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# The University of Georgia

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## **Optimizing Ph.D. Completion at the University of Georgia: A Proposal for Phase II Funding**

**Submitted to:** Council of Graduate Schools  
Ph.D. Completion Project  
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**Duration of Project:** Summer 2007 through Spring 2010

## **Optimizing Ph.D. Completion at the University of Georgia: A Proposal for Phase II Funding**

### **Purpose**

This proposal is submitted to request continuation funding during Phase II of the Council on Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Program. Through its Phase I accomplishments, the Graduate School at the University has laid the groundwork for campus-wide improvements with respect to doctoral completion. Our proposed efforts in Phase II will allow us to apply the “lessons learned” working intensively with twelve programs to improving doctoral completion in the 78 doctoral programs at the university that, to date, have not been included in our program improvement efforts.

### **Background**

Since 2004, the University of Georgia has been the lead institution in collaboration with North Carolina State University and the University of Florida. The three universities worked closely together to study doctoral completion issues and to foster program level change in a total of 37 doctoral programs.

During this three year collaboration, our chief accomplishments include the following.

- Each of the 37 programs conducted a self-assessment and, based on that assessment and available doctoral completion data, to set goals for program improvement. These goals and resultant activities have been documented, and follow-up activities designed to support change and evaluate impact have been designed.
- Two three-day conferences were held during which faculty from the three universities gathered together to discuss doctoral completion issues, compare program statistics, and share ideas about doctoral completion,
- The creation of a website (<http://www.uga.edu/gradschool/cgs>) designed to develop a sense of community among the 37 participating programs. The website posted statistics and other program information, listed useful references, and included research reports from our project team.

All of our work in Phase I was built around a theoretical framework (see Table 1, below) that set forth four key conditions for optimizing doctoral completion. This framework, which was developed based on a comprehensive review of the literature, proved to be a powerful heuristic organizer for all aspects of the project, including data collection and analysis, conference planning, and setting goals for program improvement

<b>Table 1. Four Conditions Necessary for Optimal Doctoral Completion</b>
<b>Condition #1: The right people apply for doctoral study.</b> Applicants must be realistic about the demands of doctoral study.
<b>Condition #2: The right applicants are admitted as doctoral students.</b> Admissions committees must properly screen applicants and, upon enrollment, orient them to the program.
<b>Condition #3: Students and faculty form productive working relationships.</b> Faculty members and students must interact in a mutually respectful and task oriented manner.
<b>Condition #4: Students experience social support from fellow students.</b> Students must recognize themselves as members of a community of learners facing common challenges and opportunities.

### A Mid-Course Correction

The CGS Request for Proposals urges applicants to consider needed changes in direction as they request continued funding. In our case, two major changes in emphasis will be undertaken:

- First, the emphasis of our Phase II project will move away from collecting and analyzing data and move toward information dissemination. Our project activities will have less to do with studying doctoral completion—statistically and by interviews—and more about disseminating what we already know to all 90 doctoral programs on our campus. We believe that a newly enhanced website will be of use to our doctoral programs as well as doctoral programs around the country who are struggling to address doctoral completion issues.
- Second, due to decreased funding levels in the continuation grant, we have had to face the fact that our existing collaboration is unsustainable. This means that our energies will now be focused on our own campus. However, if both our proposals are funded, we plan to continue cooperating with our Phase I partner at North Carolina State University (NCSU) to the extent our resources will permit. NCSU will make a contribution to the website, which will serve as a platform for the two universities to share information, collaborate on online discussions and, if feasible, participate in web-mediated conferencing.

## Project Goals and Objectives

The proposed project is built around four broad goals, each of which will be addressed by a number of specific objectives. The goals and objectives are as follows. A timeline is appended as Attachment A.

***Goal #1: The implementation of a campus wide-initiative to optimize doctoral completion.***

- Objective 1A: To raise awareness through a structured publicity campaign.
- Objective 1B: To foster program improvement through direct meetings.
- Objective 1C: To support program improvement through an enhanced website.

***Goal #2: Continuing to work intensively with our twelve Phase I programs***

- Objective 2A: To evaluate the long term impact of innovations.
- Objective 2B: To plan and implement continuous improvement efforts.
- Objective 2C: To systematically investigate obstacles to successful change.

***Goal #3: Enhancing recordkeeping and clarifying policy issues at the graduate school***

- Objective 3A: To clarify and create policy relevant to doctoral completion.
- Objective 3B: To post completion figures for programs on website.
- Objective 3C: To enhance system capabilities for monitoring doctoral completion.

***Goal #4: Providing the CGS Ph.D. Completion Project with needed data***

- Objective 4A: To submit required doctoral completion statistics
- Objective 4B: To install CGS exit survey procedures

## Description of Project Activities

***Goal #1 calls for the implementation of a campus wide-initiative to optimize doctoral completion. This will be accomplished by activities tied to three specific objectives.***

**Objective 1A: To raise awareness through a structured publicity campaign.**

To carry out this objective, we will launch an awareness campaign for the ninety doctoral programs. The campaign will use a combination of press releases and direct mailings to program chairs and Graduate Coordinators. The campaign will be designed to signal the graduate school's commitment to optimizing doctoral completion and to inform programs about resources available for improvement efforts.

**Objective 1B: To foster program improvement through direct meetings.**

Three half-day, invitational meetings will be hosted by the graduate school for key program personnel. At each meeting, the Program Chairs and Graduate Coordinators from 30 of our 90 programs will be invited to attend. In total (including

deans and other administrative staff), 70 people will attend each of the 3 conferences. During the conference program, we will (a) review completion statistics for individual programs (b) foster program self-assessments and goal setting, and (c) describe resources available to assist programs in planning improvement efforts.

**Objective 1C: To support program improvement through an enhanced website.**

In its current form, our website (<http://www.uga.edu/gradschool/cgs>) has been designed to support the Phase I project, and thus meet the needs of our 37 participating programs. In order to meet the needs of programs not directly our Phase I project, the website will be enhanced to include:

- The posting of all available UGA doctoral program completion statistics for public viewing. We will begin with those programs that have recently provided comparable data for the NRC study and investigate cost-benefit issues with compiling data for non-NRC programs.
- The posting of benchmarks for key completion statistics.
- Tools for program self-assessment with respect to doctoral completion.
- Key information resources for programs wishing to implement change.
- Problem-solving forums for faculty and graduate students.

***Goal #2 calls for continuing, intensive work with our twelve Phase I programs. The twelve programs are as follows:***

- 1. Psychology***
- 2. Genetics***
- 3. English***
- 4. Chemistry***
- 5. Economics***
- 6. Physics***
- 7. History***
- 8. Microbiology***
- 9. Botany***
- 10. Sociology***
- 11. Mathematics***
- 12. Computer Science***

***Over the past three years, the Graduate Dean has worked closely with these programs to foster program improvement. This working relationship will be maintained throughout the Phase II project. This goal will be accomplished by a series of meetings and formal reports, all designed to fulfill the three specific objectives.***

**Objective 2A: To evaluate the long term impact of innovations.**

During Phase I, a systematic self-assessment was conducted by each of the twelve participating programs, and they have each set clear goals to improve doctoral completion. (*Note to Reviewers: Dr. Daniel Denecke excused us from submitting the factor templates for each program and for the institution, since we have already compiled more comprehensive data on each program and posted them on our website.*) Phase II will allow us to extend these efforts and better gauge their impact over time. Through annual, face-to-face meetings and a written annual report, programs will provide the Graduate Dean evidence of improvement—*anecdotal and statistical*—based on the goals programs have set for themselves.

**Objective 2B: To plan and implement continuous improvement efforts.**

In the annual meetings with the Dean, programs will be encouraged to set new goals to improve doctoral completion in the coming years. A particular topic of discussion at this time will be minority recruitment and completion.

**Objective 2C: To systematically investigate obstacles to successful change.**

In the annual meetings with the Dean, programs will be asked to identify key obstacles that might prevent programs from implementing changes designed to improve doctoral completion statistics.

***Goal #3 calls for enhancing recordkeeping and clarifying policy issues at the graduate school. This will be accomplished by activities tied to three specific objectives.***

**Objective 3A: To clarify and create policy relevant to doctoral completion.**

Compiling data for the Phase I Project and for the NRC have helped us to better understand our data as well as certain inefficiencies within our recordkeeping structures. We have already resolved some key issues (e.g., the definition of dropout, the data fields that needed to be added to our current system). Three issues yet to be resolved are (a) how family leave requirements impact time-to-degree statistics and, more generally, research and teaching assistantships; (b) calculating completion statistics for programs in which students enter the doctoral program without first acquiring a Master's degree; and (c) how to count transferring students in completion statistics. We will investigate these issues during Phase II and, if necessary, seek policy action by the Graduate Council.

**Objective 3B: To post completion figures for programs on website.**

During our Phase I project, we shared completion statistics only with the 37 participating programs, by means of a password protected section of our website. During Phase II, we will begin posting available doctoral completion data on as many University of Georgia doctoral programs as possible. These data will be available to the public (including potential students), and will be accompanied by information on national and university benchmarks.

**Objective 3C: To enhance system capabilities for monitoring doctoral completion.**

We will continue to improve our data systems to allow for the routine and uniform monitoring of doctoral completion in all 90 of our programs.

***Goal #4 calls for the provision of data to the CGS Ph.D. Completion Project to assist that project in accomplishing its ongoing, national research agenda.***

**Objective 4A: To submit required doctoral completion statistics.**

We will submit additional doctoral completion statistics on our twelve participating programs as determined by CGS. Quantitative data will be submitted in June 2007 and June 2009, as spelled out in the Request for Proposals.

**Objective 4B: To install CGS exit survey procedures**

In Phase I, we experimented with various follow-up systems, with each university using its own method and with none of the three covering the variables most desired by CGS. Consequently, during Phase II, we will begin using the CGS Exit Survey (most likely the online version) and strive to get completers and, if feasible, non-completers to respond. If we receive a favorable decision on this proposal, we will immediately seek the advice of CGS on how best to implement the exit survey; our ability to submit data to CGS will require prior approval by our Institutional Review Board, but we do not foresee any problem in gaining that approval. As soon as the system is operational, we will submit data to CGS as spelled out in the Request for Proposals.

<b>Budget Narrative</b>
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A detailed budget is appended as Attachment B. The vast majority of the funds will be dedicated to two items:

- **Personnel.** In addition to the Graduate Dean, the project staff will consist of a part-time faculty member (Thomas Valentine) and a third-time graduate research assistant.
- **Participant Meetings.** We will hold three half-day conferences on doctoral completion, during which we will meet with the Program Chairs and Graduate Coordinators from all university doctoral programs. The costs for the conferences include the conference room fee, participant costs, audio visual equipment, and lunch; similar to what was done in Phase I)

Because our costs will certainly exceed the amount available under the Phase II Grant Program, we respectfully request the full amount of \$50,000.00.

Timeline



