



# PhD Completion Project of Brown University

## Overview and Plans

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# Overview

- Theme of the Project
  - *Role of monitored milestones in improving degree completion*
- Specific Interventions
  - Advising, mentoring, and research
  - Support and funding structures
  - Administrative procedures





# About Brown



## History of the University

- Founded in 1764: seventh oldest in the U.S.

## History of Graduate Education

- Began in 1850; modern tradition began in 1887:
  - First master's degrees granted in 1888
  - First PhDs in 1889
  - Women admitted to graduate study at Brown in 1892.
- In 1903, a Graduate Department was established with its own dean
- In 1927, Graduate Department became the Graduate School

# The Graduate School: 2006-2007

- **Approx. 1700 students**
  - 1,300 doctoral
  - 400 master's
- Brown has no professional schools other than its medical school; is developing school of public health.
- The relatively small scale reinforces the sense of community that is a defining feature of Brown

Students by Source	Women	Men
Us Citizens – Majority	482	461
US Citizens – Minority	103	78
International	217	367
Total	802	906
<b>Grand Total = 1708</b>		



# The Plan for Doctoral Support (PODS)

## A Graduate School Management Initiative

**PODS integrates financial and professional management of the graduate programs**

### **PODS Element**

- Create a link between milestones of progress and communication of academic standing
- Guarantee multiyear funding during developmental years to create a link between student support and the overall population of each graduate program
- Deliver appropriate professional and research development to uncouple the link between undergraduate teaching needs and graduate student teaching requirements.

### **Intended Results**

- Monitor the academic progress of doctoral students
- Obtain greater knowledge about optimal program size and training efficiency
- Make PhD completion possible within nominal timeframes for individual departments

# Interventions Across the Graduate School

- Focus on “early” milestones
  - Accomplishment of “early” milestones provide a benchmark of progress toward achieving candidacy.
  - Addresses the problem of attrition due to lack of clear preparation and knowledge of milestones that signal good academic standing.
- Focus on the “middle years” of PhD training
  - Accomplishment of requirements and professional development exposure to permit student completion of their research.
  - Addresses the problem of prolonged time to degree completion.

# Intervention 1: Advising, Mentoring and Research

## **Focal point**

- The doctoral student

## **Interventions**

- Revise student handbooks for each program.
- Require each student to have advisory structure and evaluations of progress each semester in the first year and annually thereafter.
- Require completion of all pre-dissertation milestones before year 4.

## **Intended Impact**

- Enhance communication between the graduate students and the faculty in each department.

# Intervention 2: Support and Funding Structures

## **Focal point**

- The doctoral-degree program

## **Interventions**

- Guarantee multiyear support by allocation of funding to departments.
- Time teaching/lab rotations and other obligations early in academic training career.
- Focus conference travel support during developmental years.

## **Intended Impact**

- Link communication between the graduate program and the graduate school administration.

# Intervention 3: Administrative Procedures

## **Focal point**

- The Graduate School administrative processes

## **Interventions**

- Create/enhance database to track type of student aid.
- Revision of existing exit survey of PhD completers.
- Track/categorize all non-completion leaves
  - Health & Family Leaves
  - Non-Academic Leaves
  - Attrition for academic purposes

## **Intended Impact**

- Assess the role that information on attrition and retention provide on overall completion rates.

# Nine Participating Programs

From the “arts and sciences”

- 2 sciences – **Geology and Chemistry** – and
- 4 social sciences/humanities – **Anthropology, English, History, and Psychology**

From the Division of Engineering

- **Biomedical Engineering**, an interdisciplinary program between Biology and Engineering, and
- All the other **Engineering** programs studied as a single unit

From the Division of Biology and Medicine

- **Pathobiology** – an interdisciplinary program closely associated with medical faculty and medical issues.

# Goal of Supplemental Interventions

*Overall focus: identify and remove obstacles to completion*

## ■ **Early-year Interventions**

- Early Start Program
- Monitoring of the process of advisor/mentor selection, especially for minorities and women

## ■ **Middle-year Interventions**

- Train students in the grant-writing process
- “Dissertation Research Institute” with Dissertation Coaches

*Supplemental interventions focus on the insertion of support for students at critical transitions*

# PhD Completion @ Brown: Contacts



- PI: Sheila Bonde, Dean
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