



Effect of Moral and Academic Student Support on Dissertation Completion Time

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Abstract

For the estimated 175,000 doctoral degrees conferred by postsecondary universities, an additional 40% of doctoral students are unable to complete their dissertation after successfully completing their coursework [1]. The doctoral students who do complete their dissertation often take many months longer than anticipated or budgeted for. Graduate institutions work diligently to avoid their students being so-called “All But Dissertation” or ABDs. To support the transition from course work to the independent work as a researcher, additional mentoring, virtual social communities of practice, and early reviews of research plans by accomplished researchers who have experience with the ethical treatment of participants are widely implemented by universities and the effectiveness of such initiatives has been investigated [2]. In order to offer a combination of additional academic as well as moral support, an online university in the United States introduced a companion course for its students in the fall semester 2017. The course is designed to keep the doctoral students progressing with tools that provide the students with an approximate timeline to completion, step-by-step instructions on how to proceed, and additional resources while frequently interacting with their colleagues in an online environment. Grounded in Dweck and Leggett’s achievement goal theory [3] which proposes a connection between achievement goals and affect in academic settings, the purpose of this study was to assess the effect of this new companion course on the number of weeks to prospectus and proposal approval. As the companion course has been implemented 12 months ago, the completion time to the final dissertation cannot be measured yet. The time to prospectus approval and the passing of the oral defense of the proposal will be compared between students who were in the program before the introduction of the companion course and students that participated in the companion course. After this initial step, further research will provide qualitative analysis of the perceptions of students and dissertation chairs on the level of academic and moral support provided by the supplemental companion course.

Keywords: *Doctoral education; online education; dissertation progress.*

References

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