



Strategic Intervention for Optimal Doctoral Completion

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Gilliam, J. C., & Kritsonis, W.A. (2006). National implications: The hidden nature of doctoral student attrition. *Doctoral Forum, National Journal for Publishing and Mentoring Doctoral Student Research*, 3(1).

Critique by Krista Haynes

Summary

It is no secret that doctoral attrition is a national problem. The problem is that there are no national studies that provide solutions. This article calls for solutions that take into account the person as well as the process. The old world view that doctoral persistence depends on the intrepid soul who pushes to completion in isolation is depleting doctoral programs of good students. Since research has shown that there is no difference in doctoral attrition based on ability (Lovitts, 2001), fault must lie with the mentoring process. The authors advocate a holistic approach from a community of scholars that includes input from students and requires faculty advisors to develop techniques and processes that consider the needs of the individual person and not just the academic goals.

Reaction

I liked their succinct statement as to the importance of this topic, "...doctoral students, who collectively represent a stronghold on the nation's progress and superiority" (p. 3). I do not feel that this paper goes into the topic with much depth. No specific solutions are offered. This seems to be primarily a call to humanitarian teaching techniques. I agree with the need for a holistic approach, but specific suggestions for implementing such an approach would be helpful.

While reading this, I couldn't help wondering if there is a hidden agenda within academic department faculty that seeks to cull out those who cannot struggle to completion in isolation? I do not believe this would be the agenda of any university administration, but I expect that many faculty members feel overworked. I have been in graduate classes in

which a statement was made that there was some attempt on the part of the instructor to cull out the faint-hearted early in the semester. It would be much better to develop admission criteria that would help choose better candidates than being faculty tyrants to reduce the teaching load to those who really count.