



Strategic Intervention for Optimal Doctoral Completion

Critique of Research
Series

Volume 1, Issue 7
Fall 2008

Golde, C. M., & Dore, T. M. (2001). At cross purposes: What the experiences of today's doctoral students tell us about doctoral education. *Science*, 291, 408-409.

Critique by Krista Haynes

Summary

This is a report on a study including doctoral students in 11 Arts and Sciences majors in 27 universities. The purpose of the study was to determine discrepancies between what doctoral students want and what they feel they achieve in the present educational culture. Golde and Dore report that at least 47% of doctoral candidates want tenure faculty careers, but the field of tenured positions is shrinking. Therefore, they wanted to know what aspects of doctoral study should change to create a workforce that is prepared for jobs outside the academy and who is responsible for implementing such change. The study resulted in two main points: 1. Many doctoral students feel that they do not receive the training they want and that they are not prepared to do the jobs available to them. 2. Many feel they do not receive enough information about what doctoral study involves and how to be successful.

The study shows that doctoral programs are better at assisting graduates with finding positions in the academy than in government, non-profit or the private sector. Most doctoral students are better prepared to do research than to teach or participate in academic governance. This varies across disciplines, with Ph.D. recipients in the humanities feeling better prepared to teach than those in many of the sciences.

Reaction

This is a fairly comprehensive study that provides insight into dissatisfaction with the doctoral educational process and places most of the blame for attrition on students' not receiving all the information needed to successfully navigate to completion. Golde and Dore state that faculty members have a

responsibility to set reasonable expectations for students, publish clear program requirements, provide boundaries such as time to degree and establish minimum requirements. They place blame on both faculty and students stating that faculty should make information readily available and students should ask more questions and seek answers more persistently. My experience based on complaints from students and students' non-compliance with Graduate School requirements lead me to agree with this statement. The authors make the following suggestions for improvement that may be useful in efforts to improve doctoral completion at the University of Georgia:

- Departments should seek out good students and use them as mentors for new students;
- Administration should make efforts to increase new faculty understanding of ethical, professional behavior;
- Advisors should clarify expectations with advisees (especially regarding time commitments);
- Department faculty should conduct thorough annual student evaluations;
- Departments should ask for student opinions and listen to them.

Although Golde and Dore do not discuss doctoral program attrition rates, finding out how to change programs so that students are more satisfied and have a better understanding of expectations of doctoral study can inform us about ways in which programs can keep more students engaged to completion.