EXPLORING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT PRACTICES FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS' DEGREE COMPLETION

ILDA JIMENEZ Y WEST
Rossier School of Education
University of Southern California

GOKCE GOKALP
Rossier School of Education
University of Southern California

EDLYN VALLEJO PEÑA
School of Education
California Lutheran University

LINDA FISCHER
Rossier School of Education
University of Southern California

JARRETT GUPTON
College of Education and Human Development
University of Minnesota

The increase in time-to degree and attrition rates of students in doctoral programs highlight the importance of identifying challenges students face and developing support services to address them. This study explored the barriers and challenges Ed.D. students face while pursuing their degree along with the effectiveness of a doctoral support center (DSC) in assisting doctoral candidates. A survey administered to 103 students inquired into participants' experiences with their program, dissertation chair, and the DSC. In addition, nine student volunteers participated in focus groups and responded to questions related to the DSC, the program, and the advisor. Time management and relationship with chairs were identified as the most common challenges, while classmates, dissertation chairs, and the DSC were identified as major sources of support for students.

Since 1920, when Harvard University granted the first Doctorate of Education degree (Ed.D.) to students seeking a prestigious degree reflecting their leadership skills as education practitioners, dozens of Ed.D. programs have emerged across the United States (Mayhew & Ford, 1974). The hundreds of degrees awarded yearly allowed educators to become competitive and uniquely poised for leadership positions in K-12 and higher education institutions. On the one hand, earning an Ed.D. placed educators one-step above those with masters degrees; on the other hand, it distinguished them from educators with a doctorate of philosophy in education degree (Ph.D.) who were focused on research. In today's competitive economy, a job-seeking candidate with an earned Ed.D. who shares equal amounts of professional experiences with other candidates is likely to have access to more career opportunities (Hite, 1985).

While Ed.D. programs continue to

expand, little has been published about students' experiences in these programs. Are students thriving in these programs? Are Ed.D. programs effectively supporting doctoral students to degree completion? What are institutions implementing to support working, professional doctoral students? How do student support structures such as a Doctoral Support Center effectively address the needs of Ed.D. students? With the exception of a small number of studies that focus on professional doctoral programs (Allan & Dory, 2001; Scott et al., 2004), fewer focus specifically on the doctorates in education (Pauley, 1999; Malone et al., 2001, Guthrie & Marsh, 2009). Almost all research studies regarding doctoral education concentrate on students in Ph.D. programs. For Ph.D. students, the average time to complete a doctorate program is seven to eight years or as long as 13 years in some cases (Berger, 2007, Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992), and the average drop-out rate is near or above 50% (Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). For Ed.D. students, the rate of completion varies depending on the institution and program format; Bair and Haworth (1999) place the completion rate for professional doctoral programs between 40-60%, similar to Ph.D. completion rates. The dropout rates of doctoral students highlight the importance of identifying the challenges students face. Universities must turn their attention to Ed.D. programs and their student support structures for two important reasons. First, universities which hire education leaders increasingly desire and require candidates who have earned an Ed.D. (Hite, 1985; The California State

University, 2001). Second, given this demand, professional doctoral programs continue to grow within the landscape of higher education (Anderson, 1983). To improve services for professional doctoral students, researchers need to examine students' experiences in their respective programs and the unique structures designed to support their educational goals.

At the center of this study are the following guiding research questions: What are some of the challenges students face in a doctoral program and how do they navigate them? What Doctoral Support Center practices and services do doctoral students find helpful and effective? How does the Doctoral Support Center support and promote predictors of success in the doctoral program? In this article, we share our perspectives as individuals directly engaged in the practice of supporting professional doctoral students on ways to assist professional doctoral students in education. As action researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) our study is motivated by how our own research can inform our practice.

In order to serve as a Doctoral Support Center (DSC) writing advisor, one must have an earned doctoral degree. The expert knowledge acquired through a combination of our past experiences as doctoral candidates, conducting research on our target population, and reflecting on the current literature on supporting doctoral students is put into action to serve students. Thus we refer to ourselves a "participant practitioners". For several years we have identified skills that doctoral students need to develop regardless of their field of study—such as how to critically write a synthesis of the literature for a literature

review or what methodology aligns with the research question or hypothesis. This skill set is generalizable and can be applied across disciplines through cost effective programs such as on-line seminars, writing groups, and dissertation writing retreats.

In the following sections, we review the relevant literature on the challenges doctoral students encounter and the ways in which they navigate those challenges, with particular attention to doctoral students in professional programs. Next, we detail the methods we employed and then transition to a discussion of the results of the study. We close by suggesting new and innovative approaches to improve the academic experience for education doctoral students and their degree completion.

Review of the Literature

There are various research paradigms that explain how doctoral candidates navigate an academic program to completion. Whether researchers see the doctoral experience as stages of a degree process (Ali & Kohun, 2007), a process of student development (Gardner, 2009), or focus on student characteristics, institutional factors, or both (de Valero, 2001; Kluevar, 1995; Kluever et al, 1997; Boven & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1994; Nerad & Cerny, 1993), current scholarship aims to predict and measure the ways in which doctoral students are successful. In the sections that follow, the important aspects of completing the dissertation, as cited in the literature, are discussed and grouped into common challenges students face, how they navigate these challenges, and how

they access support services.

Common Challenges: The Unstructured and Isolating Dissertation Process

Based on the literature, it becomes apparent that students experience graduate school in two distinct stages: 1) taking coursework, which is structured and familiar, and 2) dissertation writing, which is an unstructured process, that is often unfamiliar to students. This distinction is important. Historically, studies have attributed attrition and lengthy time-to-degree completion to a deficiency in students (Green, 1991). However, the solitary and unstructured act of doing a dissertation for which many doctoral candidates are unprepared may be a greater contributing factor (Gardner, 2009; Nerad and Miller, 1997; Sigafus, 1998). In addition, social isolation plays a role in this transition as the learning process changes from a dependent participant learner in the course work stage to an independent and isolated learner in the ABD phase. Sigafus (1998) proposes that students miss the contact with colleagues during the dissertation phase and want intellectual and faculty interactions. In the end, students may complete coursework and qualifying exams, placing them in the "all but dissertation" (ABD) phase, but struggle to write the dissertation itself (Sigafus, 1998).

The attention paid to doctoral students' social isolation warrants further investigation into how doctoral programs can support their students. Ali and Kohun (2007) and other researchers before them (Hortulanus et al. 2006; Thoits, 1986), have examined social isolation in doctoral pro-

/ College Student Journal

grams. They agree that a solution to this isolation is to facilitate opportunities to develop social relationships and social support. They challenge doctoral programs to view social isolation as an institutional or administrative matter, not an individual issue. In short, institutions can remedy this problem by enabling students to establish social networks with peers and other key figures in the program.

How students navigate challenges

A number of factors mitigate the effects of high attrition rates for doctoral students. These factors include: financial support, departmental orientation, and relationship between course work and research skills (de Valero, 2001). Among these factors, a departmental climate that is underscored by student participation and peer support seems to have a profound effect on the rate of time to degree and program completion (de Valero, 2001; Golde, 1995; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nerad & Cerny, 1993). In a supportive environment, students feel integrated, which increases their persistence (Golde, 1995). Similarly, Nerad and Cerny (1993) found that in those departments where faculty treated students as junior colleagues and participated in social and academic activities, time to degree was shorter. These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive and cooperative departmental climate with opportunities for institutional and peer support.

In addition, the student advisor relationship while writing a dissertation has been identified as an important factor impacting degree completion and time to degree in doctoral programs (Berger, 2007; de Valero, 2001; Gardner, 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Spilett, 2004; Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001). de Valero (2001) revealed that closer relationships between advisors and students as well as a higher involvement of advisors in their advisees' education process promoted success (de Valero, 2001). Tenenbaum, Crosby, and Gliner (2001) identify three kinds of support that can be provided by advisors. The first type is instrumental help which includes coaching, sponsorship, exposure to academic life, and opportunities for challenging assignments. This type of help contributes positively to student productivity (i.e., publications, posters, and conference talks). The second is psychosocial help which includes role modeling, empathizing, and counseling. Psychosocial help contributes to students' satisfaction with their mentor and with their graduate school experience. The last type of help Tenenbaum et al. (2001) identified is networking assistance, including helping students make connections in the field, contributing to student productivity.

Support structures and services

As discussed, findings from Gardner (2009) and Kluever, R.C. et al. (1997) posit that the relationship between the dissertation chair and or a departmental advisor is a critical predictor for graduate school success. Such interactions and communication between the chair and her/his advisee are essential to success in the dissertation phase. While this relationship between the student and their advisor and committee members is key to navigating challenges,

the student needs support beyond what the advisor and committee can provide (Monsour & Corman, 1991). Fundamental to students' transition from the dependent to the independent structure of the doctoral dissertation is developing social networks and accessing supportive institutional programs (Ali & Kohun, 2007). According to Berger (2007), various institutions have been providing workshops to address dissertation writing isolation. These workshops serve to create intellectual communities around common themes by bringing together 3 or 4 faculty members with 12 students writing their dissertation on closely related subjects but from different disciplines (Nerad & Miller, 1997). Workshops provide opportunities for students to share their research, identify common themes, and offer mutual support and constructive criticism from different disciplinary perspectives. This type of exchange allows students to gain a new perspective on their own proposals and establish a basis for more interchanges and even collaborative projects. Nerad and Miller (1997) report that students find these workshops exhilarating and productive.

Besides workshops and writing groups, doctoral cohort programs aimed at facilitating peer collaborations can counter doctoral student isolation (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000). In some programs, doctoral cohorts are comprised of a group of students who begin at the same time, or they are a group of students formed to focus on a similar dissertation theme. Cohorts emphasize networking, support, ease in scheduling, and satisfaction after graduation. Faculty notice that cohort members are better prepared for leadership roles and experienced better student-to-faculty relationships than non-cohort members. They inferred that cohort participants gained knowledge not accessible to non-cohort programs.

The Doctoral Support Center

Many of the aforementioned support services are provided by the Doctoral Support Center featured in this study. The Doctoral Support Center (DSC) drew from the preceding theories to create academic (curricular) and socio-emotional (co-curricular) support services for Ed.D. students at a selective research institution. While it is important to assess doctoral education through the eyes of doctoral students (Golde & Dore, 2001), we have done so with the intent to better our practice as action researchers and participant practitioners. di Pierro (2007) states, "It is apparent that much of the conversation concerns identification of various factors that contribute to attrition, without the benefit of conversations that address the implementation of best practices, those interventions currently in use that ameliorate this trend" (pp. 368-369).

Therefore, this study is purposeful in that it addresses the gap in the literature on assessing student support structures by exploring doctoral attrition not only through the lens of doctoral candidates but through research conducted by participant practitioners at a doctoral support center. The first objective of this study was to further explore the barriers and challenges that Ed.D. students face while pursuing their degree. The second objective was to

test the efficacy of institutional support structures of the DSC, established to assist doctoral candidates.

Methods

This evaluative study reports the experiences that Ed.D. students identify as facilitating or hindering their success in the doctoral program. Of particular interest were the ways students accessed assistance and resources at the Doctoral Support Center (DSC), a center within a large, private research university in the School of Education that assists students in completing their doctoral degrees. The following sections describe the qualitative research design employed in this study, including the setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Setting

The DSC was founded in 2004 to serve the School of Education at a large research institution in the southwest. The DSC's mission is to provide services to doctoral students during course work, proposal, and dissertation writing phases of their program. Three Writing Advisors work at the DSC, along with a DSC Director. They provide one-on-one writing consultation, give workshops on getting through various aspects of the program, and facilitate structured support group meetings to finish the dissertation. On average, the writing advisors work with 130 students in a given school year with an average of 235 appointments made per month.

Participants

Participants of the study were students in one of eight possible cohorts that had started the doctoral program from 2000 to 2007. One hundred and three students participated in the survey portion of the study. Seventy-seven percent of those who completed the survey had accessed the DSC services at least once or twice during the academic year in which the survey was administered. Eighty-four percent of the participants were female. The age range of the participants was 25 to 63. Thirty-eight percent of the participants were Caucasian, 23% were Hispanic/Latino, 20% were Asian American/Pacific Islander, 13% were African American followed by 3% Hawaiian, 2% other, and 1% Native American. Forty-six percent were taking courses, while 54% percent were in the post coursework stage of the doctoral program. Table 1 reports the participants disaggregated by ethnicity and coursework stage in the program. Nine students surveyed volunteered to participate in focus groups. While not a substantial number, important insights were garnered that supplemented the survey's findings.

Table 1 Participant Demographics: Ethnicity and Stage in the Doctoral Program

Ethnicity	Coursework Stage	Post-Coursework	Female	Male
Caucasian	15%	23%	82%	18%
Hispanic/Latina	11%	12%	77%	23%
African American	5%	8%	90%	10%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	13%	7%	6%	94%
Hawaiian	1%	2%	100%	0
Native American	0	1%	100%	0
Other	1%	1%	100%	0

Data Collection

The data analyzed in this article came from a larger study which used an 86 item questionnaire that inquired into participants' experiences with their program, dissertation chair, and the DSC. Among these questionnaire items, 15 were open-ended questions and served as the primary source of data. Besides completing the questionnaire, a volunteer group of nine students participated in focus groups, which was the second source of data. Participants were asked to respond to questions under 3 general categories about the DSC, doctoral program, and dissertation chair. DSC related questions inquired about the participants' perceptions regarding the services that are offered at the DSC. Doctoral program related questions were used to query participant's perceptions of both the climate of the program and how connected they felt. Finally, advisor related questions were used to query participant's perceptions about their relationships with their advisors. Within each category there were three to eight questions.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analyses of both open ended survey questions and focus groups were conducted to identify important themes related to the challenges doctoral students face such as time management, life events, the unstructured nature of the dissertation phase, and challenges experienced with dissertation chairs and how they navigate these challenges. In addition to the thematic analysis, descriptive and correlation analysis were conducted to explore the extent to which the themes that emerged through the focus groups and open ended questions were supported by the quantitative data.

Results

From the survey and focus group data, findings emerged that shed light on the experiences of students in an Ed.D. program at a large, research university. The findings led to a deeper understanding about the challenges and barriers encountered by students and the ways in which they navigated those challenges. Among the challenges experienced by students, those most commonly reported were time management issues, including balancing work and life commitments, as well as their relationships with their dissertation chairs. Following the discussion on students' challenges, we explore the ways in which students navigated the challenges they

encountered and the extent to which the DSC helped meet their needs.

Challenges

Time management and balancing life responsibilities were challenges that went hand in hand for most students, as reported in both survey and focus group responses. In fact, the quantitative data revealed that 60% of participants identified time management as a challenge. For four of the cohorts surveyed, it was the most commonly identified challenge. Similarly, 31% of all participants identified balancing responsibilities as a challenge, making it the second most commonly identified challenge in the quantitative survey. Often, students found themselves juggling commitments to family members while trying to succeed in classes or writing the dissertation. One student explained, "I work full-time and have many work and personal responsibilities, i.e., caring for an elder parent, spouse with health problems." In other cases, students struggled to meet their academic responsibilities due to childcare demands. "I had a 10 month old when I started the program and I gave birth again 8 weeks ago!" said one student.

Twenty-three percent of participants who completed the survey identified life events as a challenge, which included unforeseen circumstances in their personal lives, and for some, extraordinary dilemmas: "We are waiting for my wife to have heart surgery and I have 2 toddlers." Most students had less serious life events to contend with, but still found that they had to compromise their personal relationships to meet the demands of the

doctoral program: "Sadly, my family and friends miss our 'normal' relationships." These types of concerns were corroborated during focus groups. : "For me obviously, time probably is the number one challenge just because I think, you know, having a family. My wife works full time and having no family here, working substantial hours, I have no social time. All my free time is put towards just going on the time of having opportunities to figure out when I can write," explained a student.

Besides personal and family expectations, students worried about the time their professional careers took away from studying and writing. A student stated, "My biggest challenge is finding time to complete all of the work (reading assignments and written projects) because I am working fulltime as a teacher. There are lots of things I have to do for my students and my school which impact my time." Students found that they could not do and be everything they wanted. For example, one student in particular complained about trying to be a full time student, mother, and professional educator: "It's just tough trying to hold a full-time job as an administrator, be a mother to a young child, and carry my other responsibilities along with writing the dissertation." Such competing priorities led students to "sacrifice… sleep" and feel "overwhelmed".

In addition to time management, students' success was highly dependent on their interactions and relationships with dissertation chairs. Often, students attributed unsuccessful relationships with dissertation chairs to the chairs' lack of ini-

tiative and communication with the student: "Once coursework is completed, it has been difficult to get in touch with my chair. Perhaps if it was required to meet monthly, it would give shared responsibility between the student and chair to meet regularly to better the lines of communication in the final stages of dissertation process." In cases like these, students were forced to take the initiative themselves to open the lines of communication with their chair. If the student decided not to take such initiative, however, the relationship between student and chair, and thus the progress on the dissertation, suffered. One student explained, "My advisor has been great but he has not communicated with us very well. If we don't contact him, we will never hear from him. Thank GOD I am self-motivated because I would have been so delayed if I needed more guidance from my advisor." But for some students, cultivating a productive working relationship with their chair was simply a challenge, leading to feelings of overwhelming frustration for some: "It has been very frustrating to try and keep the communication ongoing [with my chair]." And for others, the relationship impacted their lives much more: "[My relationship with my chair] deeply affected me. I can go into detail but it affected my health, motivation, and confidence in the program."

Navigating Challenges

The quantitative results from the survey revealed that the more students experienced challenges along the way to finishing the program, the more likely they were to seek out support and resources to navigate

challenges. Specifically, the correlational analysis showed that when students faced challenges while working with assigned dissertation groups they were significantly more likely to use DSC services (r= .24, p< .05). Students were also more likely to use DSC services if they experienced challenges with writing doctoral papers (r=. 49, p < .01. Correlational analysis also revealed that when students lacked motivation to stick to a time line to complete a writing task by a certain date, students were more likely to seek help from their dissertation chairs (r = .23, p< .05; and r = .24, p < .05, respectively). Finally, lack of structure to write the dissertation was significantly related to seeking help from the thematic dissertation group (r = .49, p < .01) and challenges with the dissertation chair were significantly related to seeking help from other committee members (r = .26, p < .05).

These findings indicate that classmates, dissertation chairs, and the DSC served as major sources of support for students to navigate challenges. They discussed turning to their classmates in difficult times during coursework and dissertation writing. Students explained that they "learned so much" and felt "motivated" because of peer support. Strong relationships with classmates and peers allowed students to remain resilient and persevere through difficulties encountered in the dissertation process.

Having a positive working relationship with the dissertation chair was also vital to students' success. Often, dissertation chairs provided much-needed emotional support , while still challenging students to pro-

duce valuable work. One student noted, "I know my chair has high expectations and knows how to push me to do well. I also know she would never let me move on to the next step of the process without having completed quality work." Students were thankful for productive and positive working relationships with their chair. : One student reflected on her experience: "I truly believe that the relationship you have with your chair is the key to finishing the program. I am lucky to have an outstanding chair... Others are not so lucky and I have heard horror stories from some of my colleagues." Another student succinctly stated: "Without my chair, I would not have been able to come this far." Put simply, the quality of the relationship between the student and the dissertation chair appeared to determine a great deal of students' academic fates.

Doctoral Support Center (DSC)

An important finding in the study was the extent to which students felt the DSC helped them successfully navigate writing challenges they encountered. Students identified DSC programs and services as being effective in meeting their needs. Overall, out of 69 participants who responded to a questionnaire item about the DSC, 73% identified their experience with the DSC as either excellent or good. They reported the DSC provided both technical and emotional support. Specifically, when asked what aspects of the DSC services they liked, 55% of the students indicated that they found the technical support they received very helpful, while 41% percent indicated that they found both the

DSC's technical and the emotional support very helpful. In terms of technical support, students benefited from the one-on-one assistance with writing their class papers and dissertations, preparation support for proposal and dissertation defenses, and attending writing workshops. Assistance with writing was particularly critical for students. "The assistance I have received in the past when I have submitted my papers for review have been terrific," said one student. Students appreciated the DSC's services because they encompassed a number of means to help with students' writing, including "reviewing of papers; advice about preparing for dissertation; help with finding resources."

Aside from finding one-on-one consultations helpful, some students learned a great deal from attending a dissertation writing retreat called "Operation Dissertation Acceleration" (ODA). ODA required students to apply and pay for a four-day retreat at an off-campus site with a goal of making significant progress on writing the dissertation. One of the participants said, "I went to most of the workshops at DSC but the most helpful is when the workshop took me off campus and assigned an advisor to help us work without distractions and [with] consistent goal settings." One student asserted that ODA "saved my life to get over 80-90% of my [dissertation writing] work done."

Even though the kind of support received by students was often technical in nature, it often translated into emotional support for students. One student noted, "I am plugging along and if it were not for DSC I would just be depressed and slack-

ing. They have kept me going and I will complete this process thanks to their assistance." Students felt that the assistance provided by DSC advisors was "positive, encouraging, and helpful." The DSC advisors' strengths lie in weaving together technical and emotional support as they meet with and advise students. A student eloquently stated that DSC advisors:

> are respectful of the student's knowledge base and what the student wishes to say, and [they] know how to guide the student in writing the information appropriately. They never demean, put down, or dismiss a student's point of view. Instead, they use techniques, which guide the student to express their thoughts and data in an appropriate manner.

Conclusions

The national doctoral graduation rate of 50% (Berger 2007; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008) coupled with the sparse literature on Ed.D. programs provide the impetus for this study. Doctoral education practitioners who direct and work within professional doctoral programs, who we refer to in this article as "participant practitioners," need knowledge of the various barriers Ed.D. students face. Such knowledge can help doctoral programs develop institutional resources that ensure that more students successfully complete their degrees.

Schools of education and other professional doctoral programs can learn a great deal from the findings of this study; it is clear that professional doctoral students encounter personal and academic challenges during their doctoral studies. In fact, the findings of this study informed new DSC programming and prompted revisions of existing strategies. The following are important considerations for researchers and practitioners:

First, most of the students enrolled in Ed.D. programs work full time and do not share the same climate of support as full time graduate students. Thus, it is critical that schools of education provide active academic support for professional students. The DSC offers uniquely tailored services both in person and electronically to fit the needs of students who work full time. Current DSC writing advisers have doctoral degrees in education and have worked and taught in the school of education full time. As such, DSC writing advisers are a part of the academic culture of the school and are able to meet and talk with faculty members regarding the best means to support individual Ed.D. students toward degree completion. Furthermore, since some DSC writing advisers were once students of the same faculty in the school, they are better positioned to relate to students and help them navigate the difficulties they experience in their doctoral studies.

Second, attention must be given to the types of programming offered to professional students. In our experience, many Ed.D. students have limited time to attend workshops. Our goal has been to maximize the face time with students by carefully tailoring our presentations to meet their needs and address their questions. In addition to presentations, the DSC has started offering formalized writing groups for Ed.D. students. The writing groups

/ College Student Journal

allow the students an opportunity to form a peer support network that will sustain them through the completion of their dissertation. The DSC has also been experimenting with online modules to allow students greater access to the Center's services. While all the handouts and presentation materials are available online, the DSC now offers live video streaming of certain workshops, allowing professional students the opportunity to log in from their desktop over a lunch break and interact with a DSC staff member.

As professional educational doctoral programs continue to grow, the need for effective and innovative support structures will also increase. This poses multiple challenges for any college or school of education. Many Ed.D. programs operate on a faster timeline to degree completion than Ph.D. programs; thus, students must make a faster transition from structured coursework to unstructured dissertation writing work. How schools of education assist and support Ed.D. students through that transition will be pivotal in the continued success of Ed.D. degree programs. In short, the DSC's unique location, within the school of education, allows the staff members to join in the academic culture, and thus offer services that are specific to the program's dynamics. Understandably, the DSC cannot resolve all the challenges that professional doctoral students experience. Yet institutionalizing a program like the DSC at other institutions can offer an unparalleled level of academic and emotional social support that is likely to increase students' prospects of doctoral degree completion.

References

Ali, A., & Kohun, F. (2007). Dealing with social isolation to minimize doctoral attrition-A four stage framework. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 2*, 33-49.

Anderson, D. G.(1983). Differentiation of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 34*, 55-58.

Allan, P., & Dory, J. (2001). *Understanding doctoral program attrition: An empirical study.* Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lubinfaculty_workingpapers/17.

Bair, C. R., & Haworth, J. G. (1999, November). *Doctoral student attrition and persistence: A meta-synthesis of research.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, San Antonio, Texas.

Barnett, B. G., Basom, M. R., Yerkes, D. M., & Norris, C. J. (2000). Cohorts in educational leadership programs: Benefits, difficulties, and the potential for developing school leaders. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 36* (2), 255-282.

Berger, J. (2007, October 3). Exploring ways to shorten ascent to a Ph.D. *New York Times*.

Bowen, W. G., & Rudenstine, N. L. (1992). *In pursuit of the Ph.D.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cain, D. L., Marrara, C., Pitre, P. E., Armour, S. (2003). Support services that matter: An exploration of the experiences and needs of graduate students in a distance learning environment. *Journal of Distance Education, 18*(1), 42-56.

Council of Graduate Schools. (2008). *Ph.D. completion and attrition: Analysis of baseline program data from the Ph.D. completion project.* Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools.

de Valero, F. Y. (2001). Departmental factors affecting time-to-degree and completion rates of doctoral students at one land-grant research institution. *The Journal of HigherEducation, 72*(3), 341-367.

Di Pierro, M. (2007). Excellence in doctoral education: Defining best practices. *College Student Journal, 41*(2), 368-375.

Gardner, S. (2009). The Development of Doctoral Students: Phases of Challenge and Support. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 34*(6), 1-14.

Golde, C. M. (1994). *Student descriptions of the Doctoral Student Attrition Process.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Tucson, AZ, November 10-13).

Golde, C. M. (1995). *Early and late doctoral student attrition: Descriptions of the graduate education process.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Orlando, FL, November 2-5).

Golde, C. M., & Dore, T. M. (2001). *At cross purposes: What the experiences of Today's doctoral students reveal about doctoral education*, report prepared for the Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia.

Green, K. E.(1997). Psychosocial factors affecting dissertation completion. New Directions for *Higher Education, 99*, 57-64.

Guthrie, J. W., & Marsh, D. D. (2009). Strategies for elevating the public and professional regard of the Ed.D. *Peabody Journal of Education, 84*, 100-106.

Hite, L. M., (1985). Female doctoral students: their perceptions and concerns. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 26*, 18-22.

Hortulanus, R. Machielse, M, Meewesen, L. (2006). *Social isolation in modern society.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Johnson, R. W., & Conyers, L. M. (2001). Surviving the doctoral dissertation: A solution focused approach. *Journal of College Counseling, 4*(1), 77-80.

Kluever, R. (1995). ABDs and Graduates from a College of Education: Responsibility, Barriers, and Facilitators. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April).

Kluever, R. C. et al. (1997). Dissertation Completers and Non-Completers: An analysis of psycho-social variables. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).

Lovitts, B. E., & Nelson, C. (2000). *The hidden crisis in graduate education: Attrition from PhD programs.* Retrieved February 12, 2008 from http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2000/ND/Feat/lovi.html.

Malone, B. G., Nelson, J. S., & Nelson, C. V. (2001, August). *Completion and attrition rates doctoral students in educational administration.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Houston, Texas.

Monsour, M., & Corman, S. (1991). Social and task functions of the dissertation partner: One way of avoiding terminal ABD status. *Communication Education, 40*, 180-186.

Mayhew, L.B., & Ford, P.J. (1974). *Reform in graduate and professional education,* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nerad, M., & Cerny, J. (1993). From facts to action: expanding the graduate division's Educational role. On L. L. Baird (Ed.), *New Directions for Institutional Research, 80*, 27-39.

Nerad, M., & Miller, D. S. (1997). The institution cares: Berkeley's efforts to support dissertation writing in the humanities and social sciences. *New Directions for Higher Education, 90*, 75-90.

Pauley, R., Cunningham, M., & Toth, P. (1999). Doctoral student attrition and retention: A study of a non-traditional Ed.D. program. *Journal of College Student Retention, 1*(3), 225-238.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2001). Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice. London: Sage Publications

Scott, D., Brown, A., Lunt, I. and Thorne, L. (2004) *Professional Doctorates. Integrating Professional and Academic Knowledge. Berkshire, England:* Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian (2006).Sigafus, B. (1998). The creation of ABDs: A turning point in educational doctoral programs. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).

Spillett, M. A. (2004). Cheerleader, coach, counselor, critic: Support and challenge roles of the dissertation advisor. *College Student Journal, 38.*

Tenenbaum, H. R., Crosby, F. J., & Gliner, M. D. (2001). Mentoring relationships in graduate school. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 59,* 326-341.

The California State University (2001). *Meeting California's need for the education doctorate: A report examining California's needs for more holders — and suppliers — of education doctorates.* Sacramento: CSU Office of the Chancellor.

Thoits, P. A. (1986). Social support as coping assistance. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 54*(4), 416-423.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ilda Jimenez y West, Rossier School of Education, Doctoral Support Center, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089. E-mail: ijimenez@usc.edu