



Special
Points of
Interest

- Article Review
- Conference Updates
- Let's Discuss

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Beyond the Baccalaureate

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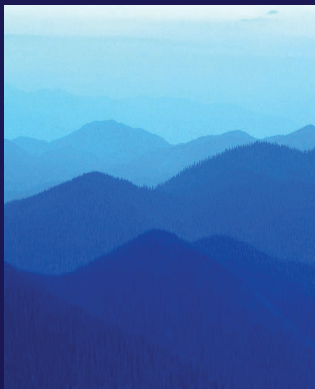
Article Review

While searching for articles pertaining to graduate and professional students, I came across Di Pierro, M. (2007). Excellence in doctoral education: Defining Best Practices, College Student Journal, 41(2), p 368-375. The author of this article describes how the Western Michigan University Graduate Center for Research, Writing, and Proposal Development, based on their research, has developed some best practice recommendations for graduate programs to follow. These are in light of the fact that the national doctoral student attrition rate is 50 percent. Many of these recommendations are ones that we as learning center professionals could help implement, or use as the basis for workshop topics. They are as follows (with my notes in brackets):

- 1) Continue to measure outputs in all departments and note trends in time to degree that may protract the process—implement purposeful change for improvement; and develop culturally sensitive advising models.
- 2) Encourage development of the dissertation topic early in the student's doctoral education. **{A workshop could be done on this topic.}**
- 3) Make of the dissertation seminar a collaborative enterprise that culminates in a final product—a concept paper or a working draft of the dissertation proposal. **{A workshop could be done on preparing an article for publication, which is often done before working on the dissertation. Email Laura Heidel at lheidel@uh.edu for an example of this type of workshop.}**
- 4) Conduct entry and exit interviews with all students- those who graduate, as well as those who do not complete.
- 5) Measure completion rates for comprehensive examinations—one of the first places where students encounter difficulty in the doctoral educational process. **{A workshop could be done on comprehensive exams. Email Laura Heidel at lheidel@uh.edu for an example.}**
- 6) Create focused tutorials or workshops to assist in developing test-taking skills. **{A workshop could be done on taking tests in graduate school, and how these differ from undergraduate tests.}**
- 7) Focus on recruitment and retention of students from underrepresented groups, especially in the STEM fields. **{At our respective institutions we can be sensitive to that fact that retention rates may be lower for students from underrepresented groups and think about ways to reduce this disparity.}**
- 8) Limit the length of extensions to less than, but no more than one year and closely monitor progress prior to the end of the extension period, especially at annual review. **{When we see students who have been in their doctoral programs for a period that is longer than average, we can discuss strategies with them to finish sooner.}**
- 9) Apprise students of the average length of each phase of doctoral study so that they understand the process of doctoral education and the commitment necessary for program completion.
- 10) Use the process flow charts and accompanying narratives as roadmaps to navigate students through the process.
- 11) Maintain better record keeping and aim for consolidation of documents.
- 12) Use the universal tracking document to help track future data. [Continued on page 2](#)



See you this fall!



Questions to ponder. .

Article Review, continued from page 1

- 13) Avoid letting students proceed to the oral defense until the dissertation is in near final form.
- 14) Use the data results for this project to improve time to degree and to identify opportunities to reduce attrition within each department. **{We can communicate with particular departments on our campus and learn more attrition. Then we can develop programs to address these areas.}**
- 15) Benchmark best practices within the university.
- 16) Develop ongoing orientations for doctoral students that coincide with each phase of doctoral study—business has long appreciated the effectiveness of providing just in time training, a more efficient method of imparting information and serving the students' needs. **{Work with departments to impart information about our services during orientation, and then discuss with departments the need for follow up orientations, based on the needs of their students.}**
- 17) Coordinate activity interviews timed to each phase so that students and dissertation committee members engage in open discussions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of their interactions.
- 18) Conduct exit interviews at the time of dissertation defense so that the student and committee members enter into a debriefing that provides opportunities for process improvement.
- 19) Provide training for graduate advising faculty. **{Consider ways to do this on our campuses. Has anyone done this?}**
- 20) Develop ongoing orientations for graduate advising faculty to familiarize them with policy changes and to provide them with an open forum through which they can address issues of concern from the faculty perspective.

2009 Conference Updates

CRLA CONFERENCE– October 29-31 Richmond, VA

There is currently a call for proposals with a deadline of March 31st. More information can be found at www.crla.net. Consider submitting a proposal that has to do with our population!

CASP CONFERENCE– October 21-23 San Antonio, TX

Our co-chair Melissa Thomas will be going to this joint conference of Texas CRLA and the Texas Association for Developmental Education. If anyone else from our group is going and would like to have a SIG meeting while at the conference, please contact Melissa at Melissa.Thomas@utsa.edu. See www.txcrla.org for more information.

Let's Discuss. . .

These are some things I have been wondering about. If you have any ideas please send them to me at lheidel@uh.edu and I will send them out to our SIG. Our SIG will function more effectively if we communicate with each other. Thanks!!

- 1) What are your greatest challenges in working with graduate and professional students?
- 2) What workshops that you have done have been the best received by students?
- 3) What marketing strategies do you use with this group, that may be different than those used for undergraduates?
- 4) What research are you currently doing on these students?