Doctoral Student Experiences: Preliminary Results from the Ph.D. Completion Project Exit Surveys

CGS Summer Workshop
July 11, 2007
San Juan, PR
The Exit Survey Results Examine the Opinions of Doctoral Completers and Non-Completers in Several Major Program Areas

- Financial support
- Family (non-financial) support
- Research experiences
- Professional/career guidance
- Mentoring/advising
- Program social environment/peer group support
- Program quality
Exit Surveys Were Completed by Both Doctoral Program Completers and Non-Completers

Figure 1. Distribution of Exit Survey Respondents by Degree Status at the Time of Completing the Exit Survey

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database.
*Includes students who status was not known at the time of the survey.
80% of Exit Survey Doctoral Completers Said That Receipt of Financial Support Was the One of the “Main Factors” That Contributed to Their Doctoral Completion

Figure 2. Exit Survey Respondents’ Self-Identified "Main Factors" That Contributed to The Completion of Their Doctoral Programs*

- **Financial Support**: 80%
- **Mentoring/Advising**: 63%
- **Family Support**: 60%
- **Social Environment/Peer Support**: 39%
- **Program Quality**: 39%
- **Professional & Career Guidance**: 30%

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database. *Includes only respondents who completed their doctoral Programs.
The Primary Sources of “Non-Loan” Financial Support for Doctoral Completers Varied by Broad Field

Figure 3. Primary Sources of Financial Support for Doctoral Completers Who Responded to the Exit Survey, by Field of Study

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database.
Different Types of Financial Support Appears to Affect Doctoral Completers’ Perceptions Regarding Time-to-Degree Completion

Figure 4. Perceived Effects of Teaching Assistantships (TA) and Research Assistantships (RA) on Doctoral Students’ Time to Degree Completion, by Field of Study

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database. *Includes only survey respondents who said they completed their doctoral programs.
Nearly Half of the Exit Survey Respondents in Social Sciences and Humanities Received Student Loans

Figure 5. Percentage of Ph.D. Completers Who Received Student Loans*, by Broad Field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Pct. With Any Student Loans</th>
<th>Pct. With Student Loans $35,000 or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Sci</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math &amp; Phys Sci</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sci</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database.
*Includes loans for doctoral study exclusively. Includes only students who completed their doctoral programs.
Most Doctoral Completers Said They Had “Ready Access” to Academic Advisors During Their Coursework and Preliminary Exams But Less Access During Their Dissertations

Figure 6. Percentage of Doctoral Completers Who Thought Their Academic Advisors Were "Readily" Available to Meet With Them During Their Doctoral Careers, by Career Stage

Sources: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database.
In All Broad Fields, Mentors’ Most Valuable Advice to Doctoral Completers Came in the Area of Research

Figure 8. Most Valuable Advice Given by Mentors to Doctoral Completers Who Responded to the Exit Survey, by Broad Field

Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Ph.D. Completion Project, Exit Survey Database.
Initial Summary of Exit Survey Results

- Doctoral recipients who completed the Exit Survey believe that financial support is one of the “main factors” in their ability to finish their doctorates.
- The types of financial support may affect Ph.D. completers’ perceptions on time to degree completion.
  - Teaching assistantships are perceived to lengthen time to degree.
- Ph.D. recipients in the humanities and social sciences were more likely to receive student loans and to borrow higher amounts than those in science and engineering fields.
- Doctoral completers’ perceptions about access to advisors may decline as their progress toward a doctoral degree increases.
- Mentors appear to help most with advice on research.