BARRIERS TO COMPLETION OF THE DOCTORAL DEGREE IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

by

Lawrence H. Myers

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in

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Approved:

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Glen I. Earthman, Chairperson

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Robert R. Richards   Pat Carlton

_____   _____
Christina M. Dawson   Mary Yakimowski

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Committee Chairman: Dr. Glen Earthman

Educational Administration

(ABSTRACT)

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the reasons for attrition of doctoral candidates in the College of Human Resources and Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Graduate students granted candidacy status have fulfilled the following requirements: successful completion of course work, successful completion of the written and oral preliminary examinations, and completion of the residency requirement. The population for this study was students, identified by the Office of Graduate Studies, who attained doctoral candidacy between 1983-1992. During this period, 94 students out of 354 attaining candidacy did not complete the degree. From the 94 students identified, 55 students were eliminated by the Educational Leadership and Policy

Studies faculty for one of the following reasons: the student is presently working on dissertation with faculty member, the student was advised not to continue after preliminary examination, or the student was not in the EDAD program, thus leaving 39 candidates. By limiting the study to doctoral candidates who have not completed the degree, it is possible to focus on the experiences of candidates who most likely will not obtain a doctorate.

The focus of this study was to develop a picture of how the doctoral degree attrition evolves over time. This was to be accomplished by allowing candidates the opportunity to expound on the doctoral degree experience in a semistructured interview setting. Responses from semistructured interviews were analyzed in order to reconstruct the experiences of those candidates who did not complete the degree and also to determine which barriers were dominant in the process.

Results of the interviews were analyzed first for differences between candidates' opinions in general, and then to identify factors that each candidate perceived had promoted, had no effect on, or had impeded degree completion. Also, factors that most affect the decision not to complete the doctoral degree as ranked by the candidates were analyzed.

Candidate responses revealed that time and financial management along with professional obligations and personal reasons were the most significant factors in degree non-completion. A secondary factor was that of financial concern and inability of how to obtain information and resources to address this concern.

Findings of this study permitted the researcher to identify several factors

affecting doctoral degree completion at one institution; the next step might be to

operationalize these factors by describing the patterns of attrition, desegregating

attrition by the stages of study, and identifying connections between the levels of

attrition at various levels.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Doctoral candidates are graduate students who have completed all of the requirements for a doctoral degree except the dissertation. Cone and Foster (1993) state that originally doctoral level graduate students were prepared for the higher education teaching role by a major advisor who stayed with the student until the doctoral degree process was completed. Today, the role of the major advisor in the formal dissertation process is assumed by the committee chairperson, who oversees and coordinates the mentoring made available to the doctoral student by a dissertation committee.

Graduate students granted the status of candidate are expected to begin their dissertation in earnest, having fulfilled the following requirements: successful completion of course work, passing of written and oral preliminary examinations, and completion of the residency requirement.

The dissertation fulfills two major purposes in the candidate's education. First, the dissertation is an intensive, highly professional training experience, the successful completion of which demonstrates the candidate's ability to address a significant intellectual problem. Second, the dissertation constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in the field (Council of Graduate Schools, 1991).

The attrition rate of doctoral candidates in American graduate schools, that is the percentage of those who enter a doctoral program and fail to complete the program for whatever reason, is reported to be approximately 50 percent (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). Within that 50 percent, because of the dimensions of the task and other pressures involved in writing a dissertation, Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) estimate that 20 percent of graduate students never complete their dissertation, resulting in failure to obtain the doctoral degree.

Since the founding of the Association of American Universities in 1900, graduate deans have decried attrition, as a waste of student energy, hope, and financial resources and the unproductive dissipation of faculty time and effort (Slate, 1994; Berelson, 1960). With reduced government spending for public programs, universities become targets for reduced tax expenditures. Under such scrutiny, policy makers may view high attrition rates as a sign of waste and inefficiency. As the argument goes, not only are individual faculty affected (Lunnebord & Lunnebord, 1973), but resources are wasted at the departmental level (Tucker, Gottlieb, & Pease, 1964). There are also significant social costs: loss of productivity (Gillingham, Seneca, & Taussig, 1991) and fewer scientists and professionals during periods of labor market demand (Benkin, 1984).

Student attrition from doctoral programs is an important issue because of the image of doctoral students. In comparison to undergraduate and master's level students, doctoral students reflect an institution's scholarly nature, but they also consume more of its resources, such as faculty time, expertise, and energy; library

facilities; and computer services. Therefore, practitioners in the field of education have long recognized the loss of resources by students, faculty, and institutions, resulting from attrition from doctoral programs (Kluever, 1995).

In addition to concern expressed for the individual who commits so much time, energy, and money in an unsuccessful bid to attain a doctorate, there is concern about the efficiency and effectiveness of a graduate education process that loses so many potentially productive able teachers, researchers, and leaders. Rogers (1969), commenting on graduate education, suggested that every student who leaves without completing a degree should be considered a failure, either in selection, teaching, faculty-student relationship, or the provision of a stimulating professional and scientific climate. Student attrition should be carefully considered from each of these perspectives in order to correct deficiencies. Goulden (1991) stated that the loss of students during the dissertation phase is a significant problem. She further pointed out that an extensive delay in the failure to successfully finish graduate research may be a personal tragedy for individual students, but it is also a wasteful, negative outcome for departments and institutions. Despite Rogers' suggestion, however, and despite the high estimated rate of attrition, the process leading to the attrition of doctoral candidates has not been subject to careful and systematic examination (Girves & Wemmerus, 1986).

Pinson (1997) stated that students also have difficulties when the dissertation is prolonged. Pinson found four predictors of prolonged dissertation phases completion: failure to set a writing schedule, inadequate computer skills, the candidate's job

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demands, and committee membership changes. Another hardship doctoral candidates face is imposed by the required residency: The Virginia Tech Graduate School states "Unless on an approved leave of absence, graduate students in degree programs must be registered continuously during the academic year and pay the prescribed fees" (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1995, p.17). Enrollment in any graduate program constitutes a tacit acknowledgment of intent to complete that program in a timely manner. Payment of those registration fees over an extended period of time can be a hardship.

One of the major reasons that some individuals never finish the dissertation is the level of stress involved (Powell & Dean, 1986). The stress resulting from working on the dissertation is of two types: stress in the social sense and stress in the task sense. Stress in the social sense is brought about when the student is unable to socialize and relax with family, friends, and significant others without feeling guilty that time is being wasted that could be spent working on the dissertation. Stress in the task sense is brought about because the amount of time spent working on the dissertation makes the researcher feel negligent in terms of time away from family, friends and significant others. Though the stress of writing a dissertation does not account for all ABD status individuals (Cheatham, Edwards, & Erickson, 1982), it is reasonable to assume that a substantial percentage of individuals never finish because of the pressures involved (Moore, 1985; Powell & Dean, 1986).

Context of the Problem

Studies examining attrition in higher education have usually focused on the undergraduate level rather than the graduate level. In a study of successful and unsuccessful graduate students at the University of Chicago, Fridenberg and Roth (1954) noted that almost all of the published studies concerning the conditions of student success and failure deal with populations below the graduate level. This observation, made more than 40 years ago, still holds true today. According to Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980), literally thousands of undergraduate attrition studies have been conducted at colleges and universities during the last 50 years.

In comparison to the undergraduate retention-attrition literature, the body of literature examining doctoral attrition is quite small. Of the few studies that have been published, the majority appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s when the production of doctorates did not meet the demand of the rapidly expanding system of American higher education (Berelson, 1960; Mooney, 1968; Stark, 1967; Tucker, et al.).

Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connolly (1983) indicated that few universities keep systematic data on students who fail to complete doctoral degrees. Several reasons can be given to account for this absence of data: lack of a database that contains basic demographic information on all students, lack of personnel to search actual student files, lack of annual matriculation lists kept at the department level, and failure to identify students who are maintained on the university roster by continuous enrollment. The same concerns are expressed by the majority of those who have investigated attrition at the doctoral level (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1995; Monsour &

Corman, 1991).

The dissertation experience has been ingrained in American higher education as a crowning achievement since Yale granted the first Ph.D. in 1861. The idea that to attain academia's crown jewel one must make an original contribution to knowledge in one's field is an item of faith. Research, rather than teaching or other academic pursuits, has become the center of academic activities at many American universities (Clark, 1995). The extent of the research to which an institution engages dictates the degree of prestige it is accorded, and symbolizes, to the academic world, the quality of the enterprise pursued in such an institution.

Doctoral attrition has never been a popular research topic among faculty scholars. Unlike student scholars, faculty scholars have not viewed doctoral attrition as a major problem (Berelson, 1960). As Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connoly (1983) pointed out, faculty scholars have avoided the topic of doctoral attrition because an ABD's failure to complete all degree requirements is a painful reminder to faculty and university administrators alike that their judgment of a student's capability and projected success may have been faulty.

Other problems also may have discouraged faculty scholars from studying the attrition of doctoral candidates. Attrition studies are not conducive to short-term research unless done retrospectively. Retrospective studies involve identifying and locating doctoral candidates who have left the program (Brown & Slater, 1960). Several studies reported only 30 percent questionnaire return rates from graduate students (Artiga, 1984; Benkin, 1984). Consequently, attrition studies have not been

as popular with the faculty who prefer to focus their research on ways to reduce the time...in order to increase doctoral production as research designed to increase doctoral production by reducing the time required to complete a doctorate (George, 1971).

Two traditional approaches for examining doctoral candidate attrition have been used in the past. The first approach, the selection approach, has been mainly concerned with the identification of personal variables associated with attrition (Artiga, 1984; Lemp, 1980). These variables have been limited to those that can be identified and measured before a student's admission to a doctoral program. These preadmission variables have included age, gender, scholastic aptitude, hometown, and financial resources. The second approach, the program approach, has attempted to identify variables associated with attrition related to the student's efforts in the program (Benkin, 1984; Berelson, 1960). This approach has focused on personal and institutional variables that come into play during a doctoral program, including motivation, financial support, faculty-student interaction, and research preparation. This study incorporated the program approach for studying doctoral candidate attrition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons that former doctoral candidates give as to why they did not complete the requirements for the doctoral degree at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Human Resources &

Education.

Statement of the Problem

What do candidates of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University doctoral program in Educational Administration perceive as barriers to completion of the degree?

In order to describe ABD attrition, the researcher will seek to answer the one primary research question, with five subquestions:

What are the barriers to completion of the doctoral degree?

a.   What are the factors in the dissertation experience associated with non-completion of the degree?

b.   What are the committee advisement factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

c.   What are the personal factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

d.   What are the relevant financial factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

e.   What are the employment factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

The barriers will be determined by reconstructing and comparing the experiences of ABDs from the point of candidacy to the point of attrition from the program.

According to the Council of Graduate Schools (1990), the doctoral program is designed to prepare a student to be a scholar who can discover, integrate, and apply knowledge as well as disseminate and communicate it. A graduate program should emphasize the development of the student's ability to make a contribution in the chosen field of study. A well-prepared graduate student will be able to understand and critically evaluate the relevant literature in the chosen field of specialization and be able to apply it to issues and problems. It is also expected that the student will enjoy a close association with faculty members who are experienced in conducting research and teaching.

Nerad and Cerny (1991) described five stages of the doctoral program: (1) course work; (2) preparation for the oral or written qualifying examination; (3) finding a dissertation topic, selecting a dissertation advisor, and writing a proposal; (4) dissertation research and writing; and (5) applying for professional employment. Many students move through each stage smoothly but other students, just as qualified, experience a serious interruption in their progress. For the majority of students this takes place after candidacy, in stage three as Nerad and Cerny described them.

Significance of the Study

By examining key factors in the doctorate degree experience, this study will be able to draw some conclusions on how doctoral attrition evolves over time. The rich description afforded by case study research will allow in-depth, intensive examination of individual cases in an attempt to develop and understand principles of attrition

(Moon, 1991). This study will give the candidates' overall perspective of the attrition

process, whereas previous studies have (Sadler & Sacks, 1993; Slaton, 1991)

generally focused on the description of the process at one point in time or on a

summary of the attrition experience. This study should be of interest to those students,

faculty, and administrators who are concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of

graduate education at Virginia Tech.

A better understanding of attrition may be especially useful in the Department of

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in order to address the 11 percent attrition

rate found there. The attrition of doctorate candidates has never been well

documented nor addressed (Haworth, 1996). This appears to be the case at most

American universities (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1995; Jacks et al. 1983;

Monsour and Corman, 1991; Valentine, 1987).

Delimitations

This study will examine the experiences of EDAD doctoral students in the

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies who became doctoral

candidates between 1983 and 1992. By limiting the study to those who obtained

candidacy during this period, confidence has been reduced in generalizing the findings

to doctoral students from other years and other settings.

By limiting the current study to doctoral candidates, it will be possible to focus on

the experiences of students who have completed all requirements except the

dissertation. This study is limited in its application due to the fact that only candidates

who attended Virginia Tech and agreed to participate in this study were interviewed. All candidates that agreed to participate were located in one geographical area of Hampton Roads, Virginia. Because of the sensitive nature of this study, the fear factor of candidate responses and the selection process have also been considered.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in conducting this study:

1.   The Graduate School maintains accurate records.

2.   The students' admittance to candidacy demonstrates a commitment to earning a doctorate.

3.   The candidates responded accurately in the interview. This study will rely on the reflections of former students. It is assumed that time did not substantially distort their recollections of a major life event, the doctoral process.

Definitions

ABD - a doctoral candidate who leaves the University before completing the dissertation requirement for a doctorate. The dissertation is the last major requirement before attaining a doctorate, thus the designation, "ABD," All But Dissertation.

Active Status - a doctoral candidate who is registered at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Attrition - occurs when a doctoral candidate does not complete a doctoral degree

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and is no longer registered at the University.

Doctoral Candidate - a doctoral student who has successfully passed all course work and written and oral preliminary examinations and completed residency requirements.

Preliminary Written Examination - a comprehensive written examination conducted by the supervisory committee after the student has completed all course work in a doctoral program.

Preliminary Oral Examination - a comprehensive oral examination conducted by the supervisory committee after the student has completed all course work and passed the written examination in a doctoral program.

Supervisory Committee - a committee consisting of the faculty members who (1) approve a doctoral student's course of study for a doctoral degree, and (2) conduct the student's Preliminary Written Examination and Preliminary Oral Examination.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the phenomena to be explored and the rationales for the study. Chapter II elaborates on the research conducted to date on doctoral degree attrition. Chapter III describes how doctoral candidates from 1983 to 1992 reconstructed their dissertation- writing experiences. Chapter IV reports the results of the study. Chapter V analyzes the results, provides interpretations and conclusions related to the research questions, and discusses the implications of the results for future practice and research.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the literature review. The chapter begins

by identifying key variables. The variables will be examined in more detail after

organizing them under seven underlying dimensions that emerge from the literature:

identification of a dissertation topic, selection of committee members, course

preparation, influencing family factors, impact of financial resources or lack thereof,

former employment status, and current employment status.

Identification of Key Approaches: Selection and Program

Two atheoretical approaches have been used to examine doctoral attrition. The

first approach focuses on preadmission factors that predict who will complete the

doctorate. This is the selection approach. The second approach attempts to identify

variables that prevent graduate students from completing the doctorate. This is the

program approach. The latter approach is more useful for identification of variables as

the attrition process unfolds over time.

The Selection Approach

Studies on selection identify personal variables related the completion of a doctorate can be measured before admission to a doctoral program, that is, in identifying personal variables that predict the probability of attrition. Because the variables studied are those existing before the student is even admitted to graduate study, institutional variables (e.g., financial support, faculty-student interaction, and intellectual climate) are excluded.

Variables, in the selection approach include undergraduate grade point average (GPA), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, Miller's Analogies Test (MAT) scores, master's degree GPA, number of years since receiving undergraduate degree, marital status, age, financial resources, gender, and race. Arkansas State University, for example, uses an elaborate, weighted criteria formula to assess applicants' academic promise and leadership potential. The following weights are assigned to admission criteria: undergraduate GPA (15 percent), Miller Analogies test score (15 percent), scholarship (30 percent), written expression (20 percent), personal statement (10 percent) professional promise (40 percent) and membership in professional organizations (10 percent). This approach focuses on academic achievement.

In a typical selection study, a measurement is taken on one or more of the above variables before an individual enters a program. Nongraduates and graduates are then statistically compared on the variable(s) to determine if the two categories of former students differ significantly or if the variables are significantly related to one of the groups. Selection studies, however, have not always examined the same set of

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variables. In addition, these studies have produced mixed results. Consequently, selection studies have not been useful for either predicting doctoral attrition or explaining the ABD phenomenon. In this regard, program variables may be more useful (Cook and Swanson, 1978).

The Program Approach

The program approach describes or compares the experiences of doctoral students after they begin a doctoral program. Studies of this kind are useful in identifying personal and institutional variables that affect the decision to abandon the doctorate. The term "institutional" and "personal" are used here as a means of categorizing factors within either a graduate department or an individual's history.

Program studies can be divided into two types: descriptive and comparative. The former describes the doctoral experiences of graduates, enrolled students, or ABDs. The latter compares these groups on selected variables. This research will incorporate the descriptive program study. Researchers conducting descriptive program studies have been interested in documenting the state of graduate education and identifying areas for reform (Baird, 1991; Haworth, 1996; Syverson, 1996). Developing an environment for the intellectual development of graduate students has frequently been a special concern to researchers. Their studies are especially useful for identifying institutional and personal difficulties that may lead to the attrition of doctoral degree candidates. Whereas graduates obviously overcome these difficulties, ABDs do not.

In a study of 10 universities, Bowen and Rudenstine (1992), found that 81 percent of the students who reach ABD status finish their degrees. A current problem they cite includes two facets: the rising proportion of students who attain ABD status but do not finish the degree and the increase in time spent as ABD before finishing the doctoral program. Jacks, Chubin, Porter, and Connoly (1983) studied 25 ABD students who had left one doctoral program and cited the following reasons: financial difficulties (44 percent), poor working relationship with advisor and/or committee (44 percent), substantive problems with the dissertation research (36 percent), personal or emotional problems (36 percent), receipt of an attractive job offer (32 percent), interference of paid work with dissertation work (28 percent), family demands (24 percent), lack of peer support (20 percent), and loss of interest in earning a Ph.D. (12 percent).

While exploring the components of excellence, Heiss (1970) found that many students dropped out of graduate school because of academic problems. In her study, 25 percent of students who did not finish graduate school attributed their attrition to lost interest in the field, 45 percent were disillusioned with graduate work, 14 percent complained of a poor relationship with their advisor, 6 percent felt the same about their sponsor, 40 percent were tired of studying, and 26 percent complained of lack of faculty interest in students. Additionally, Bowen and Rudenstine (1993) posited four other factors contributing to added time between ABD status and degree. The first factor is the selection of an appropriate dissertation topic, which for some students may take one to two years. The student may face problems such as growing complexity in the field; the necessity of complex, interdisciplinary approaches to research; expectation

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placed on and by the student regarding the complexity of the dissertation; and program "burnout"; the desire to take a break between the achievement of candidacy and the commencement of the dissertation are all factors worthy of exploration.

Second, according to Bowen and Rudenstine (1993), it may be required that the student undertakes extensive archival work or fieldwork during the data-gathering phase of the dissertation process. This work may take place outside of the student's university thereby increasing the time to complete a doctorate and also increasing the likelihood of attrition.

The third factor that Bowen and Rudenstine (1993) cite, which was also pointed out in Jacks, Chubin, and Connolly's 1983 study is that dissertation advising may be a stumbling block to completion. Problems may arise including difference in expectations between the advisor and student, unavailability of the dissertation advisor, and lack of regular contact between the student and the advisor. Sorenson and Kagan (1987) cited examples of conflicts between doctoral candidates and their dissertation sponsors. They observed that the personality of the student and the advisor must match on the levels of (a) dependence versus independence, (b) nurturance versus distance, and (c) epistemological preference. In a survey of individuals who had completed their dissertations in Communications, Cheatham et al. (1982) stated that the complaint most often cited or voiced by respondents was that there had been lack of quality interaction between themselves and their committees.

The fourth factor Bowen and Rudenstine (1993) noted was that of isolation. Because the dissertation writing phase is not collaborative, and during this time

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students are often off campus, some students experience a feeling of isolation.

A study conducted by Katz and Hartnett (1976) listed nine problems frequently associated with doctoral education:

1. When selecting a graduate or professional department, students are rarely provided with enough information about the department or the institution that allows them to make a sufficiently informed choice. Graduate departments require all sorts of information from their applicants, but feel no similar responsibility to make themselves known to their prospective students.

2. Students hope to join a community of scholars. Instead, they find themselves being pushed into relative intellectual isolation from other people and concentrating in a narrow specialty that few can share with them.

3. Students expect lively interactions - - that is, sharing ideas and working with fellow graduate students. Yet they often find very competitive atmospheres and inadequate opportunities for working with others.

4. Students desire to work with professors who will guide them and reflect on their work. Instead, they find access to professors limited, and at times they are subjected to treatment they consider demeaning. Furthermore, women students and minorities still confront considerable discrimination.

5. Students want to engage in learning that will enhance their capabilities. Instead, professional students complain of being lectured too as in high

school and being asked to study topics that they feel have a tenuous relation to their future practice. Graduate students may find themselves held to inquiries that do not reflect their own interests and intellectual predilections, but, rather, that of their professors. What is worse, they often labor in dissertations that drag out and are doubly difficult to finish because the subject they are delving into is not congruent with their own talents, motivations, and curiosity.

6. Most graduate students express a strong interest in teaching; usually, however, they are taught to neglect teaching, if not to have contempt for it. Adequate training for teaching rarely exists.

7. Students would like to advance on the road to independence and adult identity that they began in their undergraduate years. Instead, upon entering graduate or professional school, they are often treated like college freshman. Their status in graduate school often drives these young adults back to infantile patterns of behavior and feelings.

8. Students want friendship and expansion of their personal and social being. Instead, they are overworked or emotionally pressed, with insufficient time and energy for the cultivation of their personal lives.

9. Students expect the joy and excitement that comes with creative work and the pursuit of the intellect. Instead, they find their lives crammed, their moods serious if not grim, and their energies beset by relentless requirements and even busywork, all of which make graduate school, at

times, resemble military drills more than the exercise of man's most

intellectual and imaginative capacities.

In summary, many enrolled doctoral students have reported dissatisfaction with

the quality of their programs. Many students indicated that they thought about quitting

before completing a doctorate. In the late 1960s, the Graduate Division of the

University of California at Berkeley established a longitudinal, computerized database

to track graduate students. Haworth (1996) used the 1981-1983 cohort as an

illustration of the total enrollment. Her analysis showed that one quarter of the students

who entered in 1981-1983 left between years one and three of graduate study, 10

percent left between years four and eleven, and 5 percent had degrees that were still

pending at the time of her study. Some doctoral students do not get past the general

comprehensive examinations, a stage that is potentially the single most stressful

experience in a doctoral program (Barrett, 1982). Once past the general

comprehensive examinations, however, the transition from course work to independent

research has been another point at which many students drop out of their programs

(Sternberg, 1981).

Dissertation Development.

Another point at which many students drop out of the doctoral program is at the

dissertation stage. Persistence has been identified as one of the key factors leading to

the successful completion of the doctoral degree. Girves and Wemmerus (1988)

developed a model of graduate student persistence that includes the degree of

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involvement in one's graduate program and the relationship with the faculty advisor, the quality of the relationship between the advisor and student, and the departmental characteristics. Miller (1995) linked this theory related to student persistence with descriptions of three types of graduate students pursuing the Ph.D. Miller's doctoral student vignettes presented three types of ABD students: the "direct current," the "alternating current," and the "weak battery."

Miller portrays the direct current graduate student as one who maintains a constant level of effort throughout the dissertation process. There are benefits and problems for the direct current students, according to Miller (1995), the primary benefit being rapid degree completion. Few research pitfalls seem to distract the direct current. This student seeks immediate help when any problem arises and relies on authoritative sources to assist in solving problems.

The alternating current graduate student, according to Miller (1995), begins the dissertation process with a high degree of effort and then fluctuates between high and low activity, but nevertheless does not require much outside motivation. The alternating current student usually starts the dissertation phase fairly strong but begins to experience spurts of progress and delays throughout the process. This student typically settles on a dissertation topic with relative ease and progresses through the proposal and research at a steady pace. However, at any time during the dissertation process, short or long delays interrupt the student's progress toward the degree. This student generally sets no specific completion date but has a general idea of a completion timeline.

The weak battery graduate student, in Miller's 1995 characterization, has periods when effort is strong but his effort gradually tapers off, and he requires outside intervention to "jump start" the dissertation. Such a student's "battery" is, at times, strong, and he progresses toward completion of the dissertation in a steadfast manner. At other times, the "battery" is weak and requires assistance from an external source. The "battery" may even die, and the candidate may leave the doctoral program altogether. It is difficult, if not impossible, to predict the level of persistence of the weak battery student. At any phase of the dissertation process, he may be focused or standing totally still.

As indicated earlier, for many students, working on the dissertation is a lonely and isolating experience. The long hours spent in the library looking for sources, reading research materials, and writing the dissertation separate the doctoral student from activities with family and friends.

Colleges of education have vested interests in the student's successful completion of the dissertation. According to Madisen (1992), "Every time a graduate student's dissertation sheds some light on a dark corner of human understanding and banishes some segment, however small, of the world's mystery, society reaps incalculable benefits."

Difficulty at the dissertation stage may also be the result of institutional factors that may include inadequate preparation for dissertation work (Bassett, 1979), problems with the supervisory committee, or lack of proper guidance from the major advisor (Schultz, 1983).

Moreover, during this stage, doctoral candidates may find themselves cut off from institutional support systems in the form of classes, deadlines, and structured faculty-student interaction; finding themselves alone, a sense of anomie may develop (Kiely, 1982).

Kiely (1982) suggested that anomie may intensify when it is recognized that previous course work has not prepared the candidate to conduct a dissertation. Bassett (1979) found the lack of preparation especially apparent in colleges of education. She conducted a cross-disciplinary study at the University of Iowa, examining the experiences of 196 recent doctoral graduates in humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, physical sciences, and education. Her data showed that education graduates "were rather poorly prepared for research prior to embarking on their dissertation, and they required considerable amounts of assistance for their dissertation research." Education graduates did not feel as positive about their dissertation experiences as those from other disciplines. Poor preparation may be compounded in institutions that reward professors for research and publishing, but not for supervising doctoral candidates (Kiely, 1982).

Carmichael (1961) suggested that perhaps it is the tone of the graduate school that is at fault -- the preoccupation of members of the staff; their indifference to the student; the uncertainties with respect to the program, thesis, or dissertation topic; the foreign language requirement; qualifying examination; or courses requirements.

Summary

Researchers have focused on identifying institutional or personal that are related to doctoral attrition rather than trying to understand how the ABD phenomenon evolves over time. Correlates to completion or attrition have been the emphasis in most studies. Lack of faculty-student interaction, money problems, and dwindling motivation are variables that have been identified as the most important factors in attrition. Other variables that have been identified job obligations, personal problems and lack of supports from significant others.

In this chapter, these and other variables were identified and will be examined when relevant to the content of this study.

CHAPTER III

<u>METHODOLOGY</u>

<u>Description of the Population</u>

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's doctoral program in Educational Leadership targets administrators in entry-level positions in PK-12 schools throughout Virginia, neighboring states, educational agencies, and professional associations. The intent of the program is to build skills and attitudes that contribute to more stable situations for educational leaders.

The population for this study consists of students who advanced to candidacy status for the Doctor of Education Degree in the program area of Educational Administration from 1983 through 1992 but who did not complete the dissertation during that period of time. A request was made through and approved by the Research and Graduate Studies Office (RGSO) to obtain the names and addresses of students who had not completed degree requirements. The faculty in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department assisted the researcher by reviewing the (RGSO) list and deleting the names of students who meet any or all of the following criteria:

a) student presently working on dissertation with faculty member.

b) student advised not to proceed after preliminary exam.

c) student not in EDAD program.

A sample of the letter requesting the support from the faculty in the Educational

Leadership Policy Studies department is included as Appendix A.

Research Method

In addition to reviewing the literature to identify potential barriers to completion

of the doctoral degree, a semistructured interviewing technique was used to gather

data for this study. The semistructured interview employed ethnographic research

techniques: asking orally a series of structured questions (Appendix C), and then

probing more deeply, using open form questions to obtain additional information (Gall,

Borg, & Gall, 1996). The semistructured interview technique was the primary means of

collecting data for this study. The data collected from these interviews was analyzed

and is displayed in full text narrative form with supporting displays (Appendix E).

Ethnographic Research

Social anthropology, in which ethnography is the primary research methodology,

follows a naturalistic profile with particular care given to the description of local

particularities: focus on individuals' perspectives and interpretations of their world, with

relatively little prestructured instrumentation, but often a wider use of audio and

videotapes, film, and structured observation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Whatever the methodological approach, ethnography is more than description;

the primary aim of this approach is to guide the collection and analysis of descriptive

data on the ways in which social meaning is conveyed (Saville Troike, 1989).

Ethnography is also a way of generalizing. This may differ from the standard scientific model, however, and in some ways is closer to the model employed in the arts. In good ethnography, as in good literature, the message comes not through the explicit statement of generalities but in concrete portrayal (Peacock, 1983).

As stated by Van Maanen (1979), the primary analytic task in ethnographic research is to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations. Ethnographic research offers an understanding of the process and structure of a social setting.

Spradley (1990), in his description of ethnography, stated that it is the study of both explicit and tacit cultural knowledge. Culture, in this research, is defined as the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior. Whereas explicit cultural knowledge can be communicated at a conscious level and with relative ease, tacit cultural knowledge remains largely outside of one's awareness. Spradley (1980) further posits that because so much of culture consists of tacit knowledge, the informants or interviewees often know things they cannot talk about or express consciously. Therefore, the role of the ethnographer is to make inferences about what someone knows by listening carefully to what he or she says and by observing his or her behavior. Ethnographers must, therefore, participate as well as observe. Spradley maintains that participation allows one to experience activities directly, to get the feel for what events are like, and to record one's own perceptions.

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<u>Validity and Reliability</u>

Validity is described as the quality of the conclusions and the processes through which they were reached (Taft, 1988). Taft argues that the exact meaning of validity depends on the particular criterion of truth that is adopted, and in ethnographic research, the most appropriate criterion is credibility. Further, credibility can be enhanced by and is dependent on the apparent accuracy of the data and the way the study is communicated to the audience (Taft).

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explained the high degree of internal validity inherent in ethnographic research. They note that participant observation provides the opportunity for continual data analysis and comparisons that can be used to refine constructs to ensure the match between scientific categories and participant reality. Ethnographic research is conducted in natural settings that reflect the reality of the life experiences of participants more accurately than do more contrived or laboratory settings (Goetz & LeCompte).

The aim of external validity in ethnographic studies is to uncover an ideographic knowledge of the world. Guba and Lincoln (1988) posit that this type of knowledge is best encapsulated in a series of working hypotheses that describe the individual case.

<u>Interview Procedures</u>

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study. During the interview,

carefully selected questions were asked that allowed the respondent to provide a fresh

commentary about the topic. Interpretation through the eyes of interviewees was

recorded and data documented in order to gather important insights into the study.

During the interviews, candidates were given an opportunity to address the relevant

factors in the following areas: the dissertation experience, advisement experience,

personal experience, financial experience, and the employment experience. By having

the participants address such variables, the researcher extrapolated the barriers to

completion of the doctoral degree.

Pilot Study

Because the nature of this study involves a sensitive topic, the researcher

discussed the nature of the study with two graduate students who received candidacy

in 1994 and 1995 respectively but did not complete the dissertation. Neither of these

candidates is included in the population for this study nor are they actively enrolled.

The Virginia Tech Graduate School states,   "Unless on an approved leave of absence,

graduate students in degree programs must be registered continuously during the

academic year and pay prescribed fees" (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State

University, 1997, p. 17). The researcher felt it appropriate to question these individuals

in order to ascertain which questions would receive negative reactions and which would

be accepted positively.

In order to validate the interview questions, the researcher field-tested the initial

drafts of the instruments on a sample of candidates who completed requirements for

candidacy from 1993 to 1996. Significant problems can be avoided by conducting a

field test prior to attempting large-scale data collection. This field test included an

exploration of potential interviewees, how people within the community exchanged

information, and what forms of questions are appropriate (Hymes, 1970). This field test

identified problems or weaknesses in wording or construction and was conducted under

field conditions similar to those that would be used during the actual interview. The field

test was conducted enough in advance of the scheduled starting date of the interview

to allow for revisions.

Specific areas that were evaluated in the field test included the following:

1. Is the level of understanding of question wording by respondent clear?

2. Is there a language or dialect problem?

3. Are the questions of sufficient interest and appeal to motivate the respondent to complete the interview?

4. Are the questions relevant to the phenomenon being studied so as to elicit a realistic and accurate response?

5. Are the questions too restrictive, limited, or narrow in scope?

6. Are the questions designed in a way that, when taken as a whole, they address the basic research question and give the researcher the data the researcher needs?

Based upon the response and feedback from three participants, specific issues

were analyzed and revision made where necessary (Miles and Huberman,

1994).

<u>Data Collection Procedure</u>

Conducting a research study is like taking a descriptive and explanatory snapshot of reality (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). A long semi-structured interview research technique was chosen in order to get a detailed description of the factors behind the incomplete dissertation. The long interview is an appropriate technique when the researcher seeks to capture meanings and perspectives of program participants and other subjective information not normally available through other research techniques. Furthermore, interviews maximize the opportunity for more complete and accurate communication of ideas between the researcher and the subjects under study (McCracken, 1988).

The semistructured interview was selected as the primary data-gathering tool in order to allow the participants to help guide the outcome of the interview. The questions and possible probes were included in an interview guide, which was used with the intention of providing flexibility during the actual interview. The researcher followed the lead of the participant within the interview guide structure, whenever appropriate, to gain pertinent information about the doctoral experience. This type of interview fit the needs of the researcher to explore for information pertaining to the doctoral experience, and permitted the participants to tell their stories. Interview responses provided in-depth, rich information from each participant about their doctoral experience.

In this study, the researcher used the interview guide to encourage the participant's open-ended remarks to lead both the researcher and the participant into interesting and pertinent territory. The researcher assumed that with the use of this qualitative methodology, the participant's memory of the barriers to degree completion would unfold throughout the interview.

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to contacting participants. Potential respondents were contacted through letters that solicited participation. A sample letter addressed to thirty-six graduate students asking for their participation in the study is included as Appendix B. The letter explained the purpose and significance of the study, how respondents were selected, the importance of their participation, the anticipated length of the interview, how the results would be reported, and where they could contact the researcher. The letter assured participants that confidentiality would be maintained.

In the subsequent week a telephone call was made to each person who had returned the survey in order to address the candidate's willingness to participate in the study. Participants were then contacted to schedule the interview. The researcher remained flexible in allowing participants ample opportunity to select the date, time, and location of the interview. Interviews were conducted in January and February 1998.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher provided participants an overview of the study, addressed questions and concerns, and requested the participant's permission in advance to audiotape the interview. In allowing participants

to ask questions and voice concerns during the preliminary conversation, the researcher established a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, an atmosphere of trust. The researcher informed the participants that they were coparticipants in the interview and could ask that the tape be stopped at any time.

All questions were asked in the same order as presented in the interview protocol (see Appendix C). Prompt questions were included in the interview protocol in order to provide flexibility for the interviewer to explore certain topics more thoroughly.

The interview protocol was designed to elicit responses from participants on the relevant variables in the areas of the dissertation experience, advisement experience, personal experience, financial experience, and the employment experience in order to extrapolate the barriers to completion of the doctoral degree.

Interview Schedule

One 60-to-90 minute interview was scheduled with each participant. With permission from each participant, each interview was audiotaped. The participant chose the location for the interview and a time that was convenient for him/her.

<u>Data Management/Analysis</u>

Sampling in qualitative research involves two actions that can pull in different directions. First, the researcher needs to set boundaries: to define aspects of the case(s) that can be studied within the limits of the researcher's time and means, that connect directly to the research questions, and that are likely to include examples of what the researcher wants to study. Second, and at the same time, the researcher needs to create a frame to help uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes or constructs that undergird the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Data in this study were collected from taped interviews and researcher notes. In addition to the barriers to completion, data were collected on relevant variables in the dissertation process, advisement process, personal process, financial process, and the employment process. One set of interview questions was developed for all candidates interviewed.

A contact summary form was utilized after each interview and prior to transcription to note the main concepts and issues of each encounter and to allow for more rapid retrieval of data. Transcribed interviews were coded utilizing domain analysis, wherein themes, ideas, related terms, and processes may form clusters that may become major categories. Individual themes and ideas may constitute subcategories (Spradley, 1979).

Coded data were extracted, condensed, and entered onto matrices, which were developed as themes emerged. From these matrices, conclusions were drawn by noting patterns and themes that may be compared and contrasted. In comparing the

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validity of conclusions drawn from displays rather than text, Miles and Huberman

(1988) state that the chances of drawing and verifying valid conclusions are greater

than for extended text because the display, arranged coherently, permits careful

comparisons, detection of differences, noting of patterns and themes, seeing trends,

and so on. Conclusions herein have been presented in full text narrative form with

supporting displays.

CHAPTER IV

Interviews, Themes and Categories

This section of the study summarizes general observations about the data

collection process, the protocol, and the themes and categories that emerged from the

interviews. Throughout this chapter, the terms "candidates," "participants," and

"interviewees" are used interchangeably.

General Observations

Thirty-six letters were mailed to the identified candidates. From this initial

mailing, 6 candidates responded positively within the 1-week time frame specified in

the letter. A second follow-up letter resulted in 4 additional candidates agreeing to

interviews. Eleven candidate letters were returned by the post office after 2 weeks

marked "address unknown." During the third week of the researcher's attempt to

secure the candidates' willingness to participate in the study, a follow-up telephone call

effort was made. The follow-up calls revealed that 14 of the identified candidates could

no longer be reached using the telephone numbers provided, either because the

number had changed or because the telephone had been disconnected. One

additional candidate was secured by telephone confirmation; however, 9 candidates

declined to participate in the research project when invited to do so by telephone. The

most common reason given for declining to participate in the study was availability of time.

    Participant interviews were conducted at the date and place selected by the participant. Most were conducted at the participant's home or a nearby library facility. Overall, the interviews went very smoothly. Respondents were participatory and appeared to provide genuine responses to the questions. The data collected were rich and descriptive and provided substantial information for this research project.

<u>Emerging Themes and Categories</u>

    The purpose of the interviews was to identify the effect of specific, predetermined factors on non-completion of the doctoral degree in educational administration. The exploratory nature of this study enabled the researcher to give participants the opportunity to elaborate on factors from their personal experience that also affected these outcomes.

<u>Doctoral Candidacy</u>

    Table 1 shows that participants advanced to candidacy between the years 1984 and 1992. Two participants achieved their doctoral candidacy in 1984, 2 in 1985, 1 in 1987, 2 in 1989, 3 in 1990 and 1 in 1992.

<u>Individual Reasons</u>. Table 2 supports the idea that individual reasons affecting doctoral degree completion are divided into two main subthemes: personal and

university factors. The researcher decided to further classify comments used by the candidates into three groups (financial, time, and committee support) based on the kinds of words used by the candidates to describe individual reasons for not completing the degree.

Interviewee responses classified as "financial" reasons for not completing the doctoral degree were those including words and/or phrases such as: "financial limitations," "running out of money," "money," and "financial support." Interviewee responses classified as "time" reasons for not completing the doctoral degree included comments such as: "two steps forward, and one back," "structured time," "lack of time management," and "jumping through hoops." Interviewee responses classified as "committee support" for not completing the doctoral degree, included: "frustration with the committee," "lack of a strong chair," and "lack of committee support."

Prioritizing Factors. Table 3 depicts the most important factors in not completing the degree, as listed by the candidates. Frustration and/or loss of interest were the factor listed most commonly, with 36 percent of the candidates offering this response. Twenty-seven percent of the candidates identified "finances," making this the second most commonly cited factor, and 18 percent identified "family factors" to make this the third most commonly cited factor.

Examples of comments that suggested that frustration and/or loss of interest was a factor that impeded degree completion:

I thought I had done a good job of choosing my committee
members, but once behind closed doors, I felt like a referee was needed

for these educators who had already earned their degree (Participant C).

I lost interest because of the process one has to go through in order to please each and every member of the dissertation committee (Participant J).

I had difficulty in getting the committee to come to consensus (Participant A).

I don't feel that I received the support that was given to other classmates and I think this was strictly from the chairperson that I selected. It seemed that he wanted the research topic/proposal to be what he wanted, not what I wanted (Participant E).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that financial

support impeded completion:

I was having a hard time financially but was trying to stick with the program, but when I was unsuccessful with my first try at my prospectus examination I figured it was not worth struggling as I was and risk the chance of this happening again (Participant D).

It was really hard for me being a single parent to continue to pay for this degree; time that should have been spent on my dissertation was spent on a part-time job (Participant F).

Money proved to be a problem for me the last year of course work and didn't let up thereafter (Participant I).

Examples of comments made by respondents that suggested family factors had

an effect on doctoral degree completion:

My spouse became very unsupportive in my quest for this degree because he felt that I would be leaving him behind as far as educational issues were concerned (Participant G).

It was really hard for me being a single parent to continue to pay for the degree (Participant F).

On-Campus Residency. The researcher found that over 82 percent of the candidates

surveyed did not complete the on-campus residency that is now required in the

program, as depicted in Table 4, Appendix E. For those students who did come to the

campus after completing the prospectus, the consensus was that library research was

the aspect of on-campus attendance that was most beneficial, whereas the least

beneficial was the availability of the professors during the summer hours due to the

professors not being on campus during this time.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested the residency

program was beneficial:

> The most beneficial aspect of the program was the access to the
> library and the concentration on the reason for being there (Participant A).

> The area that I found to be most beneficial while on campus was
> library research (Participant B).

> From what I understand from other students who have gone
> through the program since it has been a requirement, is that it is
> beneficial that you have the support of other students that are in the same
> predicament that you are in, and it is helpful to bounce ideas off each
> other (Participant C).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that the

residency program was least beneficial:

> The least benefit was the accessibility to the committee members,
> as many of them were out conducting summer consulting work
> (Participant A).

> Unfortunately I became so frustrated on how the program was run
> and what was expected of the students to do on their own that I shut down
> while there and began making voyages home each and every weekend
> (Participant J).

Independent Research. Table 5 relates the candidates' ability to conduct independent

research before and after residency. All candidates felt qualified to rate their research skills, and 91 percent of the candidates ranked themselves above average (a score of 6 or better) on a scale of 1 to 10.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that independent research skills didn't play a significant role in the failure to complete the degree:

> I think I ranked above average in terms of being able to conduct research independently (Participant F).

> I rank myself as an 8 for doing independent research. I am self-driven and need little direction (Participant G).

> I think I would rank myself an 8 for conducting independent research. I truly enjoyed qualitative and quantitative research (Participant H).

> Overall, less than 9 percent of the candidates felt that the demands of independent research were a factor in their not completing the degree.

Dissertation Committee. Table 6 addresses the candidates' establishment of a full dissertation committee. The overall findings showed that all of the candidates had established a full committee before the end of the semester after successful completion of the preliminary examination, suggesting that this was not an obstacle to completing the degree.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that the establishing a full dissertation committee did not affect the decision not to complete:

> I had a chair for my study shortly after completing the preliminary examination and had full membership in about one month (Participant C).

> I had a full dissertation committee in June of 1985 (Participant F).

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Yes, I accomplished this the second week on campus (Participant J).

Was never a resident but did come to campus in order to talk to my professors and generate a support system (Participant D).

Relationship with Chair and Committee Members. Table 7 addresses the candidate's relationship with the chair and committee members. Fifty-four percent of the candidates stated that this relationship was "fair," 36 percent rated it as "good," and only 9 percent said it was "poor."

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested the relationship with the chair and committee members was not a factor in doctoral degree incompletion:

I cannot say enough good things about my chair. Without him, there wouldn't have been the possibility of a doctorate (Participant A).

Very close relationship with the committee chairman, limited communication with other committee members, as protocol required contacts through chairman (Participant B).

Good, mostly supportive (Participant G).

Descriptive words: mentor, advisor, committed, engaging, and supportive.

Chair's Help: instrumental with revisions, managed the politics of the system, procedural knowledge of University rules and regulations was high.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested the relationship with the chair and committee members was a factor in abandoning the degree:

My relationship with my chair and committee members was fair. My committee members seemed to have some issues among themselves that they had not addressed (Participant C).

My relationship with my chair and committee members was fair (Participant F).

My relationship was very educationally eye opening (Participant D).

Descriptive words: distant, unsupportive, contradictory and frustrating.

Chairs Help: He was not strong enough to keep the committee together as a whole, which in turn broke down the lines of communication.

Chair not as supportive as one of the committee members.

Communication Mechanisms. Table 8 addresses the means of communication the candidates used with the chair and committee members and focuses on which medium the candidates found to be most efficient and which were least efficient.

The telephone was the method of communication used most often by the candidates, with 72 percent of the candidates responding that it was both the one they used most often and it was the most efficient. The least efficient method of communication, which 64 percent of candidate pointed out, was the postal service.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested which methods of communication were most efficient in working with the chair and committee members:

Communication included much telephoning, direct appointments, and the Postal Service (Participant A).

I used the telephone, fax, e-mail and Postal Service (Participant B).

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I communicated by means of the telephone, the Postal Service and
the fax (Participant I).

Frequency of Communications. Table 9 addresses the frequency of communication

with the chair and committee members and the response time after communication was

initiated. Forty-five percent of the candidates used the aforementioned methods of

communication on a weekly basis, 36 percent on a bi-weekly basis, and 18 percent less

often than every two weeks.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that frequency

of communication and response time was not a factor in their attrition:

This varied as to what aspect of the paper I was working on. When
I got to a really technical part of the paper, communication took place
weekly, less technical about every other week (Participant F).

I conferred with my chair on a bi-weekly basis. He usually would
respond back to me within 24 hours (Participant H).

Weekly. My chair usually responded within 24 hours (Participant
K).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that

communication was a factor in their attrition:

The frequency of the communication was dependent on time.
There was lost time between returning of calls from Blacksburg. Maybe a
weeks lag time (Participant A).

I communicated bi-weekly. The chair responded within 1 to 5 days.
The other committee members took from 1 to 3 weeks (Participant B).

Response time varied from 2 to 3 days to 1 week, depending on
which committee member I was addressing (Participant E).

Soundness of Ideas. Table 10 refers to how ideas were discussed and presented to

the committee. Fifty-five percent of the candidates stated that the extent to which ideas

were discussed was "good," 18 percent said that this was "fair," and 27 percent

rated it "poor."

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that the

availability of committee members to discuss the soundness of ideas was not a factor in

leaving the program:

> Quite often, I usually called and discussed ideas individually with
> committee members (Participant D).

> I had several group meetings and several individual meetings with
> committee members (Participant F).

> To a great extent, conferences, constant rewrites, and individual
> guidance (Participant G).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that the

availability of committee members to discuss the soundness of ideas was a factor in

leaving the program:

> Few opportunities. Once my prospectus was approved it seemed
> that it was harder to get the members together as a team to run new ideas
> by them (Participant E).

> Only at my prospectus meeting. Verbal and written feedback
> during prospectus and on the prospectus document (Participant I).

> This was minimal. I really only got feedback at the prospectus
> meeting (Participant K).

Family/Personal Obligations. Table 11 addresses the extent to which personal or

family obligations took time away from degree completion. Sixty-four percent of the

candidates responded that these considerations interfered to a great extent, 9 percent

responded "to a medium extent," and 27 percent responded "to a small extent."

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that

family/personal obligations were not a factor in the incomplete degree:

> None, I am single, therefore what I was doing was on my own accord (Participant F).

> Small extent, individual personal reasons overshadowed family obligations (Participant J).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that

family/personal obligation were a factor in the incomplete degree:

> To a great extent. Guilt came into play after I completed my pre-prospectus. The amount of time I had to spend in the library away from my family was astronomical (Participant E).

> To a great extent. My son was a senior in high school and excelled in both football and basketball. I made the choice that he needed me there for support in order for him to continue in the path he had started down. My younger daughter became ill and was hospitalized for several months (Participant I).

Support. Table 12 addresses support from family and significant others. All of the

candidates stated that they had full family and significant other support.

Examples of comments by the respondents that suggested that family support

was not a factor in abandoning the degree:

> I would not have gotten as far as I did without my family's support. My husband even went as far as helping with library research and editing of papers (Participant A).

> All family members were indeed supportive and felt that the choice that I had made to further my education was a wise one (Participant C).

> Much support, my spouse took my not completing harder than I did (Participant I).

Not one candidate responded in the negative on this question in any manner. Some candidates stated that they began to feel guilty about being absent from the home, but each stated that family support and the support of significant others was always present.

Personal Factors. Table 13 refers to candidates' personal life choices and whether they played a role in degree completion. Seventy-two percent of the candidates stated that personal factors did play a role in their not completing the degree, whereas 28 percent stated this factor was not a strong one.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested personal factors played a role in the incomplete degree:

Personal factors did not play a role in my not completing the degree. I had tremendous support on all levels (Participant A).

I tried to keep my personal obligations completely separate from school obligations (Participant B).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that personal factors played a role in the incomplete degree:

I am a single parent and at the time had three grandchildren under the age of 4. One of them was extremely ill at birth and was constantly in and out of the hospital for the first year of his life (Participant C).

I decided that my family needed to come first before my degree (Participant D).

I lost all sense of self. I began to feel guilty (Participant E).

Distance. Table 14 shows that no comments were identified that suggested that a long distance move farther away from Virginia Tech was a factor in degree completion.

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Personal Finances. Table 15 addresses the significance of personal finances of each candidate and if this factor was significant in degree completion. Seventy-three percent of the candidates stated that personal finances were a factor in not completing the degree, whereas 27 percent indicated this factor was not significant.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that personal finances were not a factor:

Personal finances were not a factor to my completing the degree. I had established a "school fund" prior to starting work on my degree (Participant F).

The classes were sat up such that it was not a burden each semester (Participant G).

Structure of payments allowed me to put away monthly what I knew would be due at the beginning of the new semester (Participant K).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that personal finances were a factor:

It took a lot of money. I decided it wasn't worth it as I wasn't getting a promotion (Participant A).

Knowing that I was not going to complete the degree in the shortest time period, I knew I could not continue paying additional tuition payments (Participant B).

I started with one group of people but was left behind due to having to drop a class for financial reasons (Participant D).

Financial Aid.   Table 16 explores candidates' knowledge of the availability of financial aid. Fifty-five percent of the candidates stated that they were aware of some type of financial aid available, whereas 45 percent said they were not aware of any aid available.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested they knew that financial aid was available:

Yes, I did know that there were some types of aid available but did not apply for any (Participant B).

Yes, I received a scholarship for the last twelve hours (Participant F).

Yes, I applied and received a scholarship (Participant J).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested they were unaware that financial aid was available:

No, and seeing that classes were not directly on campus it was hard to inquire as to what was available (Participant A).

No, I wasn't aware of any aid but when I did look into financial aid, in order to qualify, you had to be taking a certain amount of hours (Participant D).

No, I wasn't aware of aid and did not receive any aid (Participant I).

Job/Professional Responsibilities. Table17 explores the extent to which a paying job or professional responsibilities disrupted dissertation studies. Seventy-three percent of the candidates indicated that such responsibilities were a significant factor, whereas 27 percent stated they were not.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that job/professional responsibilities were not a factor in the incomplete degree:

Minimal. This was not a problem (Participant G).

I would say, on the average my job held the same status during the dissertation writing stage as course work (Participant I).

This was minimal. As I stated earlier, I started the dissertation aspect of the study off with a bang, but just lost the interest to continue (Participant K).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that job/ professional responsibilities were a factor in the incomplete degree:

My job had to come first (Participant A).

I would say that about 85% of time taken away from my dissertation was because of professional responsibilities (Participant E).

I had to have my job, therefore the responsibilities associated with my job were first and foremost; after-hour and evening events played an extremely large role in my not completing the dissertation (Participant F).

Change in Job/Professional Responsibilities. Table 18 depicts any change of job made or promotion received by the candidates during the degree program. Fifty-five percent of the candidates received a promotion or a change in job, whereas 45 percent remained in the same position while doing graduate coursework.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested a change in job was not a significant factor in the incomplete degree:

No, I did not change jobs or receive a promotion but my responsibilities did increase (Participant E).

No, this was not a factor in my completing the degree (Participant J).

No, I did not change jobs but I did know that I had to perform well on my job in order to keep my job (Participant I).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested a change in job was a significant factor in the incomplete degree:

I changed positions entirely. I went from being an assistant

principal in an elementary school to an assistant principal at a high school. I never knew the extent of after-school activities involved in this job (Participant C).

This made it harder for me to work on my paper at work, made it harder for me to have the resources that I had grown accustomed to and I found myself without enough time to complete the degree (Participant H).

Employer Support Table 19 explores the support of the candidate's employer while seeking the degree. Fifty-four percent of the candidates stated that they had "full support," 36 percent indicated they had "no support," and 9 percent said that the employer was "neither supportive nor non-supportive."

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that employer support was not a factor in the incomplete degree:

My employer supported my having to take time off for major exams, visits to campus, etc (Participant C).

My employer decided if it this was something that I wanted, then it would be something that he would support (Participant G).

My boss would let me leave early to study or attend a meeting with my advisor. I was granted annual leave and she arranged a duty schedule to be more flexible and offered verbal encouragement and office equipment for my disposal (Participant I).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that employer support was a factor in the incomplete degree:

I really did not have the support of my principal, nor did the system encourage its employees to further their education (Participant B).

My immediate principal was not encouraging or supportive. The school system paid one semester per year (Participant A).

Even during my illness he was not supportive (Participant K).

Additional Impeding Factors.   Table 20 addresses additional factors that the

candidates identified as impeding degree completion.   A variety of additional factors

were revealed in responses to this question, ranging from how the system works to the

inner strength one has to have in order to complete the degree successfully. A number

of statements made by the candidates had been addressed in previous questions. One

statement made by a candidate stood out from the others: Direct guidance on how to

focus energy and time (Participant G).

Advice to New Students. Table 21 addresses advice the candidates would give a new

student coming into the program.

Examples of comments made by the candidates of information they would share

with the new student:

Develop and maintain a schedule and work with a partner for
mutual support (Participant B).

Find out what issues are popular with professors. Select members
of your committee that are knowledgeable and supportive of your topic.
Maintain open communication with professors and maintain a spirit of
humility at all times (Participant G).

Stay focused. Do the program at your pace. If you need to take a
break, do so and don't feel guilty for having to do so (Participant I).

Future Degree Completion. Table 22 reports the candidates' responses when asked if

they planned to complete the degree in the future. Seventy-three percent stated that

they would not complete the degree in the future, whereas 27 percent stated they do

plan to do so.

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that degree completion is in their future plans:

I would eventually like to complete the degree. I have never thought otherwise. I just have to get myself in the position where I am comfortable in all aspects of my life and am ready to be humiliated into complacency (Participant H).

I am presently working sporadically with a local professor who is giving me tips and insights that have proved to be extremely valuable (Participant I).

Examples of comments made by the respondents that suggested that degree completion is not in future plans:

Due to the unstructured nature of completing the dissertation I know I won't finish it. I have made inquiries from time to time but have never followed up on the information that was received (Participant B).

I am satisfied with my current position and have been advancing simply on the merit of my work, not the title I may have received (Participant C).

I don't see this as a possibility in the near or distant future (Participant F).

<u>Summary of Findings</u>

The 11 candidates participating in this study responded to 22 questions relating to one research question with five subquestions. In all cases, wording of the questions was the same.

The first set of questions required the respondents to determine factors in the dissertation experience associated with noncompletion of the doctoral degree. Thirty-four percent of the candidates responded that time and finances were the main reasons

for not completing the degree, but when asked to prioritize factors in order of importance, frustration and/or loss of interest ranked first, accounting for 36 percent of candidate responses. On-campus residency was not a requirement for over 82 percent of the candidates, but the absence of this aspect of the program (which is now required) did not hinder any candidate in their ability to conduct independent research according to self-ratings. Ninety-one percent of the candidates ranked themselves above average in ability to conduct independent research.

The second set of questions required respondents to address factors associated with committee advisement and its impact on the doctoral degree completion. All of the candidates had a full dissertation committee, with an established chair, shortly after the preliminary examination. Fifty-four percent of the candidates stated that they had a fair relationship with the chair and other members of the dissertation committee. Communication was most often accomplished by the use of a telephone, generally on a weekly basis, and the telephone was found to be the most efficient line of communication, according to 72 percent of the candidates. The U.S. Postal Service was found to be the least efficient method of communication according to 64 percent of the candidates. The opportunities to test the soundness of ideas with committee members were most frequently rated as good, at 55 percent; these opportunities were made available through conferences, committee meetings, and verbal and written feedback from committee members.

The third set of questions required respondents to address personal factors associated with the incomplete degree. Sixty-four percent of the candidates stated that

family or personal obligations were a significant factor in the incomplete degree, but all candidates also responded that they had total family support while working on the doctoral degree. Personal factors were rated as significant in the incomplete degree, earning 72 percent affirmative responses. Contributing factors included children, death, guilt, medical attention to a child, and medical attention to self. No candidate identified distance from the campus as a factor for not completing the degree.

The fourth set of questions required respondents to address relevant financial factors associated with the incomplete degree. Seventy-three percent of the candidates stated that personal finances were a significant factor. Of the 73 percent of candidates that stated this factor was significant, 45 percent were not aware of any type of available financial aid.

The fifth set of questions required respondents to address employee factors associated with the incomplete degree. Seventy-three percent of the candidates stated that professional responsibilities did detract from their dissertation studies. Fifty-five of the candidates changed jobs during the process and found new job responsibilities to be a contributing factor. Thirty-six percent of the candidates stated that their employers were not supportive of their earning the degree and the candidates saw this as a contributing factor, whereas 54 percent stated they had good support from their employers. The remaining 10 percent reported no influence by employers.

The last group of questions required respondents to address factors other than those previously discussed: information that would be helpful to a new student coming into the program, and plans, if any, to complete the degree. A variety of factors were

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revealed, but one candidate or another had addressed most factors in previous questions. Three additional factors that would have supported their efforts that had not been addressed by the survey follow:

- Direct guidance on how to focus energy and time.

- Commitment, inner strength, peer advisors, self-motivation, support from supervisors.

- Length of time professors feel that dissertation research/writing should take.

When describing the advice they would give a student new to the program, respondents made a number of suggestions (see Table 21, Appendix E). As to future plans concerning the degree, 73 percent of the candidates had no plans to complete the degree, and 27 percent stated they would like to complete their degree in the near future.

Overall, the data collected in this study were rich and descriptive and provided substantial information for this research project. Findings of this study revealed that doctoral degree completion is related to numerous factors. Findings also revealed that the importance of those factors is perceived differently from candidate to candidate.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the study conducted, a summary of the

findings, the conclusion, and the researcher's recommendations for further study.

Included is a review of the purpose of the study, a restatement of the research

questions, a summary of the related literature, a review of the research method used by

the researcher, and a synthesis of the findings and conclusions derived from the data

analysis. The researcher has made recommendations for further research.

Summary

This study examined the reasons for attrition of former doctoral candidates in the

College of Human Resources and Education in the Department of Educational

Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze this information and to explore the

candidates' perceptions about degree requirements.

Summary of Related Literature

The literature on graduate students, and specifically on the time it takes doctoral

students to complete degrees, can charitably be described as sparse. The following

review summarizes three studies published in the early 1960s. The first

comprehensive study of graduate education was *Berelson's Graduate Education in the*

United States (1960). Although this source is over 28 years old, it is still one of the

major sources of information on the topic and is cited in almost all sources that follow.

Another multi-disciplinary study was *Attrition of Graduate Students at the Ph.D. Level in*

the Traditional Arts and Sciences, by Tucker, Gottlieb, and Pease (1964). This

research was designed to study attrition, but one of its main contributions is a

discussion of the difficulties in defining attrition in a population in which it is relatively

common for individuals to take more than 10 years to complete their degree programs.

A third study often cited was *Of Time and the Doctorate, by Kenneth Wison* (1965).

Wilson's major contribution was the discussion of the factors that his respondents

identified as having the most influence on the duration of their doctoral studies.

This researcher examined key factors in the incomplete doctorate degree

experience. The primary research question and five sub-questions answered by the

study follow:

What are the barriers to completion of the doctoral degree?

1. What are the factors in the dissertation experience associated with non-completion of the degree?

2. What are the committee advisement factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

3. What are the personal factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

4. What are the relevant financial factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

5. What are the employment factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

The purpose of the present research was to explore rather than to confirm contributing factors leading to attrition. This study had several sample limitations. Research was limited to the analysis of factors affecting graduate student degree completion at one institution. The study was limited to data collected from doctoral candidates from 1983 to 1992 in the College of Human Resources and Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Therefore, the findings of this research are not generalizable to other university settings. Furthermore the sample size was small. Instead, the research should be ideographically interpreted in terms of particulars to the case, and tentatively applied (Lincoln & Gube, 1985).

Furthermore, this study was conducted by interviewing people who volunteered to participate and all participants were from one central geographical area. Some individuals declined to participate. Thus, it is possible that the volunteers differed in some significant way from the nonvolunteers, hence affecting the results of the research.

<u>Method</u>

The sample consisted of 11 doctoral candidates who consented to participate. The semistructured interview sought information about the candidates' perception of barriers to completion of the degree.

<u>Summary</u>

Results of the interviews were analyzed first for differences between candidates' opinions in general and to identify factors each interviewee believed had promoted, had no effect on, or impeded degree completion. Also, the most influential factors on the failure to complete the degree as ranked by the candidates were analyzed.

The semistructured interview strategy consists generally of a primary question, which is asked of all interviewees, followed by sub-questions. The interview is then free to expand and explain as needed.

Primary Question: What are the barriers to completion of the doctoral degree?

Sub-Question 1: What are the factors in the dissertation experience associated with non-completion of the degree?

The former doctoral candidates were asked to draw conclusions about the main reasons that students do not complete doctoral degrees. Two factors, time and finances, were pointed to equally (36%) by respondents as the number one barrier to degree completion. When the respondents were asked to prioritize barriers to doctoral

degree completion, frustration and/or loss of interest was ranked first (36 percent) followed by financial considerations (27 percent), family considerations (18 percent), and time and support considerations (9 percent each).

The related research suggested that the relevant variables in the doctoral dissertation represent three dimensions: motivation to complete a doctorate, time to work on the dissertation, and accommodation by academic judges. The comments written by the candidates in response to the interview questions supported this notion. Their comments, for example, suggested that the advisor was capable of contributing to each of these dimensions by playing the role of motivator, sponsor, and guide. By having the opportunity to play these roles simultaneously, the advisor was in a position to set the tone of a candidate's doctoral dissertation experience.

Sub-Question 2: What are the committee advisement factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

Fifty-four percent of the candidates reported some sort of difficulty with their advisor or dissertation committee members (see Table 7, Appendix E). In regard to the chair, Participant F wrote: "He was not strong enough to keep the committee together as a whole, which in turn broke down the lines of communication." Sometimes, difficulty involved a single influential member, as Participant J reported: "My chair was not as supportive as one of the committee members, I knew early in the study that I had chosen the wrong person for this role."

In other instances, difficulty involved the entire committee. Participant F

recalled, for example: "I chose the members because of the level of expertise I felt each could bring to my dissertation. This turned out to be the wrong thing to do because the personalities clashed terribly."

Sub-Question 3: What are the personal factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

Sixty-four percent of the candidates responded that family or other personal obligations took time away from working on the dissertation (see Table 11, Appendix E). Participant K reported: "Personal obligations played a more significant role than family obligations. I myself became ill and never found the energy to return to the grind of completing the degree." Participant F's progress was also interrupted: "Guilt came into play after I completed my pre-prospectus. The amount of time I had to spend in the library away from my family was astronomical. My job became tougher to deal with and my patience became obsolete."

Sub-Question 4: What are the relevant financial factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

Over 70 percent of the candidates responded that personal finances were a contributing factor to their not completing the doctoral degree (see Table 15, Appendix E). Participant J reported: "I began having difficulty towards the latter part of the courses. I did seek financial aid from the main campus and through other sources but was unsuccessful with both. The main reason I did not receive aid from the University

was due to full-time status requirements."

Fifty-five percent of the candidates were aware of financial aid that was available (see Table 16, Appendix E) whereas 45 percent stated they were not aware of any type of financial assistance.

Sub-Question 5: What are the employment factors associated with non-completion of the degree?

Seventy-three percent of the respondents stated that a paying job or professional responsibilities hindered the completion of the doctoral degree (see Table 17, Appendix E). Participant E reported: "I would say that about 85 percent of time taken away from my dissertation was because of professional responsibilities." The professional obligations were not always planned." Participant H recalled: "My new job held quite a few additional responsibilities than my previous job. I found myself continuing to put off research, writing and contacting my chair until I just could not get the energy to go any further."

Conclusion

Based on the data from this research, the researcher draws the following conclusions:

Candidate responses revealed that time and financial management along with professional obligations and various personal aspects were all significant factors contributing to failure to complete the degree. A secondary factor was financial

concerns and the inability to obtain information and resources to address these concerns.

Implications of the Study

Findings of this study permitted the researcher to identify several factors affecting doctoral degree completion at one institution. The next step might be to operationalize these factors by describing the patterns of attrition, desegregating attrition by the stages of study, and identifying connections between the patterns of attrition at various levels.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based upon the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:
1. Students should be oriented to the research expectations required for the dissertation at the onset of the one-credit-hour dissertation seminar and before the research block begins.
2. A system of advising that matches professors with doctoral candidates upon entry should be instituted.
3. Doctoral students should give careful consideration to choosing the dissertation chairman and committee members. When a chairman is selected, the student should discuss the potential members with the chair prior to asking the committee members to serve.
4. The doctoral student should identify research interest as early as possible. Bowen

and Rudenstine (1992) suggest that having students begin dissertation work in their first or second year of study would result in more effective graduate programs.

5. To deal with the problem of procrastination and lethargy, once the writing phase of a dissertation has begun, Germeroth (1991) recommends that students keep a dissertation progress log.

6. Consideration should be given to rotation of coursework. Theories of Educational Administration and the Advanced Topics in Educational Research should be in the earlier stages of coursework in order to alert students to the writing style expected in the field and to computer research needed in order to successfully complete papers and assignments for other courses.

7. The department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies should aggressively pursue more funding for dissertation research for their doctoral students.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Verification of Candidates

To: Educational Leadership Faculty

From: Lawrence H. Myers

Subject: Candidates for the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational

               Administration

Date: September 23, 1997

The following list compiled by the graduate school is composed of candidates for

the Doctor of Education degree that have successfully completed all course work, oral

and written portions of the preliminary exam, but have not completed the dissertation

from 1983 - 1992.

Please place your initials beside any candidate name for one or all of the

following reasons:

               a) student presently working on dissertation with faculty member

               b) student advised not to proceed after preliminary exam

               c) student not in EDAD program

Please return the completed forms to Dr. Glen Earthman on or before October 10,

1997. Your help in this verification process is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lawrence H. Myers

APPENDIX B

2905 Gatehouse Road

Norfolk, Virginia 23504

Date

Dear:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Administration program, of the College of Human Resources at Virginia Tech. The purpose of my research is to examine the barriers to non-completion of the degree as identified by candidates. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Human Resources.

This study consists of interviewing doctoral students who were admitted to candidacy from 1983-1992 to indicate factors that affected their not completing the degree. You have been selected randomly from a list supplied from the graduate office and verified by the faculty as not having completed your dissertation. My purpose in contacting you is to solicit your participation in this study.

The information gathered from these interviews may help to identify factors affecting graduate degree progress at Virginia Tech. Your frank and honest opinions

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during the interview will be very helpful in gaining a better understanding of your experiences as a doctoral candidate. The interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes, and will be audio taped. Interviews will be conducted during January and February 1998. You will have the freedom to set the date, time, and location for the interview, and the taping will be stopped at any time that you consider necessary. Transcripts of your interview will be available to you in case you would like to confirm the information you provided.

Confidentiality is guaranteed in this study. The researcher will not release identifiable information regarding the participants at any time. The audiotapes and transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed one year after the completion of this study. I will contact you by telephone in the next several days to determine your willingness to participate. If so, I will ask you to sign the statement at the end of this letter and return it to me.

Questions and concerns about this research or its conduct should be addressed to:

Lawrence H. Myers, Investigator   or   Dr. Glen Earthman

(757) 626-0953   (540) 231-9707

Thank you for your kind attention to this request. I hope you will give serious consideration to participating.

Sincerely,

Lawrence H. Myers

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Name_____

Subject's Permission

      I have read and understand the letter requesting my participation in the study

about factors that affect dissertation completion of doctoral students at Virginia Tech.

My questions and concerns have been answered and addressed. I voluntarily agree to

participate in this project.

     _____   _____

           Date   Signature

Lawrence H. Myers

2905 Gatehouse Road

Norfolk, Virginia 23504

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Name_____

Research Question:

What are the barriers to completion of the degree as identified by doctoral

candidates?

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study.

Your input is invaluable in determining which variables were barriers to completion of

the doctoral degree.

What I would like for you to do is to think back since finishing the course work, passing

the written and oral exams and share some of your impressions with me about the

doctoral experience.

1.   In what year did you write the preliminary examination?

2.   There are some students you know who were in the program and did not complete

      requirements for a degree. What do you think are the main reasons why these

      individuals did not finish?

A.	Were there any other reasons that may have contributed to this?

B.	Of those reasons, which were the most important ones?

C.	Were any of these reasons identified above influential in your doctoral degree experience?

3.	Would you please prioritize these factors from most important to least important? Lets discuss your reason for prioritizing these factors as you have.

4.	On-campus residency is now a requirement in order to complete the degree. After completion of the preliminary exams, did you participate in this experience?

Yes or No

If no, why not?

Was the residency requirement a formidable barrier for you?

Did it have any influence on your completing the degree?

Was this your stopping point in the program?

If you answered yes, while on campus would you tell me what area of the residency program was most beneficial to you? What area was least beneficial to you? Would you like to expound on either area in more detail?

5.	On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your ability to conduct independent research?

A.	Why do you think this?

B.	Rate your skill in conducting independent research after completing the residency requirement

C.	How do you feel about independent research if you did not attend residency?

I would like to ask some questions about the advisement aspect of the program.

6. Did you establish a full dissertation committee with an established chair before leaving campus during residency?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your chair and committee members?

    How helpful was your committee? In what way?

    A. What are some descriptive words you would use to describe this relationship?

    B. Give me examples of what your chair did to help you

8. What communication mechanisms did you employ to work with your chair and committee members?

    Telephone, Fax, E-mail, Postal Service, Federal Express, UPS

    A. Which of these communication mechanisms did you find most efficient in giving and receiving information?

    B. Which of these communication mechanisms did you find least efficient in giving and receiving information?

9. How frequently were these methods of communication used? What was the response time after correspondences were received?

10. To what extent did you have opportunities to test the soundness of research ideas with the committee members? How was this accomplished?

Now lets discuss some personal aspects of the degree process.

11. To what extent did family or personal obligations take time away from your doctorate studies?

12. In general, was your family or significant others supportive of your study for the doctorate?

13. Did personal factors play a role in your not completing the degree? If so, what are these factors and how significant were these contribution to you not completing the degree?

14. Did a long distance move further away from Tech cause you not to complete the degree? Example - job relocation, military transfer...

Now lets move on to the financing of the degree.

15. Were personal finances a factor to your completing the degree? If so, would you please elaborate?

16. During your full time status, were you aware of any financial aid available? If so, was this taken advantage of?

Now lets address your employment factors.

17. To what extent did a paying job or professional responsibilities take away from your dissertation studies?

18. Did you change jobs or receive a promotion while working on your degree? If so, how did this affect your doctoral studies?

19. Was your employer supportive of your completing your degree?

    Expound on that for me?

20. What factors, other than those already discussed, do you think impede degree completion?

21. Suppose I was a new student to this program, what would you tell me about things in order successfully complete my doctoral degree in a reasonable time?

22. Do you ever plan to complete your degree in the future?

Again I would like to thank you for taking the time and agreeing to participate in my study. As I stated earlier, the results of this study will be sent to you if requested.

APPENDIX D

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Project

Title of Project: Barriers to Non-Completion of the Doctoral

Degree in Educational Administration

Investigators: Lawrence H. Myers and Dr. Glen Earthman

I.   The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the attrition of doctoral candidates in the

College of Human Resources and Education in the Department of Educational

Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

II.   You will be asked to participate in an interview with Lawrence H. Myers. The

interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked semi-structured,

open-ended questions about your doctoral experience. The interview will be recorded

and transcribed for data analysis. In addition to the interview you will be requested to

complete a short self-administered questionnaire.

III.   Risks

There are no foreseeable physical or emotional risks to you.

IV.   Benefits of This Project

It is expected that the data from this study will enlighten the faculty in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies of the attrition process at the doctorate level. An understanding of the doctoral attrition process may serve as a basis for developing retention programs. Successful retention programs become the opportunities for institutional self-renewal.

V.   Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your identity will be known only by the researchers. Each transcribed interview will be coded numerically for the researcher's use. No personal names will be used. People mentioned in the interview will be referred to only by job title (i.e., teacher, administrator, central office administrator, etc.)

A reference list of the coded interview and tapes will be secured in a locked box and placed away from the research materials.

VI.   Compensation

You will not be compensated for participating in the study.

VII.   Freedom to Withdraw

You may withdraw from the study at any time and are free to respond to any

questions asked during the interview.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional

Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute

and State University and by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy

Studies.

IX.   Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntary agree to participate in this study. My responsibility is to respond to a

60 to 90-minute (face to face interview).

X.   Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed consent and conditions of this project.

I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my

voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by

the rules of this project.

_____ _____

                  Signature   Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conducts, I may contact:

_____   _____

          Investigator(s)   Phone

_____   _____

          Faculty Advisor   Phone

_____   _____

          Chair, IRB   Phone

          Research Division

APPENDIX E

TABLE 1

Table of Findings: Research Question I

In what year did you write the preliminary examination?

The breakdown was as follows:

1984 ----2

1985 ----2

1987 ----1

1989 ----1

1990 ----4

1992 ----1

TABLE 2

Table of Findings: Research Question 2

There are some students you know who were in the program and did not complete requirements for a degree. What do you think are the main reasons why these individuals did not finish?

      A.   Were there any other reasons that may have contributed to this?
      B.   Of those reasons, which were the most important ones?
      C.   Were any of these reasons identified above influential in your doctoral degree experience?

Participant	Response
Participant A	I feel the main reason people don't finish is that they get weary of taking two steps forward, and one back. A. Other reasons are: running out of money to pay tuition; difficulty of getting committee members together; loss of the long range goal, not able to see what is happening right now; rationalize that a doctorate isn't necessary for advancement; and decide that too much time is being expended for naught. B. The important ones were running out of money and rationalizing that it is not worth the headache. C. All of the reasons were rationalizations to stop but I decided that it was not needed for advancement in my current position. I feel that entering administrators will need this degree in order to compete. I on the other hand already have a principalship and am not looking forward to advancing any further.
Participant B	The main reason that I view as reasons for not completing the degree was the time constraint that is involved in the completion of the degree. A. Financial limitations, family situations, health of students/family members, job requirements and loss of interest. B. I feel that the amount of time that one puts forth during class work in preparation for this final step the dissertation should be more focused if it is indeed going to be scrutinized so thoroughly. During course work, the style that is expected for the dissertation to be completed in was not mandated for class papers. C. I am not a very focused individual; therefore I need a great deal of structure in order to complete any and all tasks. When I was left to complete the dissertation on my own without the benefit of structured time, I went astray.
Participant C	The main reasons I view are the frustration one reaches with getting proposal approval, committee composition and personality conflicts. A. There were several students that I was aware of that had a problem with the comprehensive exams. I am not sure if they decided to stop at that point. Personally I became frustrated with my committee members not being able to agree on one single aspect of what I wanted to research. I chose my dissertation committee and I did a poor job of it. B. Personal conflict between committee members. C. Yes, frustration with committee and the process one has to go through in order to get prospectus examination completed.
Participant D	For those students and myself I think the main reasons are lack of money, lack of time management and loss of interest and unsuccessful completion of the prospectus

	examination. A. Of course for each individual you would have a different reason but I think the aforementioned ones were probably the most important. B. Time Management and Money C. I had an unsuccessful first run at my prospectus exam. When I learned that I would not be graduating with the classmates that I started with, I put the entire dissertation on the back burner and as of this date, haven't turned that flame back on.
Participant E	The main reason that most individuals do not finish the dissertation is the loss of motivation, family commitment, change of jobs and the low level of support from key committee members. A. Money and time B. Lack of support from dissertation committee. C. Low Level of Support, I felt that each time I tried to get an idea past my chairperson, one of the members of my committee would influence him to make a decision that would be totally the opposite of what we had discussed. My chair was not as strong as I thought he should have been with issues that I felt he should have been in control of. He was the expert on my topic but others influenced his decisions to my dismay.
Participant F	There are several reasons that I have found out by talking to other individuals that did not complete the degree agree on. It seems that the main reasons were lack of money, time and support. A. Commitment to complete the degree. B. Time and Support usually came up more often than any other reason. C. I seemed to find time to do everything else except work on my dissertation. I enjoyed the support I received during class work from my classmates. Working on this project individually without this structure caused me so problems as far as setting time lines and deadlines for completion.
Participant G	One of the main reasons individuals did not finish the dissertation was due to the inability to set aside time to work on the dissertation and to keep focused and structured. A. Family, personal and job demands B. Time and the demands of a new job. C. The major reason for me was the lack of time. I did start a new job but it was no more demanding than my previous job, therefore I can't use it as an excuse. I just lost interest and became unmotivated to continue.
Participant H	One of the main reasons is that people have not continued to conduct this part of the course work as if it were a class. Discipline is key to continuing in the mode they were in while in class. A. New job, change in family status, major loss in family and money. B. Money and time C. My new job, it took up a major portion of my time and I found myself taking work home to complete that I never had to do before. This did not allow me to work on my paper as I did my course work and I soon found myself stating "I'll get to it next week", next week has never come.
Participant I	Some of the students decided that once they received their CAGS degree, they were not going to go any further. Others decided that they did not have the financial support, committee support nor family support to go on. A. Loss of interest, no intention of completing program once started, motivated by others not by self (Only did it to impress his employer, not for self-improvement).

	B. Financial support, committee support C. Yes, I really did not feel that I had the support of my committee on my topic and this was truly puzzling to me. They agreed that it was a good topic in order to do research on but whenever I hit a barrier, I did not feel I had the support necessary in order get around these barriers.
Participant J	Some of my classmates including myself decided that we had jumped through enough hoops for one lifetime. I felt that I was treated like a kid in high school instead of a professional in my field that had been on my current job for twenty years. A. Financial support, time constraints, loss of interest, decision not to go on. B. Financial support and loss of interest. C. Loss of interest was the main reason I decided not to complete the degree but this was in turn brought about by the way I was treated by those in charge of the program.
Participant K	For some of the students, the course work which was structured and had specific time lines was not overwhelming. When it came to writing the dissertation, I don't feel that we were properly trained to do so. The research class was beneficial in some areas but left large gaps in other areas. I don't feel that as a whole the class was ready to take on independent research. A. Frustration, Lack of Support, Lack of Financial Resources. B. Frustration, Lack of Support C. For me it was frustration. I became totally frustrated when I couldn't find what I needed and didn't know where to turn to in order get information needed.

TABLE 3

Table of Findings: Research Question 3

Would you please prioritize these factors from most important to least important? Lets discuss your reason for prioritizing these factors as you have.

Participant	Response
Participant A	The main reason I became discouraged is the feeling of not making progress. The second priority was the expenditure of too much for naught. Thirdly, I had difficulty in trying to get the committee to come to consensus; didn't feel the need for a doctorate, and was about to run out of money.
Participant B	I would rank time constraint as the most important, financial limitations as second and job requirement as third. As I stated earlier I am a poor manager of time and only do well when I have a specific time period in which things are due. The financial aspect of obtaining the degree seemed to be increasing instead of decreasing as I got closer and closer to completing the degree. I was and am on the same job so that factor was minor.
Participant C	Most important was my frustration level, which I never seemed to get beyond with several members of my committee. I thought I had done a good job of choosing my committee members, but once behind closed door, I felt like a referee was needed for these educators who had already earned their degree. Next I would have to rank completion of the prospectus and then completion of the comprehensive exam.
Participant D	If I had to prioritize I would say for me lack of financial support would be most important, time management and the unsuccessful completion of the prospectus exam. I was having a hard time financially but was trying to stick with the program. When I was unsuccessful with my first try at my prospectus examination I figured it was not worth struggling as I was and risk the chance of this happing again, therefore I decided to stop.
Participant E	I would prioritize these factors as 1) low level of support from key committee members, 2) family commitment 3) change of job and 4) loss of motivation. I don't feel that I received the support that was given to other classmates and I think this was strictly from the chairperson that I selected. It seemed that he wanted the research topic/proposal to be what he wanted, not what I wanted. This lead to some hard feelings and I felt that I was talking to a brick wall whenever I did speak to him and other committee members.
Participant F	I think money, time and support from both family and committee members. It was really hard for me being a single parent to continue to pay for this degree. The time that I should have been spending on my dissertation was spent doing a part-time job out of my home without any ones knowledge.
Participant G	Family factors, then personal factors and a new job. My spouse became very unsupportive in my quest for this degree because he felt that I would be leaving him behind as far as educational issues were concerned. This had never been a concern until I actually got within striking distance of obtaining the degree. This not only affected my personal choices but also had a detrimental effect on my job performance.

Participant H	I feel that the major loss in my family was the most significant factor that caused me not to complete the degree. I didn't know how great an impact this loss had on me until I set down and analyzed the entire situation with respect to school, job, etc. I had started a new job, which was demanding, so I really poured my being into this new position and slacked off in other areas.
Participant I	I would prioritize it this way, financial support, committee support and self motivation. Money proved to be a problem for me the last year of course work and didn't let up thereafter. I had a problem with selecting a committee and once selected, had a problem with communicating with each. After experiencing some of these problems, I became less and less motivated to complete the degree.
Participant J	Loss of interest would be my first choice, then financial support and time constraints. I loss interest because of the process one has to go through in order to please each and every member of the dissertation committee. I found this to be a joke. Some of the members could not even stay in a room with each other and agree on a topic but were suppose to be there to encourage you to do the same. I ran into financial difficulty and sought out financial aid but did not receive any.
Participant K	For me to prioritize the aforementioned item I still think total frustration would be number one. I was frustrated on what was expected which I felt I had not been properly instructed on during my research class. Other professors were aware that the research professor had some problems, but these problems were not addressed professionally.

TABLE 4

Table of Findings: Research Question 4

On campus residency is a requirement in order to complete the degree. While on campus would you tell me what area of the residency program was most beneficial to you? What area was least beneficial to you? Would you like to expound on either area in more detail?

Participant	Response
Participant A	I participated in two summers of living on campus. This was such a factor as I commuted for a total of twelve weekends as I had the responsibility of teenagers at home. This living on campus was expensive, inconvenient, and I am not sure I felt the benefit of two summers. Thank goodness, it has been modified to one. The most beneficial part of the program was the access to the library and the concentration on the reason for being there. The least benefit was the accessibility to the committee members as many of them were out conducting summer consulting work.
Participant B	On campus residency was not a requirement to complete the degree but I did take it upon myself to spend a summer on campus in order to be closer to my professors and hopefully work on my dissertation more diligently. The area that I found to be most beneficial while on campus was library research, least beneficial was that I did not get to communicate with my committee as often as I would have liked to due to the fact that most were on vacation during this time period.
Participant C	Residency was not a requirement therefore I did not participate in it. From what I understand from other students who have gone through the program since it has been a requirement, it has been beneficial in that you have the support of other students that are in the same predicament that you are in and it is helpful to bounce ideas off each other.
Participant D	No, I did not participate in this aspect of the program, I think it was started a couple of years later. I really do think this aspect of the program would have been a burden seeing that I was already experiencing financial problems.
Participant E	No, I did not participate in this aspect of the program and am not that familiar with it to answer whether it would have been a burden or not.
Participant F	No, I did not participate in summer residency. I have gotten information on this area because if I ever do decide to complete this degree, those who have attended have stated that it is a rewarding experience, which could help me complete my degree.
Participant G	No, this was not required at the time I went through the program but at the time I had a co-worker that had taken leave to work on his doctorate so I stayed with him for several weeks and made appointments and gathered information while there. From talking to individuals who have attended residency, I don't see what they are doing that I didn't do on my own. It sounds like the classes are unstructured and that the students are pretty much left to do what they need to do in order to complete the degree.
Participant H	This was not a requirement in the program. I am not real familiar with the program, therefore I don't know if it would have been a burden or not.

Participant I	No, this was not a requirement when I went through the program so I don't know if it would have been a formidable barrier or if it would have had any influence on my completing the degree.
Participant J	Yes, it was a requirement and I think my class was the first class that had to officially participate in this program. No, the residency requirement was not a formidable barrier because it took me away from my job which was suppose to allow me to concentrate solely on my dissertation. Unfortunately I became so frustrated on how the program was run and what was expected of the students to do on there own that I shut down while there and began making voyages home each and every weekend.
Participant K	No, this was not a requirement of the program. I have heard from those who have attend the mandatory residency program that it helps one stay focused and it allows more one on one time with the professors. I think this aspect of the program would have been beneficial to me because I became frustrated with research and could have used some positive prompting.

TABLE 5

Table of Findings: Research Question 5

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your ability to conduct independent research?
      A.   Why do you think this?
      B.   Rate your skill in conducting independent research after completing the residency requirement.
      C.   How do you feel about independent research if you did not attend residency?

Participant	Response
Participant A	My ability to conduct independent research was/is a 7. I am very self -motivated and task oriented.
Participant B	I would give myself a 6 on independent research. There are many types of studies and I felt comfortable with the method I used for my research.
Participant C	I would rate my ability to conduct independent research as a 7. I felt that I got a fairly good background for doing research from my research class and all other I learned independently.
Participant D	10. Conducting research was never a problem for me. Storing, computing, assimilating. Now that's a different avenue altogether.
Participant E	I would say 7+. I had little exposure to qualitative research and had to learn more about this process independently.
Participant F	I think I ranked about average in terms of being able to conduct research independently. Average for me would be about a 6.
Participant G	I rank myself as an 8 for doing independent research. I am self-driven and need little direction. I never participated in residency.
Participant H	I think I would have to give myself an 8 for conducting independent research. I truly enjoyed qualitative and quantitative research.
Participant I	On a scale of 1 to 10, I would rank myself as a 7 due to the fact that I thought myself weak in the qualitative area of research. It seemed that most class coverage concentrated on quantitative research methodology.
Participant J	I would rank myself as a seven before, during and after residency. My major research professor was not available while on campus due to his illness so I basically took what I had learned from class to campus and sharpened those skills.
Participant K	I was poor in the area of independent research. I always felt that I was missing what 75% of the class had gotten during lectures, therefore I would rank myself as a 5.

TABLE 6

Table of Findings: Research Question 6

Did you establish a full dissertation committee with an established chair before leaving campus during residency?

Participant	Response
Participant A	As I stated earlier residency was not a requirement but I did stay on campus. While on campus I had the opportunity to establish a full dissertation committee.
Participant B	I established a full dissertation committee while on campus, not during residency but when I elected to stay there. This I found to be very time consuming because at the time several of the professors had left for vacation and were doing other things of interest. I finally got my last signature one-day before leaving campus after being there for nearly four weeks.
Participant C	This particular question does not apply to me because residency was not a requirement. I had a chair for my study shortly after completing the preliminary exam and had full membership in about one month.
Participant D	Was never a resident but did come to campus in order to talk to my professors and generate a support system. A complete committee was formed in September of the same summer.
Participant E	I had started establishing a dissertation committee as soon as I completed my preliminary examination. I completed this task in July.
Participant F	I had a full dissertation committee in June of 1985. Residency was not a requirement of the program.
Participant G	Residency was not a requirement but I did visit the campus and have a full committee by the end of June.
Participant H	I really did not have a full committee until around August. I procrastinated and did not even select a chair until July and by the time we discussed my topic and he gave me feedback, it was July.
Participant I	My full dissertation committee was completed by July.
Participant J	Yes, I accomplished this the second week on campus.
Participant K	In July I had a full dissertation committee established.

TABLE 7

Table of Finding: Research Question 7

How would you describe your relationship with your chair and committee members?
      A.   How helpful was your committee? In what way?
      B.   What are some descriptive words you would use to describe this relationship?
      C.   Give me examples of what your chair did to help you?

Participant	Response
Participant A	I cannot say enough good things about my chair. Without him, there wouldn't have been a doctorate. He was invaluable and was able to get votes in so many ways. Some of the committee members didn't even know I existed B. Descriptive words would be mentor, advisor, helper, coach, negotiator and editor. C. My chair did much editing, advising, and went to bat with other committee members. He was instrumental in helping with revisions also.
Participant B	Very close relationship with the committee chairman, limited communication with other committee members as protocol required contacts through chairman. Several committee members were especially helpful and contributed support in their area of expertise. B. Some of the descriptive words I would use would be supportive, encouraging and committed. C. He managed the "politics" of the system. He met with me frequently to provide feedback, and to establish schedule for completion. He also provided constant moral support and encouragement.
Participant C	My relationship with my chair and committee members was fair. My committee members seemed to have some issues among themselves that they had not addressed. A. My committee was fair. Finally one person, the chair took over all reviews due to others schedules. This was a much better and smoother process. B. Some of the descriptive words I would use to describe my committee relationship would be tenuous, distant disrespect and a fine farewell. C. My chair gave me feedback but it was actually late in the process.
Participant D	My relationship was very educationally eye opening. A. Due to the structure and boundaries put on the candidates as far as how to manage the distribution of your chapters; my contact with committee members was minimal. Very little guidance or support. B. Descriptive words would be invisible members, distant, unsupportive, and unrealistic. C. My chair started out be available but became distant as my study continued.
Participant E	My relationship with most members was good. The relationship between the chair and co-chair could have been better. A. Some gave excellent guidance; one was hard to reach and appeared insensitive. B. Some descriptive words would be contradictory, understanding, unsupportive and facilitator. C. He read my prospectus, technical assistance was low, procedural knowledge of university rules and regulations was high.

Participant F	My relationship was fair; relationship among committee members was strained and very obvious. A. I chose the members because of the level of expertise I felt each could bring to my dissertation. This turned out to be the wrong thing to do because the personalities clashed terribly. B. Tiring, Frustrating, Disappointing and Unexpressed Knowledge. C. He was not strong enough to keep the committee together as a whole which in turn broke down the lines of communication.
Participant G	Good, mostly supportive. A. Some members were quite helpful which made up for those that did not get as involved. B. Engaging, interested and supportive C. My chair assisted me with format, organization and carving out key concepts, deadlines and keeping me focused.
Participant H	Fair. A. My committee as a whole was less than supportive. There were some members that were more helpful than others. B. Frustrating, Challenging, Questionable. C. Addressed issues relative to flow of paper. Edited for problems and grammar.
Participant I	Poor A. I did not feel I had the support of the committee, nor the chair once my topic was approved. B. Puzzling, Frustrating, Explosive C. My chair was not strong, therefore the committee ran without the organization skills needed in order to be successful.
Participant J	Fair to Good A. As with everything, some members gave more support than others. Some of the committee members gave you information that was available that you as a student may not have been aware of. This included information for you dissertation as well as financial funds availability. B. Helpful, Creative, Professional C. My chair was not as supportive as one of the committee members, I knew early in the study that I had chosen the wrong person for this role.
Participant K	Fair A. My committee was helpful in that they provided feedback and information that needed in order for me to get to prospectus. B. Frustrating, Unsupportive, Unavailable C. Stayed in contact with me, returned calls, answered questions.

TABLE 8

Table of Findings: Research Question 8

What communication mechanisms did you employ to work with your chair and committee members? Telephone, Fax, E-Mail, Postal Service, Federal Express, UPS
    A.   Which of these communication mechanisms did you find most efficient in giving and receiving information?
    B.   Which of these communication mechanisms did you find least efficient in giving and receiving information?

Participant A: Communication included much telephoning, direct appointments and the postal service.
    B. Telephone
    C. The Postal Service

Participant B: I used personal conferences, telephone, fax, E-mail and the postal service.
    A. Personal Conferences, Telephones and Fax
    B. Postal Service

Participant C: I used the telephone, fax, E-mail and postal service.
    A. Telephone
    B. Postal Service

Participant D: Telephone, Fax, E-mail, Postal Service
    A. E-mail and Fax
    B. Telephone

Participant E: Telephone, Fax, Postal Service
    A. Fax
    B. Postal Service

Participant F: Telephone, Fax, Postal Service and Federal Express
    A. Telephone
    B. Fax

Participant G: I employed the telephone, fax, E-mail and Federal Express.
    A. Telephone
    B. E-mail

Participant H: I used the telephone and postal service most often. I tried Federal express once but was much too expensive.
    A. Telephone
    B. Federal Express

Participant I: I communicated by means of the telephone, the postal service and the fax.
    A. The method I found most efficient was the telephone.
    B. Least efficient was the postal service.

Participant J: At one time or another I used all of the aforementioned means of communicating with the exception of UPS.   A. The telephone was most efficient.

B. The Postal Service was least efficient.

Participant K: Telephone, postal service and fax.
    B. Telephone
    C. Postal Service

TABLE 9

Table of Findings: Research Question 9

How frequent were these methods of communication used? What was the response time after correspondences were received?

Participant	Response
Participant A	The frequency of the communication was dependent on the time. There was last time between returning of calls from Blacksburg. Maybe a week's lag time.
Participant B	Bi-weekly The chair responded within one to five days. The other committee members took from one to three weeks.
Participant C	Usually weekly My chair responded within one or two days after receiving my information. The other committee members were not as efficient. Sometimes I never got a response from them.
Participant D	Weekly The response time from my chair was usually less than 24 hours.
Participant E	Weekly Response time varied from 2 to 3 days to 1 week, depending on which committee member I was addressing.
Participant F	This varied as to what aspect of the paper I was working on. When I got to a really technical part of the part, communication took place weekly, less technical about every other week. The response time was usually about 1 to 2 days.
Participant G	I used the aforementioned methods of communication about every third week. Response time was about 48 hours.
Participant H	I conferred with my chair on a bi-weekly basis. He usually would respond back to me within 24 hours.
Participant I	Every two weeks I tried to schedule a telephone conference. I always communicated in some form on a bi-weekly basis. Response time was usually about 24 to 48 hours.
Participant J	Bi-weekly This varied as to which committee member information was being requested from. My chair usually responded with 48 hours, other committee members took from one day to one week.
Participant K	Weekly. My chair usually responded within 24 hours.

TABLE 10

Table of Findings: Research Question 10

To what extent did you have opportunities to test the soundness of ideas with the committee members? How was this accomplished?

Participant	Response
Participant A	Depending on the idea, three of the committee members were very effective. I usually tried to hold a conference call that included all members that were available at that time.
Participant B	Yes Research ideas were discussed during conferences.
Participant C	Yes, on a scale of 1 to 10 I would say that the extent was about a 6.5. I had two full committee meetings.
Participant D	Quite often. I usually called and discussed ideas individually with committee members.
Participant E	Few opportunities. Once my prospectus was approved it seemed that it was harder to get the members together as a team to run new ideas by them.
Participant F	Good I had several group meetings and several individual meetings with committee members.
Participant G	To a great extent, conferences, constant rewrites, and individual guidance.
Participant H	I used every class opportunity with all professors to discuss research ideas.
Participant I	Only at my prospectus meeting. Verbal and written feedback during prospectus and on the prospectus document.
Participant J	Since I was on campus this aspect of the program was easy to take advantage of. I made appointments with individual professors and kicked around ideas in order to get their responses.
Participant K	This was minimal. I really only got feedback at the prospectus meeting.

TABLE 11

Table of Findings: Research Question 11

To what extent did family or personal obligations take time away from your doctorate studies?

Participant	Response
Participant A	A lot of time for personal reasons could have be taken away from the process, but my family took a back seat many times.
Participant B	Important family activities and work activities remained a priority. Optional personal activities were omitted.
Participant C	Very often, I am a single parent of three and helping to raise grandchildren. This took away from my research time, library time and individual time.
Participant D	Quite a bit. I realized that I had not spent any quality time with my family since starting the program. Vacations were put on hold, things that were important to other family members seemed not as important to me because of my commitment to the degree.
Participant E	A great extent. Guilt came into play after I completed my pre-prospectus. The amount of time I had to spend in the library away from my family was astronomical. My job became tougher to deal with and my patience became obsolete.
Participant F	None, I am single, therefore what I was doing was on my own accord.
Participant G	To a rather great extent, but I managed to work between schedules.
Participant H	Medium extent. I had to carefully balance duties as wife/mother.
Participant I	To a great extent. My son was a senior in high school and excelled in both football and basketball. I made the choice that he needed me there for support in order for him to continue in the path he had started down. My younger daughter became ill and was hospitalized for several months.
Participant J	Small extent. Individual personal reasons overshadowed family obligations.
Participant K	Personal obligations played a more significant role than family obligations. I myself became ill and never found the energy to return to the grind of completing the degree.

TABLE 12

Table of Findings: Research Question 12

In general, was your family or significant others supportive of your study for the doctorate?

Participant	Response
Participant A	Without a doubt, I would not have gotten as far as I did without my family's support. My husband even went as far as helping with library research and editing of papers.
Participant B	Yes, my family was very supportive. It seemed at times that my family was more enthused with my receiving the degree than I was.
Participant C	Absolutely. All members were indeed supportive and felt that the choice that I had made to further my education was a wise one.
Participant D	My family was supportive but I felt that they were beginning to tire of my absences. My children were young and didn't quite understand all of the logistics of me not being there for vacations, special school events, etc...
Participant E	Yes, I was the one that started feeling guilty about the amount of time that I left them to fend for themselves. My wife took up the slack but I felt I should have been there.
Participant F	Yes, my immediate family was extremely supportive. I did not have the burden that others had as far as a spouse is concerned.
Participant G	Yes, I had full family support. We as a family support each other on all educational fronts. My degree was one of those fronts.
Participant H	Yes, even though I felt that sometimes my family got tired of my not being there, I still felt their support.
Participant I	Yes, very much so. My spouse took my not completing harder than I did.
Participant J	Yes, all family members pitched in and kept the household running in my absence.
Participant K	Yes, most definitely

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TABLE 13

Table of Findings: Research Question 13

Did personal factors play a role in your not completing the degree? If so what are these factors and how significant were these contributions to your not completing the degree?

Participant	Response
Participant A	Personal factors did not play a role in my not completing the degree. I had tremendous support on all levels.
Participant B	No. I tried to keep my personal obligation completely separate from school obligations. I was very successful in accomplishing this, other factors were more significant than the personal ones.
Participant C	Most definitely. I am a single parent and at the time had three grandchildren under the age of four. One of them was extremely ill at birth and was constantly in and out of the hospital for the first year of his life. This took a significant amount of time away from my study.
Participant D	Yes. I decided that my family needed to come first before my degree. In putting them at the rear I observed how much of their lives I was missing. I decided one had to be more important than the other.
Participant E	Yes, to a great extent. I lost all sense of self. I began to feel guilty about the time I was spending away from my family.
Participant F	No, personal factors did not play a role in my completing my degree. I had scheduled this degree into my lifestyle at the time I started but other issues developed as I progressed in the program that took precedence over completing the degree.
Participant G	Personal factors did play a role in my not completing the degree. I had to take leave in order to address the death of one parent and the living accommodations of the other. This took up a great deal of time and I just never seemed to get back on track.
Participant H	Yes, personal factors played a role in my not completing the degree. I had a small child who required a lot of attention. My husband company relocated and he decided that he did not want to relocate so for a long period of time I was the sole supporter of the family.
Participant I	Yes, very much so. The illness of my daughter which I had to take an extended break for, the scholastic and athletic events of my son which were rather mandatory and my own personal stress level which I didn't manage well.
Participant J	Yes, I purchased a new home and automobile at about the time I completed my preliminary examination. These additional expenses placed an unforeseen burden on me which in order to take care of I had to find additional employment, which took time away from my research.
Participant K	Yes, personal illness which I am still battling.

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TABLE 14

Table of Findings: Research Question 14

Did a long distance move further away from Tech cause you not to complete the degree? Example - job relocation, military transfer...

This was not a problem for any of the candidates interviewed.

TABLE 15

Table of Findings: Research Question 15

Were personal finances a factor to your completing the degree? If so, would you please elaborate?

Participant	Response
Participant A	Yes, it took a lot of money. I decided it wasn't worth it, as I wasn't getting a promotion.
Participant B	Yes, knowing that I was not going to complete the degree at the shortest time period, I knew I could not continue paying additional tuition payments.
Participant C	Yes, I took courses only as I could pay for them. At this time there was not a strict policy as to how course work was to be completed.
Participant D	Yes, I started with one group of people but was left behind due to dropping a class.
Participant E	Yes, to a small degree.
Participant F	No, personal finances were not a factor to degree completion. When I began taking classes I monitored my finances so that classwork would be included in my budget. Class tuition did not come as a surprise during any phase of the program.
Participant G	No, this factor was not an issue for me. I think the way the program was designed allowed one to complete it without being financially burdened.
Participant H	Yes, I had a major loss in my family and I was responsible for all costs as far as all types of arrangements were concerned. It was an unexpected and uncalculated financial burden.
Participant I	Yes, I ran into some personal financial problems the last year of course work but made it through. I thought it would get better with the raise I received after my CAGS degree, but unfortunately this was not the case.
Participant J	Yes, I began having financial difficulty towards the latter part of courses. I did seek financial aid from the main campus and through other sources but was unsuccessful with both. The main reason I did not receive aid from campus was due to full-time status requirements.
Participant K	No, this was not a factor for me.

TABLE 16

Table of Findings: Research Question 16

During your full time status, were you aware of any financial aid available?

Participant	Response
Participant A	No, and seeing that classes were not directly on campus it was hard to inquire as to what was available.
Participant B	Yes, I did know that there were some types of aid available but did not apply for any.
Participant C	Yes, When I received the paperwork it was just too much to complete.
Participant D	No, I wasn't aware of any aid but when I did look into financial aid in order to qualify you had to be taking a certain amount of hours.
Participant E	Yes, did not qualify until the last year.
Participant F	Yes, I received a scholarship for the last twelve hours.
Participant G	Yes, a fellow student alerted me to the fact that he was getting a scholarship for the last year while writing his dissertation. Upon inquiry I too received this scholarship.
Participant H	No I wasn't aware of any aid but I expressed an interest to my chair and the next thing I knew I received $2300.00.
Participant I	No, wasn't aware of aid and did not receive any aid.
Participant J	Yes, I applied and received a scholarship.
Participant K	No, never received any aid.

TABLE 17

Table of Findings: Research Question 17

To what extent did a paying job or professional responsibilities take away from you dissertation studies?

Participant	Response
Participant A	My job had to come first.
Participant B	To a great extent. The position was intense and I had to give my full attention to making sure that my performance on this job was of top-notch quality.
Participant C	Professional responsibilities were a priority and did take time from my studies. I knew that moving from elementary to high school level would take up some of my evening hours, but I never thought that it would be to such a large extent. There seemed to be some activity that required an administrator going on every evening. Even with my co-workers taking on the bulk of these activities I found myself losing precious research/writing hours.
Participant D	Quite a bit. Professional responsibilities made it extremely difficult to keep up with deadlines.
Participant E	I would say that about 85% of time taken away from my dissertation was because of professional responsibilities.
Participant F	I had to have my job, therefore the responsibilities associated with my job were first and foremost, after hour and evening events played an extremely large role in my not completing the dissertation.
Participant G	Minimal. This was not a problem.
Participant H	To a great extent. My new job held quite a few additional responsibilities than my previous job. I found myself continuing to put off research, writing and contacting my chair until I just could not get the energy to go any further.
Participant I	I would say, on the average, my job held the same status during the dissertation writing stage as coursework.
Participant J	My job was my livelihood. I had to have my job in order to continue all aspects of my life. My job performance had to be acceptable in order for me to maintain my current position, therefore I would say professional responsibilities was to a great extent why my studies were not completed.
Participant K	This was minimal. As I stated earlier I started the dissertation aspect of the study off with a bang, but just lost the interest to continue.

TABLE 18

Table of Findings: Research Question 18

Did you change jobs or receive a promotion while working on your degree? If so, how did this affect your doctoral studies?

Participant	Response
Participant A	No, I did not receive a promotion while working on my degree but the amount of time it took away from my present position; I feel caused me not to get another position I was up for.
Participant B	Yes, I received a position that was very intense in that it required my full attention. I was hired as a clean up man in order to get a building that was in terrible shape as far as test scores and teacher morale were concerned back up to what the school administrated considered acceptable.
Participant C	Yes, I changed position entirely. I went from being an assistant principal in an elementary school to an assistant principal at a high school. I never knew the extent of after school activities involved in this job. The small increase in pay did not quite equal out in terms of the amount of hours put in.
Participant D	Yes, I changed school systems. I came from a large system but the particular school that I was assigned to had less than 900 students. The new assignment housed over 2000 students, just my discipline alphabet along was over 700 students. I spent most of my day trying to keep my head above water with this aspect of my job responsibilities.
Participant E	No, I did not change jobs or receive a promotion but my job responsibilities did increase.
Participant F	Yes and this slowed down the process that I had established for myself considerably. Slowly I began to let other things be more important than my completing the degree.
Participant G	Yes, I did change jobs but this really did not affect my completing my degree.
Participant H	Yes, this made it harder for me to work on my paper at work, made it harder for me to have the resources that I had grown accustomed to and I found myself without enough time to complete the degree.
Participant I	No I did not change jobs but I did know that I had to perform well on my job in order to keep my job.
Participant J	No, this was not a factor in my not completing the degree.
Participant K	No, I started on my dissertation with a bang, but just lost the energy to continue.

TABLE 19

Table of Findings: Research Question 19

Was your employer supportive of your completing your degree? Expound on that for me.

Participant	Response
Participant A	No, My immediate principal was not encouraging or supportive. The school system paid one semester per year.
Participant B	No, I really did not have the support of my principal, nor did the system encourage its employees to further their education.
Participant C	Yes, my employer supported my having to take time off for major exams, visits to campus etc...
Participant D	My employer was neither supportive nor non-supportive. He did not take an interest in my degree completion at all.
Participant E	Yes, he permitted time to visit committee members in the Tidewater area, scheduled appointments and time need for exam preparation.
Participant F	Yes, I received flexible hours, was allowed to take home a laptop computer and was given comp time for overtime spent in the office working on projects.
Participant G	Yes, my employer decided that if this was something that I wanted then it would be something that he would support.
Participant H	No, I really felt that he added additional work to my schedule in order to make the completion of my degree more difficult.
Participant I	Yes, my boss would let me leave early to study or attend a meeting with my advisor. I was granted annual leave and she arranged a duty schedule to be more flexible and offered verbal encouragement and office equipment for my disposal.
Participant J	Yes, my boss did not go over board to support me, but he did not make my job any more difficult.
Participant K	No, even during my personal illness he was not supportive.

TABLE 20

Table of Findings: Research Question 20

What factors, other than those already discussed, do you think impede degree completion?

Participant	Response
Participant A	The ability to work with not against the system. In order for things to continue to be beneficial for you, you have to learn what the system is willing to give to you. I feel that from prospectus completion it is known who will and who will not complete the degree.
Participant B	Frustration and not enough time to devote to research.
Participant C	Lack of encouragement from friends, family and co-workers.
Participant D	Attitude of committee members and slow responses from committee members.
Participant E	Length of time professors feel that a dissertation should take.
Participant F	Fatigue and lack of motivation.
Participant G	Direct guidance on how to focus energy and time.
Participant H	Commitment, inner strength, peer advisors, self-motivation, lack of support from supervisors.
Participant I	The old syndrome of I'm there you get there the best way you can.
Participant J	Loss of interest, committee attitudes and lack of support.
Participant K	Length of time that the dissertation entails.

TABLE 21

Table of Findings: Research Question 21

Suppose I were a new student to this program, what would you tell me about things in order to successfully complete my doctoral degree in a reasonable time?

Participant	Response
Participant A	As a new person to the program, I would address many things. 1. Have a mentor within the school system who wants to see you advance. 2. Develop a mentorship with a major professor who appreciates your capabilities. 3. Know that you will be humbled like you wouldn't believe. 4. Appreciate the fact that egos need to be stroked in so many ways. 5.Realize that you will give up five to six years of your life
Participant B	Develop and maintain a schedule and work with a partner for mutual support.
Participant C	Pick your committee members wisely. They should be able to get along with each other as well as respect each other so that power struggles don't interfere with your degree completion.
Participant D	Simply don't quit.
Participant E	Choose your chair and committee membership carefully, stick with your topic and don't let committee members discourage you.
Participant F	Pick a dissertation topic carefully.
Participant G	Find out what issues are popular with professors. Select members of your committee that are knowledgeable and supportive of your topic. Maintain open communication with professors and maintain a spirit of humility at all times.
Participant H	Watch out for the power/political games between professors.
Participant I	Stay focused, line up supporters and support systems ahead of time, get a mentor, set goals and deadlines.
Participant J	Use your time with your professors wisely. At each class try to find the time to get to know each professor at a level other than student/professor. Know which professors you can and cannot work with and try to learn which professors are friendly with each other. It is a big mistake to put professors that don't get along on your committee.
Participant K	Stay focused. Do the program at your pace. If you need to take a break, do so and don't feel guilty for having to do so.

TABLE 22

Table of Findings: Research Question 22

Do you ever plan to complete your degree in the future?

Participant	Response
Participant A	No. As I stated earlier, the degree is not needed for my current position and I plan to stay in this position until I retire.
Participant B	No, due to the unstructured nature of completing the dissertation I know I won't finish it. I have made inquiries from my chair from time to time but have never followed up on the information that was received.
Participant C	No, I am satisfied with my current position and have been advancing simply on the merit of my work, not the title I may have received.
Participant D	No, after missing the opportunity to complete the degree with member of the class I started with I have not had the interest to complete the degree. I know there were other individuals who did not graduate when they expected to and these individuals persevered and finally did receive the degree but I decided not to go that route and find other means to make my life seem fuller.
Participant E	Yes, but with a completely different dissertation chairperson. I have started investigating how I can remove the current chair without a stigmatism attached to doing this. There is only a small amount of individuals that one can chose from and you have to choose very carefully in order to be successful.
Participant F	No, I don't see this as a possibility in the near or distant future.
Participant G	No, I am now scrambling for time to spend with family and friends due to the hours spent on my current position.
Participant H	Yes, I would eventually like to complete the degree. I have never thought otherwise. I just have to get myself in the position where I am comfortable in all aspects of my life and am ready to be humiliated into complacency.
Participant I	Yes, I am presently working sporadically with a local professor who is giving me tips and insight that have proved to be extremely valuable.
Participant J	No.
Participant K	No, not from this University. I am going to check to see what Universities in the area would accept work from Tech in the doctorate program.

APPENDIX F

VITA

Lawrence H. Myers was born in Welch, West Virginia, on January 22, 1957. In 1979, he graduated from Christopher Newport College with a bachelor's degree in biology and a minor in education. Hampton Institute University granted him a Masters Degree in 1981. On August 9, 1997, the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University awarded the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study to Lawrence H. Myers.

Mr. Myers began his professional career as a high school physical science/earth science teacher in Smithfield, Virginia. For the past sixteen years, he has been employed by the Virginia Beach City Public Schools as an elementary, middle and secondary special education teacher, special education coordinator and secondary school administrator. Mr. Myers currently serves as vice-principal at Westlake High School in Waldorf, Maryland.

Upon completion of my formal education I plan to relocate to the Washington D. C. area and pursue a job in the area of program evaluation/ implementation, in order to help improve the education offered by the public schools in that area and elsewhere.