

Ph.D. completion: reasons for non-completion

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The Council of Graduate Schools recently released preliminary data collected for the Ph.D. Completion Project on completion rates by discipline. The aim of the project is to identify practices and strategies that will help more graduate students achieve timely completion of their Ph.D. programs. The 29 universities that participated in the survey included private and public as well as elite and up-coming institutions. The respondents to the survey were graduate students who completed their Ph.D.s in the fields of engineering, life sciences, math and physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

The respondents ranked the main factors contributing to completion of their Ph.D.s. 80% of them placed maximum importance on financial support, 60 % on family support, 39 % on social environment and peer support, 39 % on program quality, and 30 % on professional and career guidance.

Among disciplines, the rate of completion depends on the amount of borrowings. Humanities students often need to borrow more and take longer to complete their Ph.D.

When asked about the advice they received from mentors, respondents across all fields said research advice was the biggest gain. That was followed by career advice specially directed to students in humanities and social sciences. Teaching was the last area in which mentors gave advice to students.

The time-to-completion of Ph.D. rates among various fields was also studied. The study found that majority of the students in engineering and physical and biological sciences completed their Ph.D.s between years six and seven of their programs. In social sciences, only 40 % of the students completed in the same time, while only 29 % did so in humanities.

The next stage of the project will be interpretation and analysis of the data. The program director Daniel Denecke was certain other factors that affect the time to completion would emerge from the study. Availability of good jobs in some fields may also be the reason for non-completion of Ph.D. programs.

On the Net:

Why and When Ph.D. Students Finish
insidehighered.com/news/2007/07/17/phd