



Strategic Intervention for Optimal Doctoral Completion

Critique of Research
Series

Volume 1, Issue 8
Fall 2008

Haworth, J. G. (Ed.). (1996). Assessing graduate and professional education: Current realities, future prospects. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, N. 92.

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Summary

Although assessment of undergraduate education has been noticeably important to universities for many years, the assessment of graduate and professional education has just recently begun to be treated as a serious issue. The chapters in this publication examine the challenges of assessing graduate and professional education, the demand for such programs, rethinking admissions criteria, quality assessment of student learning, increasing student retention, and documenting student outcomes.

The challenges to assessing graduate and professional education programs include differences across disciplines and the need to include many stakeholders who may not be available for surveys or candid about their feelings. Studies of admissions criteria do not show a strong degree of correlation between entrance test scores and success during the first year of graduate programs. Adding additional criteria would be expensive in faculty time and may exclude good prospects based on a set of specific criteria. Haworth concludes that assessment is necessary but difficult because of the need to consider the context of student characteristics and goals as well as the institutional setting and educational process.

Reaction

Haworth pulled on studies and opinions of higher education professionals to make an appeal for finding ways to assess graduate and professional education. Her case is weakened by all of the difficulties espoused, but there were some suggestions as to how such assessments might be accomplished.

The most important section for implications for decreasing doctoral attrition at the University of

Georgia discussed reasons for high doctoral attrition rates. The most prevalent of these include student frustration with academic policies, disappointment with advising, and alienating departmental climates. In the chapter on retention, Nerad and Miller describe a three-pronged approach used by the University of California at Berkeley which I believe is also an important strategy for UGA:

- Institutional policies and strategies
- Working with departments
- Working with students

Working with departments and students includes first-year evaluations with a team of faculty members. Berkeley distinguishes between an advisor (a faculty member who makes sure the student makes progress and fulfills institutional requirements) and a mentor (another faculty member who sees the student as a protégé and assists the student in setting goals and standards and nurtures their professional development). Academic departments are also charged with providing workshops on grant-writing, dissertation-writing and professional development and to encourage staff members to provide a caring atmosphere. At the time of publication, there had not been time to evaluate the success of this approach.