

2006-2007 :: Doctoral Attrition

1. Mission Statement:

The mission of the Office of the Graduate Studies is to support the University's mission in producing engaged graduates, prepared for leadership and contribution to today's constantly changing world. This is accomplished by strengthening the quality and scope of existing masters and doctoral program offerings and also by acting as a catalyst in introducing new degree offerings that develop scholars capable of discovering, integrating and applying knowledge. This training will prepare students for the challenges of living in a fast-paced global economy. Vital to this effort is attracting and supporting focused and highly motivated graduate students to an ever expanding array of advanced degree offering and research opportunities.

2. Objectives:

2.1 Understand and reduce doctoral attrition rates.: To explore ways in which the completion rate of doctoral students at UT Dallas can be increased through improved mentoring, supervision and feedback to doctoral students. (At present approximately only half of the students who begin Ph.D. programs actually complete their degree.) The role of the supervising committee and it's evaluation of the quality and viability of the research proposal, the monitoring, periodic review and feedback to the student research progress will all play a role in achieving a goal of improving completion rates.

2.1.1 Related General Education Outcome Item(s): 1. Communication; 12. Guided Research

2.1.2 Related Strategic Plan Item(s): II-1 The Education of Leaders; II-3 Investment in People

2.1.3 Related Institutional Priority Item(s): SP-6 Increase Number of PhD's Granted; SP-7 Enhance Graduation Rates; COM-4 Enhance research, graduate education and technology-driven economic development; CMP-1 Increase number of faculty and grad students in engineering, physical sciences & technology; CPT-3 Significantly improve quality of UTD's graduate students; CPT-5 Increase retention and graduation rates

2.2 Providing discussion forum for ABD students:

To provide ABD (All But Dissertation) students with direction and encouragement on such topics as getting organized to write, on framing a viable research topic, on how best to make use of their time and library sources in developing their topic, on optimal ways of presenting their research results, on developing communication skills and on setting goals and milestones. Seminars on theses and related topics will be offered each academic year to provide students struggling with completion anxieties with a forum for discussion and realization that they are not alone in their endeavors and frustrations. Such realization often acts as a catalyst in reenergizing students to refocus their efforts and energy and motivates completion. Student dialog often help colleagues to assist each other. Manuscript formatting completion consultation will also be provided by the office of graduate studies staff.

2.2.1 Related General Education Outcome Item(s): 12. Guided Research; 13. Independent Research; 14. Ongoing Research

2.2.2 Related Strategic Plan Item(s):

I-1 Research Enterprise Initiative; I-2 The Bio-World; I-3 Nanotechnology; II-1 The Education of Leaders; II-3 Investment in People; VI-3 Business Leadership

2.2.3 Related Institutional Priority Item(s): SP-6 Increase Number of PhD's Granted; SP-7 Enhance Graduation Rates; COM-2 Protect Enrollment Gains, Access and Student Quality as part of moving toward Tier One Status; COM-3 Sustain Progress toward Tier One Status in terms of programs, research and faculty quality; COM-4 Enhance research, graduate education and technology-driven economic development; CPT-4 Enhance student diversity; CPT-5 Increase retention and graduation rates

2.3 Identify students admitted to each doctoral program each semester.: Mine the graduate admissions data each semester to identify students admitted and enrolled that semester in all doctoral programs. This information will facilitate accurate tracking in subsequent semesters and permit degree programs to track progress, completion or attrition of each cohort of admitted students.

2.3.1 Related General Education Outcome Item(s): 12. Guided Research

2.3.2 Related Strategic Plan Item(s): II-1 The Education of Leaders; II-3 Investment in People

2.3.3 Related Institutional Priority Item(s):

SP-2 Add 5,000 New Students; SP-6 Increase Number of PhD's Granted; SP-7 Enhance Graduation Rates; SP-8 Reduce Costs; COM-1 Reallocate Existing Resources to Preserve Quality in Teaching and Research Programs; COM-2 Protect Enrollment Gains, Access and Student Quality as part of moving toward Tier One Status; COM-3 Sustain Progress toward Tier One Status in terms of programs, research and faculty quality; COM-4 Enhance research, graduate education and technology-driven economic development; CMP-1 Increase number of faculty and grad students in engineering, physical sciences & technology

3. Measures & Findings:

3.1 Completion/Attrition data over period of 10 years.: Identify and provide to each doctoral degree program an accurate listing of the cohort of admitted Ph.D. students each semester. Degree programs will monitor progress each academic year of the cohort of admitted students. Evaluate and generate a report on completion and attrition data over a seven to 10 year period (where available) for each doctoral degree program. Correlate completion rate, time to degree and attrition information with the background and preparation of the students when admitted to the program. Identify factors contributing to attrition.

3.1.1 Assessment Timeframe:

Each Fall semester for the period 1999 through Fall 2005. Every semester Fall 2005 to present semester. Study was expanded to include all admitted graduate students.

3.1.2 Success Criteria:

Compiled attrition data for entering graduate students for Fall 1999 through Fall 2005. Information gained together with data for each semester starting with Fall 2005 will allow programs to correlate attrition statistics with entering student qualifications. Better understanding of the factors contributing to attrition will be gained. This information will vary by field and across socio economic groups and will be highly individualized. Objective will be to reduce attrition to at UTD from current level of 50% to 40% over a five year period – 2005 - 2010(the normal cycle of Phd student is 5 year – min)

3.1.3 Related Objective(s):

Understand and reduce doctoral attrition rates.; Identify students admitted to each doctoral program each semester.

3.1.4 Results Related To Success Criteria:

Identifying the cohort of graduate students admitted each semester to individual graduate degree programs is essential to determine attrition statistics. With this pivotal information it is then possible to track the students each cohort through to completion. Since the Fall semester is the largest admission class this semester was examined first for the Fall semesters 1999 through 2005.

3.1.5 Numerical Results:

Attrition data has been compiled for graduate students admitted each Fall semester for the academic years 1999 through 2005. Data is now being collected each semester. Fall, Spring and Summer).

3.1.6 Influencing Factors: Initially the intent was to focus only on doctoral student attrition. It was soon realized that graduate student entry to doctoral status had different pathways since some students continued past and earned masters through to the Ph.D. while with earned masters could entered directly into doctoral status. Monitoring all graduate student admits was a more effective approach and allowed masters completion statistics to be also examined.

3.1.7 Achievement Level: Partially Met

3.1.8 Further Action: Yes

3.2 Improve/add graduate student mentoring activities.: Encourage the development and or expansion of mentoring program in each academic unit that help doctoral students to become more involved in professional and department activities. Evaluate and share best practices.

3.2.1 Assessment Timeframe: each academic year

3.2.2 Success Criteria:

Helping doctoral students to become more involved in professional and department activities will communicate that they “belong” within their academic discipline. This awareness will help offset the build up of negative impressions contributing to early departure from the degree program prior to completion and reduce attrition. All schools will be encouraged to develop a mentoring program to help doctoral students to become more involved in professional and department activities. To fully engage female and minority students in supportive departmental climate

3.2.3 Related Objective(s):

Understand and reduce doctoral attrition rates.; Providing discussion forum for ABD students; Identify students admitted to each doctoral program each semester.

3.2.4 Results Related To Success Criteria: Behavioral and Brian Sciences reports the following mentoring activities

1. All 1st year students enroll in a 2 semester Doctoral Proseminar. The purpose of the class is to acquaint students with the various faculty research projects and to encourage discussion with faculty and between students. Each semester, 2 classes are set aside for the students to update their peers on their own research efforts. Periodically, time is set aside at the end of class for students to bring up issues and concerns with the School's Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. It's difficult to objectively measure outcomes such as socialization and interdisciplinary knowledge in the short-term and much easier to measure the acquisition of facts.)

2. The School offers weekly brown-bags in which doctoral students and faculty join together in discussions usually following an informal student or faculty presentation.

3. There is a monthly meeting/social gathering at a faculty member's home for doctoral students and faculty who are interested in brain-imaging research.
4. The faculty of each of the 3 Ph.D. programs meets annually to review student progress and to make recommendations to students to guide them in improving their performance. The evaluation is intended to assure that students don't fall too far behind or remain stuck in unproductive paths.
5. Students are active participants in faculty recruiting. All prospective faculty meet with Ph.D. students for lunch and informal feedback from Ph.D. students to the search committees is weighed in recommendations for hiring.
6. Funds are set aside for student travel to major professional meetings. This encourages students to present, a criterion for receiving funding, but also groups of students attend as representatives of the university and tend to stay together and socialize with each other.

School of Management reports that each area has a Ph.D. coordinator who advises the student on graduate social events and encouraging students to join professional societies, and to become active in honors societies and clubs not only in the school but also in the wider academic community.

School of Natural Science and Mathematics encourages students to become engaged in professional societies (Sigma Xi, American Chemical Society, Astronomical Society) and supports students to attend regional and national meetings in their disciplines. Regular departmental and group meetings encourage student participation and professional development.

Other schools engage students in off campus internship and research participation in industry.

3.2.5 Numerical Results:

All entering students are made aware of professional development activities and practices on and off campus.

3.2.6 Influencing Factors:

Each new cohort of students join and benefit from the experiences and participations of students admitted in prior semesters. This is a positive feedback mechanism.

3.2.7 Achievement Level: Met

3.2.8 Further Action: No

3.3 Review of Policies. Doctoral Progress report.: Report on Regular review of all policies related to and impacting completion of doctoral degree. Includes transfer of credit, degree and grade point average requirements, admission to candidacy, thesis requirements, framing of a research proposal acceptable to a supervising committee; selection and composition of supervising committees, final oral examination procedures, and graduation requirements. Report on annual meeting with the student and his/her appointed supervising committee. An essential part of this process will be an annual meeting of the student with the appointed supervising committee to review research progress and provide student guidance and modification to the original research proposal based on actual progress.

3.3.1 Assessment Timeframe: Each academic year

3.3.2 Success Criteria:

Update policies and reporting requirements on student progress (this will ensure that doctoral students and supervising faculty are fully informed and in possession of updated information concerning accepted practices.) All students at dissertation stage will conduct annual meeting with his/her appointed supervising committee.

3.3.3 Related Objective(s):

Understand and reduce doctoral attrition rates.; Providing discussion forum for ABD students; Identify students admitted to each doctoral program each semester.

3.3.4 Results Related To Success Criteria:

Student status and academic trajectory is reviewed each year by the appointed supervising committee and feedback is provided to student on academic standing and remaining requirements required for completion.

3.3.5 Numerical Results:

Students are provided updated information by the committee each academic year and more frequently through his/her interaction with the appointed supervising professor.

3.3.6 Influencing Factors:

The regular meetings of the student with the supervisor and supervising committee allow any modifications or updates to the research plan to be discussed and modified if required to ensure student progress and completion in a timely fashion.

3.3.7 Achievement Level: Met

3.3.8 Further Action: No

3.4 Report on ABD seminar: Report on ABD seminar.

3.4.1 Assessment Timeframe: every semester

3.4.2 Success Criteria: At least 10 students will attend the 4 seminar sessions throughout the semester.

3.4.3 Related Objective(s): Providing discussion forum for ABD students

3.4.4 Results Related To Success Criteria: Students sign in during each ABD seminar session.

3.4.5 Numerical Results:

A total of 464 students have attended the ABD seminar since its inception in summer 2003. Of those, 379 are still on the active list who receive announcements and are interested in attending at some time. The rest have contacted me and said that they have graduated or left the university.

3.4.6 Influencing Factors:

Students appreciate the ABD seminar. Many have asked the we offer it at night. In the summer of 2007, we will add one night session for EPPS students.

3.4.7 Achievement Level: Met

3.4.8 Further Action: No

5. Closing the Loop:

5.1 Time to degree examination: For graduated doctoral and masters students compile data to time to degree

5.1.1 Related Objective(s): Understand and reduce doctoral attrition rates.

5.1.2 Related Measure(s): Completion/Attrition data over period of 10 years.

5.1.3 Responsible Person: Program directors and dean of graduate studies.

5.1.4 Target Date: 2009 AY

5.1.5 Priority: Medium Priority

6. Analysis:

6.1 Program/Unit Strengths:

6.1.1 Objectives/Outcomes Exceeded or Met: Attrition data has been compiled for fall semesters of academic years 1999 through 2005. Data on admitted students is being collected each semester.

6.1.2 Other Strengths:

Time to degree information can be obtained and correlated with prior academic preparation of admitted students.

6.2 Program / Unit Weaknesses:

6.2.1 Objectives / Outcomes Partially or Not Met: More data has to be compiled for students admitted each semester to reveal patterns..

6.2.2 Other Weaknesses:

Time for completion of requirements and or attrition are controlled by a myriad of different factors and it may be difficult to correlate any single patterns with a single cause.

6.3 Other Areas Needing Improvement: contiguous monitoring required.

7. Report:

7.1 Executive Summary: Attrition data for admitted graduate students is being compiled.

7.2 Top 3 Program/Unit Accomplishments: For the period 1999 through 2005 attrition statistics for admitted graduate students (fall semester) has been collected.

Information on all admitted graduate students is now been monitored each semester.

7.3 Contributions to UTD: Improved insight into attrition of graduate students.

7.4 Top 3 Program / Unit Challenges: Data is being collected for masters and doctoral student admits.