

# **Study #4: Program Practices**



# Description of Data

- Contact people in the 36 programs were asked to complete a web-based questionnaire
- The questionnaire contained ten open-ended items Asking for “succinct descriptions” of current program practices

# Description of Data

The question asked for information about four broad areas of program practices:

- Communication with Potential Doctoral Students.
- Admissions.
- Orientation and Advisement.
- Student Interactions.

# Description of Data

These four areas were designed to be congruent with our “Four Conditions for Optimal Doctoral Completion”:

- 1. The right people apply for doctoral study**
- 2. The right applicants are admitted as doctoral students**
- 3. Students and faculty form productive working relationships**
- 4. Students experience social support from fellow students**

# Description of Data

- The resultant data consists of approximately sixty pages of single spaced text. In addition, the text often refers the reader to web-based materials.
- To date, 33 of the 36 programs have responded.

# Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using content analysis.

Our research objective is to map the variety of ways that departments handle critical practices (e.g., corresponding with potential students, screening applicants, supporting student social support, etc.)

# Data Analysis

- The data are complex and do not allow for easy summarization without many lists and tables.
- For today, I'll focus in on one area: The matching of students to dissertation chairs.

# Preliminary Findings

- In most programs, the formal assignment is made only if the faculty member agrees to serve as chair.
- In most (but not all) programs, the student chooses.



# Preliminary Findings

When does the student make that choice?

- Before starting the program.
- After planned exposure to faculty through colloquia, coursework, or lab rotation.
- After required one-to-one interviews with a specified number of potential chairs
- The faculty member chooses, not the student.

# Preliminary Findings

Can the student change chairs?

- Most programs said yes.
- Several said “yes, but no one has ever done this”.
- Some programs have standardized procedures for doing so.

# Preliminary Findings

- In Program A, the student selects a chair before entering the program and changes of chair are extremely rare.
- In Program B, the student selects a chair after taking coursework and conducting 3 interviews with potential chairs.
- In Program C, the admissions committee assigns a chair and, although changes are technically allowed, they really never happen.

# Discussion of Program Practices

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Now we ask conference participants to work in small groups to make sense of these and other program practices—and then report your best wisdom back to the full session