Completion Project



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Ph.D. Completion Project Overview

- Three Year Project (2004-2007)
- Funded by Pfizer and the Ford Foundation
- 21 Research Partners
- 25 Project Partners (1/3 of whom are submitting all or nearly all quantitative data)
- Data Collection and Submission (10+ years completion AND 10+years attrition; exit surveys); designed interventions and assessment; host site visits; networking
- ***Emphasis on Doctoral Pipeline – esp. underrepresented minorities and women***



Baseline Data Highlights

- The National Picture
- Broad Field-level Factors (e.g. Life Sciences)
- Program-level Factors (e.g. Biology)
- **Institutional Factors**
- **Departmental Factors**
- Demographic Variables
- The Student's Perspective



Leverage Areas

- Completion Data, Attrition Data, & Survey Data
- Selection and Admissions
- Mentoring and Advising
- Financial Support
- Program Environment
- Research Culture and Activities
- Curricular Processes and Procedures
- Professional Development



The Edge of the Known Universe

- Baseline Data = a view from the Hubble Space Telescope
- Next Quantitative Data Submission = May 2007
- *NEW* Request for Proposals
 - (third quantitative data submission = expected May 2009)



The National Picture

- At 57%, the national 10-year completion rate appears to be almost 10% higher than most cited estimates. This could mean:
 - Progress?
 - Cherry-picked Programs?
 - Strong Graduate Schools?

Broad Field-level Factors

- Seven Years = Insufficient for Understanding Effects of Field
 - E.g. late completion in Life Sciences (surpassing Engineering at y10) and in Social Sciences (surpassing Physical Sciences and Mathematics at y10)
- **Institutional Leverage Points**
 - Professional development (e.g. “PFF”; career center)
 - Dissertation seminars
 - Periodic progress review

Institutional Factors

- E.g. Publics vs. Privates
 - Little difference in completion rates in engineering at approx. 55 (7y) and 64% (10y)
 - Life sciences – privates higher than publics by approx 10%
 - MathPhysSci – privates higher than publics by approx. 15%
 - English and History – privates higher than publics by approx. 20% or more
 - SS – in Political Science, for example– small differences of at 7 yrs become big differences at 10 years (62% private /48% public)
- **Institutional Leverage Points:**
 - Context-sensitive policies, e.g. continuous registration and/or time-limit
 - Benchmarking completion
 - Formalizing effective informal practices
 - Exit (and not just exit) Surveys – for completers and non-completers



Program-Level and Department Factors

- Financial Support and Resources
- Cohort Size (more impact on TTD than completion)
- “Cultures” or Habits of Expectations
- Employment Prospects
- **Institutional Leverage Points**
 - Interdepartmental dialogue
 - Innovative funding models (e.g. block grants)
 - Use of data
 - Transparency
 - Pre-enrollment campus visits

Demographic Factors

- Underrepresented Minorities – best in Life Sciences and Humanities (but humanities where Hispanic students facing more difficulties); Physical Sciences, Math, Engineering)
- Gender the biggest difference overall
- UR groups exhibiting Later TTC
- **Institutional Leverage Points**
 - Build on existing programs (AGEP; scholarship/fellowships); cohort and peer mentoring; “family friendly” policies



The Student's Perspective

■ Exit Surveys

- Beyond adequacy of institutional/departamental resources
- Climate for Graduate Students
- Social Integration
- Conflict Management
- Professional Development
- Transparency

What's Next

- Request for Proposals
- Expanded Partner Pool
- Site Visits with Individualized Reports
- Revised *Ph.D. Completion and Attrition* publication (with results from baseline data)
- Enhanced Benchmarking Tools
 - (including website)
- NRC Completion Data Collection
- CGS Best Practices Monograph