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INFLUENCES ON DOCTOR OF EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED ALL PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS BUT DISSERTATION

Christopher Page
University of the Pacific

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INFLUENCES ON DOCTOR OF EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED
ALL PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS BUT DISSERTATION

By

Christopher Page

A Dissertation Submitted to the

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Educational Administration and Leadership

University of the Pacific
Stockton, California

2020

INFLUENCES ON DOCTOR OF EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED
ALL PROGRAM REQUIREMENT BUT DISSERTATION

By

Christopher Page

APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Advisor: Delores E. McNair, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Brent Duncan, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Jacalyn Griffen, Ed.D.

Senior Associate Dean of Benerd College: Linda Webster, Ph.D.

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By

Christopher Page

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my father, James P. Page, who sacrificed everything so his children and children's children could have more. Although he never earned a college degree, he was by far the smartest man I knew. Unfortunately, I was unable to finish this in time for him to see it. He would have read it from cover to cover-and enjoyed it.

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Thank you to the unspoken heroes—those ABD Ed.D.s who were thoughtful enough to give their precious time to complete the survey so we could have this study.

INFLUENCES ON DOCTOR OF EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED
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Abstract

By Christopher Page

University of the Pacific
2020

This study explored the influences on Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) students who have completed all required coursework for their degree, but have not finished their dissertation, in an effort to identify factors influencing degree completion. Past research documents an increased time-to-degree (TTD) for Ed.D. students, which has a negative impact on K-12 and higher education, as well as on business, government, and society. This study examined Ed.D. students enrolled at a private teaching college in northern California by use of a survey built upon the framework of Bean's nine themes of college student retention. It analyzed demographic indicators as well as the professional and personal priorities and how these characteristics interface with the demands of completing a doctoral dissertation. The results highlight key differences between Ed.D. students and other graduate and undergraduate students to understand the reasons behind their increased TTD.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, one of every two doctoral students do not finish their degree even after pursuing it between six to 12 years (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; D'Andrea, 2002; Gardner, 2008; Roberts, 2012; Wao, 2010; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Furthermore, the time to degree (TTD) is increased for Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) students to 12.7 years compared to just over seven years for doctorates in other fields (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). There are decades of research studying college persistence for undergraduate students (Tinto, 1975) that are well cited and reviewed in the literature. Studies have been conducted for niche groups; however, persistence studies for students enrolled in Ed.D. programs are not as ubiquitous.

In California, where this study was situated, there are numerous degree programs for students pursuing the Ed.D. These programs represent a substantial investment in public and private resources, such as scholarships, federal grants, faculty, and staff, as well as students' resources in terms of time and money. In addition, increased TTD has a negative impact on business, government, and society, ultimately depriving the same society the benefit of an educated population (D'Andrea, 2013). Lynch et al. (2007) noted the professional degree (such as the Ed.D.) can produce graduates and research that may lead to important innovations in higher education. In another study, Sowell, Zhang, Redd, and King (2008) noted that an increase in doctoral graduates is critical to meeting the needs of tomorrow's workforce. This has direct benefits to higher education institutions who are seeking to increase their graduate rates and reduce TTD. Increasing TTD blocks the pipeline for these professionals to get to the workforce in their field where businesses, nonprofits, and public and private schools seek their talent

(D'Andrea, 2002). Most urgently, Ed.D. students' increased TTD directly holds up higher education from recruiting the these graduates capable of helping to solve the dropout rate in higher education (Hossler, 2006; Tinto, 2012). This clogged pipeline is a roadblock for future academic leaders to begin making a professional impact on education and the fields of their employment. As a result, it is essential that students complete their programs in a timely manner. Understanding what barriers might impede students' progress toward degree completion can help faculty better identify support services designed to overcome these barriers. Some factors that have been identified for other types of doctoral students are intrinsic, such as self-efficacy, self-critique, time management, attitude, sacrifice, organization, and habitual behavior. Extrinsic factors that affect degree completion include support from faculty or dissertation advisors (Roberts, 2012).

This study sought to identify factors that impact Ed.D. students' degree completion and TTD that university faculty and staff might use to intervene and facilitate their timely success. Using Bean's (2005) nine themes of college student retention as a theoretical framework, this study took a comprehensive look at the personal, professional, and academic lives of Ed.D. students and how Bean's nine themes related to their degree completion efforts. These themes include; identifying intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, external environment, student background, and money and finance. This study surveyed a group of Ed.D. students within a school of education at a private university in California. The survey was used to identify factors that influence degree completion.

Background

Retention, persistence, withdrawal, and attrition in higher education have been widely studied over the last 30 years. With one in 10 (or 30,000,000) Americans currently enrolled in postsecondary education (Shaw, 2011) it is a topic with a wide audience of college students and their families, college professors, and institutions of higher education. Of those in graduate or doctoral studies, 19% of the full-time students are 35 years or older (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Of those taking these studies on a part-time basis, 47% are 35 years or older (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Studies show that only one of two doctoral students finish the dissertation despite pursuing it between six to 12 years (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Roberts, 2012). Doctoral students pursuing an education degree have a substantial increase in TTD and higher rate of withdrawal than students in other doctoral degree programs (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Denecke and Slimowitz (2004) stated that only 41% of doctoral students complete the degree within seven years and 57% finish within 10 years.

Stakeholders who are likely interested in decreasing students' TTD are the businesses and organizations who seek to hire graduates, the federal government and its tax-payers who fund and loan money to students, and society itself influenced by an educated population. Attrition can affect an institution's budget as well as its reputation (Duncan & Genin, 2008). With so many students making this personal and financial commitment to pursue the doctorate, and the consumption of government loans and university personnel being used to assist with these endeavors, it is important to understand the influences that keep these students from graduating and consider possible solutions to facilitate improved student success rates.

College students, whether undergraduate or graduate, face a number of common barriers in pursuit of their degree that give them reason to withdraw. These include family background

and obligations, environmental upbringing, financial status, as well as academic competency, a commitment to their institution, and socialization connections in their housing and academic life (Tinto, 1975). In addition to these common barriers, adult learners who make up the majority of Ed.D. students, face more complex barriers. They often work full-time jobs or on career paths that generally require a high level of commitment including time outside of normal work hours (Malone, Nelson, & Van Nelson, 2004). The Macrothink Institute conducting a study of doctoral students' perceived barriers while pursuing their degrees. In addition to external factors, such as employment and challenges to conducting doctoral-level research, they included perceived barriers, such as emotional concerns, anxiety, burnout, or struggling to maintain a motivated, interested mindset. The study also identified that doctoral students perceive their school as having rigid and inflexible program structures and a lack of support for degree completion (Hwang et al., 2015).

Graduate students are assumed to be more fully developed in terms of finding services available in the institution and are institutionally underserved with academic and career advising services usually focused on and provided to undergraduate students (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Graduate students have noted a lack of connection and guidance from their professors (Hwang et al., 2015). While graduate students' level of commitment to their employer may vary, their enrollment in a doctoral program also reflects a commitment to their professional development and the field of education at large. Thus, the pursuit of a degree is a priority that may be secondary to their profession, but because it is often pursued to augment their profession, how the two priorities are balanced is not well understood.

Students play a substantial role in whether or not they graduate, but the higher education institution also plays an important role in graduation rates. Tinto (1975) asserted that the college

professor plays the most critical role within the institution in influencing graduation rates.

Students are more likely to succeed with clear and ambitious expectations, support, and engaged faculty. Support may include students' family who provide emotional support and financial assistance, institutional administrative staff support, counseling and advisement, and peer support. Many institutions of higher learning have established learning communities to assist students and improve retention and graduation rates among undergraduate student populations (Tinto, 2012).

A number of theoretical models have been developed to help understand the undergraduate dropout phenomena in higher education. The most well noted developer of these dropout models is Tinto who inspired other scholars to update and revise their conclusions based on new hypotheses and research findings. These updates included a variety of ideas that authors noted were missing from Tinto's original 1975 model. Weng, Cheong, and Cheong (2010) applied Tinto's (1975) and Bean's (2005) models by adding self-efficacy as a construct. Berger and Braxton (1998) extended Tinto's model by adding organizational attributes to the persistence process. Liu and Liu (1999) applied Tinto's model to a commuter campus and Roberts (2012) applied it only to students enrolled in information technology programs. However, these dropout and retention models primarily address traditional, undergraduate students who reside on campus and have very different experiences than Ed.D. students.

Research on student retention often discuss traditional undergraduate students. As a result, doctoral students who are markedly different from their undergraduate counterparts are not always included in these discussions. Ed.D. students often have non-negotiable commitments that younger students may not have. These commitments include raising children, caring for elderly parents, home upkeep, financial needs for a full-time salary, and maintaining a

committed relationship with a spouse or partner (Roberts, 2012). When these non-negotiable commitments impact students' educational experiences, they can delay dissertation completion.

Major differences between traditional undergraduate learners and Ed.D. learners are age, residential status, job status, marital status, and parental status. The term *traditional student* often refers to students who attend college immediately after finishing high school as opposed to adult learners who enroll after a military career and/or who are established professionals changing their career path. Adult learners are more likely to be married and have children and/or aging parents than traditional learners. These examples demonstrate significant differences that warrant a separate discussion to understand the Ed.D. experience, TTD, and barriers to degree completion. The results of this study add to current scholarship and provide a model that students, postsecondary educators, and other stakeholders could use to identify students who may be at risk of not completing their doctoral degree.

Research Problem

Tinto is one of the most widely cited experts on undergraduate attrition. He found that attrition of undergraduate students is due to students' unsuccessful social acclimation to university study. He also concluded that a lack of support on behalf of university faculty and staff is a deficiency that hampers student retention (Tinto, 1975, 1994). His work yielded a number of models to help understand undergraduate students' experiences in pursuit of a bachelor's degree. From these models a number of intervention strategies were created to help undergraduate students and colleges and universities work together to increase retention.

Ed.D. students are underrepresented in the literature and they differ substantially from traditional undergraduate students. As a result, the ways and methods that institutions interact with them to help facilitate a reasonable TTD differs. Ed.D. students focus on real world

problems relevant to their profession (Klenowski, Ehrich, Kapitzke, & Trigger, 2011). Although Ed.D. students enter their degree programs with strong professional backgrounds and an understanding of their job and industry, they often lack the skills and training needed for doctoral research and writing. They also struggle with theoretical framework development. Ed.D. students are more likely to work demanding, full-time jobs and be occupationally committed, where they put a high priority on their employer's needs (Klenowski et al., 2011). This study sought to address how universities can best support their Ed.D. students.

Study Purpose

This study explored influences on Ed.D. students who have completed all required coursework for their degree, but have not finished their dissertation, in an effort to identify factors influencing TTD and degree completion. It sought to use the results to develop a model that university faculty and staff could use to identify Ed.D. students at risk of not completing their program and to suggest strategies to increase dissertation completion and facilitate a timelier TTD. This study adds to the current scholarship on graduate student retention, degree completion, and TTD for Ed.D. students in particular.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What are Ed.D. students' expectations for their TTD?
2. How prepared do Ed.D. students feel for the dissertation research phase of their academic program?
3. What impacts Ed.D. students' motivation to complete their dissertation once all coursework has been completed?
4. What barriers do Ed.D. students face while trying to finish their dissertation?

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach at a single site by surveying a group of Ed.D. students at a private university in northern California. The target population included those students who had completed all course requirements and had not yet finished their dissertation. Students completed a survey to identify factors that influence their motivation as well as barriers to their dissertation and degree completion. The survey questions are quantitative with one open-ended question for each of Bean's nine themes used as the framework for the study. The methodology is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was derived from Bean's (2005) nine themes of college student retention. Bean divided these nine themes in two categories: intentions and attitudes, and interactions with institutions and external environments. The nine themes are described below in Table 1. The theoretical framework will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Table 1
Bean's (2005) Nine Themes of Student Retention

Theme	Description
Intentions	This is the best predictor of persistence and may be professional, social, or cultural intention.
Institutional Fit and Commitment (loyalty)	Students' attitudes toward the institution and attitudes toward being a college student at that institution.
Psychological Processes and Key Attitudes	Includes self-efficacy, approach/avoidance behavioral theory as part of coping theory, and locus of control as a part of attribution theory. Those satisfied with being a student and those with strong self-confidence in academic and social settings are more likely to be successful.
Academics	Includes students' skills to survive academically, emotional and social intelligence, and the ability to understand what is expected in a variety of settings that the higher education experience requires.
Social Factors	Peer to peer in academic and non-academic settings, such as campus activities outside the classroom, friendships, close friends on campus, and also students' family structures. The academic success expectations set by parents, siblings or friends can influence college student retention.
Bureaucratic Factors	Student interactions with various departments within the institution. This includes admissions, finance, housing, academic affairs and minimum requirements, transfer credits, prerequisites, matriculation, and graduation requirements.
External Environment	Includes family and employment issues. As students age these forces become more dominant in students' list of priorities. These forces can lead students to another institution or away from their institution for an extended period of time.
Student Background	Includes networks, such as family, friends, and relevant connections, as well as human capital (students' knowledge, skills, and abilities).
Money and Finance	A lack of money is one of the best excuses for leaving graduate school, yet it can also be a primary reason student persist.

Definition of Terms

Several terms used in this study can have various meanings depending on the context in which they are used. The following terms are defined here for the purpose of this study.

All but dissertation (ABD): ABD signifies that a student has completed all course work but has not yet completed dissertation requirements.

Attrition: Attrition is used when discussing students who do not reenroll at an institution in consecutive semesters (Seidman, 2005).

College completion intention: College completion intention is the likelihood that students will make a decision to complete their undergraduate degree (Thomas, 2014).

Degree completion: Degree completion indicates that an Ed.D. student has completed all phases of the dissertation in addition to required coursework.

Occupationally committed: Occupationally committed refers to a student who is professionally committed to an organization or employer.

Persistence: Persistence is defined as the desire and action of a person to start and finish an intended degree within an institution of higher education (Seidman, 2005).

Retention: Retention is defined as the ability of a college or university to retain a student from admission through graduation (Seidman, 2005).

Socialization: Socialization signifies student interactions with peers, faculty, and staff.

Support: Support refers to aid provided to the Ed.D. student to complete the dissertation. This can include academic, professional, personal, financial, family, social, or emotional support.

Time to degree (TTD): TTD is defined as the length of time Ed.D. students take to complete their degree requirements (Wao, 2010), including coursework and dissertation requirements.

Withdrawal: Withdrawal is used to indicate a student's departure from an institution prior to degree completion (Seidman, 2005).

Significance

Educated societies thrive more than less educated societies. A strong national economy and global competitiveness largely depends on the educational attainment of a nation's citizenry (Seidman, 2005). The increasing TTD for doctoral students not only slows higher education's ability to hire needed professors to fill anticipated vacancies, it is also an indicator of doctoral students at risk of not finishing. In addition, much of the funding for tuition and fees for doctoral students come from government loans, scholarships, or public funding. Doctoral student attrition is expensive for colleges and universities and also immeasurably costly for the doctoral student who leaves (Gardner, 2008). Higher education institutions must, therefore, seek to improve doctoral TTD and graduation rates.

Society is continually seeking new leadership to tackle pressing issues such as health, homelessness, poverty, and increasing crime rates (Tinto, 2012). The cost of not helping finance and facilitate a higher-educated workforce is evident. It is also essential for the benefits of remaining a competitive force on the global stage and being an international benefactor (Tinto, 2012). When discussing the results of a 2006 study, Tierney and Sablan (2014) concluded that the United States is falling behind in its ability to produce college graduates compared to other nations. As technology and innovation makes the globe virtually smaller and more connected, geographic distance becomes less relevant and national and worldwide conflict increases; thus a more educated world population is sought to minimize conflict and thrive.

Stakeholders of higher education are abundant in business, government, and societal interdependent relationships. It directly includes the 30,000,000 American students currently enrolled in its degree programs, but also those who graduated or took classes without

graduating in past years. Further, it indirectly affects students' immediate and extended families, their workplaces and colleagues, as well as their customers, suppliers, financiers, and even competitors. The United States government is a stakeholder as it finances students' loans and reaps a wide variety of taxes from these students. A higher-educated workforce that earns more income also stimulates the economy and provides tax revenue with which the government expects to fund its operating costs.

The results of this study add to current scholarship and provide a model that students, postsecondary educators, and other stakeholders could use to increase Ed.D. graduation rates for those students who have completed their required coursework but have not finished their dissertation requirements.

Researcher Perspective

As with the participants in this study, I struggled with competing commitments that have impacted my ability to complete my Ed.D. As I considered my situation, I became aware of other doctoral students who were having similar experiences. Furthermore, I noticed a variation in the TTD of Ed.D. students in my program; some students finished their degree requirements in four to five years while others did not. I began to question what might be different between these two groups of students who seem equally committed to their academic success. As I discussed this question with other doctoral students who had not completed their degrees, I began to see some common issues and realized the importance of empirically identifying factors that may impede Ed.D. completion. Thus, my role is one of a peer to the participants of this study requiring particular attention to reduce assumptions and bias in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases of this study.

Chapter Summary

The study of college student attrition and retention is not new to scholarly research, but there is a gap in the literature regarding Ed.D. students. This chapter included a preliminary discussion of what we know and do not know about attrition and persistence of Ed.D. students. The purpose of the study was to explore influences on Ed.D. students who have completed all required coursework for their degree, but have not finished their dissertation, in an effort to identify factors influencing TTD and degree completion. The research questions, overview of the research design, significance, and my role was presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 includes a review of the relevant literature and a detailed description of the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology employed to answer the research questions regarding Ed.D. completion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The United States has been offering higher education degree programs since 1636 when New College (later renamed Harvard College) was established. Nearly 500 years later, institutions of higher education are still celebrated even as they face increased public scrutiny. Retention, attrition, and college persistence in higher education have become areas of concern as evidenced by the last four decades of academic scholarship. These areas began getting the attention of academic scholars in 1975 when Tinto published his longitudinal model of student departure (Bean, 2005; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Gardner, 2008; Roberts, 2012; Thomas, 2014; Tinto, 1975, 1994, 2012).

It is critical to study students' reasons for leaving postsecondary education due to the amount of resources, both public and private, devoted to colleges and universities. College dropouts have negative effects on an institution's finances and credibility (Duncan & Genin, 2008; Hossler, 2006). In addition to influencing the 30,000,000 Americans currently enrolled in colleges and universities across the United States, and the millions of new students consistently enrolling each year, college student retention and persistence influence an immeasurable army of stakeholders in education, business, government, and other areas of society.

Researchers have done well studying undergraduate students. Their efforts have revealed more about students' lives before coming to college, their first-year experiences as undergraduate students, and why they might leave postsecondary education prior to earning their intended degrees. Higher education has also learned that in addition to students' responsibility for not finishing college, faculty and staff play a substantial role in influencing students' academic decisions.

Although much of current scholarship focuses on undergraduate students' experiences, there is less research that focuses on doctoral students in general, and Ed.D. students in particular. As a result, there remains less research of sound models of policies, procedures, practices, and programs that higher education institutions can apply to increase the graduation rates of the Ed.D. students they accept into their programs. Despite the research, there exists an absence of translating theory to practice (Tinto, 2005b). This study used the research related to undergraduate retention as a starting point and then used Bean's (2005) nine themes of college student retention as a framework to examine the graduation rates and TTD of Ed.D. students.

This chapter reviews of the scholarship related to student retention and attrition. This is followed by a discussion of Tinto's theories on student departure. The chapter offers a summary of the gap in scholarship that illuminates areas that merit further study. Lastly, Bean's (2005) themes nine themes of college student retention are described in detail as the theoretical framework of this study.

Student Enrollment and Persistence

There are a variety of reasons students choose to enroll in postsecondary education. Many are looking at higher education as a means for professional opportunities and growth (Templeton, 2016; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Zhou, 2015). Others enroll in order to be eligible for jobs that require a college degree; in other words, they learn to earn. For many students, culture and family expectations also play a role in their decision to attend college. Other students have long-term aspirations of what successfully completing a degree can bring for them.

There are similar reasons college students persist with their studies once they enroll at a college or university. Doctoral students are often motivated to enroll and persist because of

intrinsic interests in research and/or teaching (Zhou, 2015). Students who are older, commute, attend part-time, and are employed full- or part-time are part of a group, that while common, is not homogeneous and can be more difficult to study (Bean, 2005). Ultimately, people enroll in higher education degree programs to fulfill a dream. If students enter college, whether in a graduate or undergraduate program, they often have dreams of graduating, gaining access to new professional opportunities, and achieving prestige or personal success, which may serve as motivators to continue in their programs of study (Lynch et al., 2007). Bean (2005) identified nine themes of college student retention that include areas that influence students' continued enrollment. These themes include identifying intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, external environment, student background, and money and finance. Bean's themes provide the theoretical framework for this study.

Increased TTD

There is growing concern among graduate students, university personnel, and academic stakeholders regarding the amount of time doctoral students take to complete their degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). According to Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) and Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011), TTD is longer for Ed.D. students than in any other field. Those seeking the Ed.D., on average, complete the degree in 12.7 years compared to 7.7 years for doctoral students in other fields (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Studies have shown that only one of two doctoral students finish their degree requirements, including the dissertation, even after pursuing the degree between six to 12 years.

Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) attributed TTD to a student's level of integration in five domains: academic, social, economic, personal, and external. They asserted that academic

integration had the greatest connection to degree completion. Although their study focuses on undergraduate students, it is reasonable to think that similar factors impact graduate students' experiences. Similarly, White and Nonnamaker (2008) noted a 10-year national completion statistic for doctoral students in humanities and engineering. They also noted reasons for the long TTD is due to limited finances, poor relations between students and faculty, a dissatisfaction with their chosen degree program, challenges remaining motivated, and a limited ability to work independently (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Although their study focused on Ph.D. students, it is reasonable to think that the Ph.D. student may have similar issues to the Ed.D. student that serve as barriers to degree completion. Increased TTD is not a positive trend for students, faculty, staff, or academic stakeholders. A variety of authors discuss and agree that the primary influences on the increased TTD include the students themselves, their faculty, and factors inherent to their higher education institutions (Bean, 2005; Tinto, 2012).

Student Withdrawal

Scholars have developed a number of models to understand college retention and attrition. These models vary among the college populations studied. College students have some common barriers, such as socialization, academic competence, organization, time management, and finances. Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) concluded that both students and faculty share some responsibility for the increase in the TTD for Ed.D. students. Their conclusions agree with other work that indicates that students often leave due to a perceived lack of support (Roberts, 2012). They also move away from home into new and sometimes uncomfortable living conditions; take on student loans that can take decades to repay; and physically, mentally, and emotionally invest in these academic endeavors.

According to Strayhorn (2005), issues affecting Ed.D. students' persistence are also influenced by economics and whether students receive financial assistance for their studies. Academic matters, such as self-efficacy, and non-academic factors, such as students' age, gender, and marital status, also play a role in student persistence. Considering the effort that students and their families put in to applying to, enrolling in, securing living arrangements for, and uprooting their lives in pursuit of a degree, it is reasonable to suggest that students enter a program with the intention to complete their degrees and not to withdraw. Yet, for many students, something interrupts their studies and keeps them from achieving their academic goals. Withdrawing from a degree program not only has negative influence on students and their families, it also has negative influence on their institution.

Roberts (2012) shared a number of factors that influence withdrawal and retention of teacher training students. Although the focus of her work was on undergraduate students, her research can provide insight that is relevant to graduate students' experiences. Some of the problems related to program completion that she identified are a result of the actions of the students themselves, their faculty, and their higher education institutions as described below.

Students' Role in Attrition

According to Roberts (2012) students clearly play a role in their own withdrawal from their studies. In addition to the qualifications that earned them acceptance to their college or university, they bring with them personal issues, behavioral habits, family and financial concerns, travel, commuting issues, and even illness. In a study of 3,000 doctoral candidates in Belgium, a very clear distinction was made between the higher graduation rates of students who received research fellowships versus students who were teaching assistants or who entered the program without funding (van der Haert, Ortiz, Emplit, Halloin, & Dehon, 2014). Another cause

of student dissatisfaction and withdrawal among doctoral students is the unmatched interests between students and advisors (Zhou, 2015). Other factors include stress and self-efficacy.

When students begin their postsecondary studies, they may find a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of higher education (Roberts, 2012). The academic workload, which includes attending classes, participating in labs, reading, writing, researching, and meeting deadlines, can often be overwhelming. For the residential student, homesickness and the campus culture can create significant emotional influences. Other factors influencing withdrawal can include financial difficulties (on behalf of the student and/or their family) or the difficulty of navigating the institutional bureaucracy in an effort to seek the many avenues of support the institution may offer (Manik, 2015; Roberts, 2012).

Institutions' Role in Attrition

Roberts (2012) asserted that higher education institutions play a substantial role in student retention and attrition. How they deliver degree programs to students, the methods of instruction, resources available to students, financial support, and campus life all play a role. Students tend to be more successful finishing degree programs in institutions that create programs and policies that demonstrate their commitment to student success (Tinto, 1975, 2005a). Tinto (1975) stated that there is a relationship between a commitment from the institution toward student completion and student goal commitment. Manik (2015) discussed some student-centric strategies instituted by schools including tutoring, study groups, academic support programs, and mentoring.

Faculty's Role in Attrition

“Faculty members have the greatest influence on student persistence” (Bean, 2005, p. 241). From a negative aspect, this influence can be a teaching style that is difficult to follow or a

lack of individual interaction between students and faculty. Grading, including the amount, quality, and quantity of faculty feedback, can affect retention positively or negatively. From a positive perspective, factors that influence student retention include shared responsibilities between students and faculty. Creating a community of learners among faculty as a way to improve delivery of courses can be one way of increasing student persistence (Duncan & Genin, 2008; Furco & Moely, 2012). Learning is a two-way street and teaching and learning is a mutual responsibility between students and faculty. Consequently, it can be difficult to disentangle the influences to identify the locus of control.

Ed.D. Adult Learners

Some student groups face issues unique to their demographics, such as not fitting into campus or student culture, the commute challenges of the non-residential student, health or capability issues, or the multifaceted challenges of the adult learner (Liu & Liu, 1999). Lynch et al. (2007) noted in their report of the professional doctorate, that students enrolled in professional doctorates, such as the Ed.D., are different from students in research doctoral programs largely because they are already working professionally and have been in the workforce for several years. They may also struggle with work-life balance due to professional commitments much more than their counterparts (Geesa, Lowery, & McConnell, 2018). A substantial percentage of the Ed.D. population is the adult learner who brings a number of challenges to bear that the traditional student likely does not. The adult learner may be a head of household with children and a spouse/partner, have professional responsibilities that occupy their time five to six days a week, and have financial burdens including a mortgage, multiple car payments, and earlier college loans still in repayment. They may also have aging parents or community commitments, such as assisting with their children's extracurricular activities.

Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) identified that a key factor influencing TTD is academic integration. This includes conversational dialogue and classroom integration between faculty and students. It can involve faculty coaching small groups in class, facilitating discussions, and directly engaging with students. This is different from the traditional lecture class format that does not help students become involved, engaged, and supported in ways that help them persist and succeed in completing their degree (Thomas, 2014). These studies suggest that both students and faculty can play a role in using academic integration to increase persistence and decrease TTD.

The Gap in Current Scholarship

Integration is a key element in student persistence. This includes having a social life and friends; it also includes peer to peer learning and integration with institutional administration and faculty. Students' academic competency and family background also influences persistence. This has become evident due to the decades of research conducted on the undergraduate student in a variety of college and university settings. What is not yet certain is what factors impact Ed.D. students who have completed all required coursework but have yet to complete their dissertation. Prior research conducted on undergraduate students is not sufficient for this unique group of students. The Ed.D. student is understudied and undertheorized.

Students in Ed.D. programs are different than undergraduates and other graduate students, so existing retention studies may or may not apply to them. Ed.D. students are adult learners compared to the traditional, undergraduate students Tinto (1975) studied. As a result, the methods universities use to interact with Ed.D. students to help facilitate their academic success through to graduation also differs.

Unlike undergraduate students, Ed.D. students seek to focus on real world problems relevant to their profession (Klenowski et al., 2011). Although Ed.D. students enter their degree programs with strong professional backgrounds, they may lack the skills and training needed for doctoral research and struggle with theoretical framework development (Klenowski et al., 2011). Ed.D. students are more likely to work demanding, full-time jobs; be occupationally committed; and have financial struggles. The wide range of roles these students play and the importance of their commitments outside of their academic program make these students different from those studied in other research (Bean, 2005), potentially limiting the usefulness of prior models.

Theoretical Framework: Bean's (2005) Nine Themes of College Student Retention

Bean (2005) discussed the many theories regarding institutions of higher learning, students, faculty, administration, dropout, and retention. He summarized his work in two categories; intentions and attitudes, and student interaction with the institution and the external environment. He then made recommendations for improving student retention. Bean theorized that behavior is a result of an intention to perform a specific behavior. He added that intention is linked to an attitude toward the behavior and attitude is based on the consequences of the behavior. Further, beliefs lead to attitudes, which feeds back into a loop (Bean, 2005). Bean's nine themes are described in more detail below.

Intentions and Attitudes

From the outside looking in it is easy for researchers, administration, and faculty to view a group of students as homogeneous. Yet, the students themselves, and their reasons for attending college, vary. Some students attend a specific college or university because they sought it out, spending their high school years accumulating a record that would allow them to be accepted, and intending to graduate with a degree to take the next step toward a long-term

professional goal. Other students enroll at a college or university of their second (or even third) choice because their family members wanted them to attend, they did not want to join the military or work full-time, or they could not enroll in a preferred institution.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) found that student intention was the best predictor of persistence. Understanding student intentions may help postsecondary educators create policies and programs to support student retention. Yet, the element of intention can become a less valuable predictor when other descriptors of students are evident. The non-traditional student who is older, commutes, works full-time, and attends school full-time is a growing segment of the higher education landscape. For these students, their intention becomes a less clear predictor of persistence. Bean (2005) determined that intention, while a possible predictor of who will leave school, does not help explain *why* students do so.

Institutional Fit and Commitment

Students' level of satisfaction with their postsecondary institution and their sense of institutional fit are also important indicators of student completion (Bean, 2005). Institutional fit continues a common theme that students likely experienced throughout their K-12 education—fitting in. This can mean fitting in with the student body as a whole or a group within the larger student body. If there are shared values among students, there is a greater possibility of fitting in. Shared values relate to any part of the college experience, such as studying, social events, athletics, academic major, or long-term goals. Other issues that could influence a sense of institutional fit include in-class experiences that conform to students' institutional expectations and those that align with students' personal values (Bean, 2005). Any kind of experience that can threaten the aspect of fitting in can increase the likelihood that students may drop out. These include failure to thrive in the academic environment; discrimination, whether it be for religion,

race, ethnicity, political affiliation, gender, or sexual orientation; challenges to one's values; and negative interpersonal experiences.

Psychological Processes and Key Attitudes

Documented psychological processes in the student retention literature relate to students sense of self-efficacy where “self-efficacy, approach/avoidance behavioral theory as part of coping theory, and locus of control as a part of attribution theory” (Bean, 2005, p. 220), impact retention. Students who have the self-confidence to be academically and socially successful in the university are more likely to adapt and graduate. Bean (2005) described the behaviors of approach and avoidance as a means of coping with the academic environment and handling social and academic challenges. Those with an internal locus of control are confident in their ability to thrive in any situation. These students are more likely to engage in activities that further their capacity for success. They are more likely to have the drive to engage in academic activities that lead to positive outcomes, such as collaborating with other students, or the self-advocacy to speak with a professor regarding rewriting an assignment in which an unsatisfactory grade was given.

Students' attitudes also play a substantial role in their ability to graduate. These attitudes include the personal satisfaction of being a college student and their sense of self-development and self-confidence as a student (Bean, 2005). Another important attitude is the belief that the degree will lead to preferred employment. Yet another is students' ability to adapt to the stress and requirements of their academic endeavor. Finally, students' attitude toward the college or university itself is important. This could be due to perceived quality, prestige, or other attributes. More than anyone aside from the student, faculty members, specifically students' advisors, play an important role in helping students build community (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). They are

directly involved with students, contributing to students' academic experiences and shaping the minds, thoughts, and attitudes of students (Bean, 2005).

Academics

Bean (2005) discussed three elements students experience when interacting with a postsecondary institution: academics, social factors, and bureaucratic factors. Academics, next to financial issues, is considered one of the most critical reasons that students leave college. Important skills to survive academically include social intelligence, the ability to achieve satisfying academic results, and resisting temptations to engage in distracting on-campus activities. Bean described social intelligence as the ability to understand what is expected and the ability to effectively manage oneself in order to achieve desired results. Tinto (1975) discussed reasons students may not succeed in college, one of which is not knowing how to remedy a negative situation. By failing to address academic difficulties early, for example, students may find their situation worsens before it improves, if at all.

Social Factors

Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) simplified Tinto's (1975) model of retention as having two pillars to student success: academic socialization and non-academic socialization. Academic socialization refers to students' social interactions with the universities' faculty and administrative employees, such as academic and financial counselors. Students' lack of positive socialization with university staff hinders retention and leads to destructive behavior. This lack of social capital ultimately affects students' satisfaction with their institution as well as their self-confidence, loyalty, and ability to fit-in and remain in college (Braxton et al., 2004).

Non-academic socialization includes peer-to-peer social interactions in academic and non-academic settings, such as campus activities outside the classroom, friendships, close friends

on campus, and students' family structures. It also includes students' parents' education as a social influence and whether parents attended college themselves, especially if the student attends the parents' alma mater. Finally, the academic success expectations set by parents, siblings, or friends can influence college student retention (Braxton et al., 2004).

Bureaucratic Factors

Students inevitably have bureaucratic interactions with their universities; first through interactions with the admissions department in seeking acceptance to attend the university as a degree-seeking student, and second through interactions with the financial aid department to address payment for tuition and fees. Eventually other bureaucratic factors students will interact with include the registrar, academic advising, housing, and other student services departments. Typically, universities, particularly large ones, can be cold and impersonal when interacting with students regarding bureaucratic needs, yet these needs are critical to the students' admission, enrollment, and progression toward degree completion. Bean (2005) suggested that colleges and universities adjust the ways they interact with students in order to support student retention.

External Environment

Although initially not included in his initial retention model in 1975, Tinto eventually recognized and included students' external environment as essential to understanding dropout. These forces beyond the control of the student or institution include opportunities to transfer to another institution; family responsibilities and events, such as marriage, divorce, pregnancy, or care giving; or employment options, and can lead to a student leaving their program before completion (Bean 2005).

Student Background

Bean (2005) drew the conclusion that students' social capital, networks and connections; plus their human capital, skills, knowledge, and abilities; equal college retention. The highest level of college success is found with traditional, residential students who are just out of high school who hold high levels of academic skill and who attend high quality academic degree programs. Consequently, the lowest academic success is found in schools with little to low status with open admission policies. Bean added that the retention equation is improved when there is a good match between the student and the institution—the school wants what the student has to offer, and the student wants what the school has to offer. Bean concluded that when retention rates and institutional status are aligned, retention rates can change based on interactions between students, faculty, and the institution as a whole.

Money and Finance

A lack of money is a frequent reason for leaving college. Bean (2005) asserted that this is outside the locus of control of students. Although students may enter postsecondary education understanding the financial costs, they do not have control of rising tuition, financial aid availability, access to assistantships, or changing market conditions that may impact student loans or employment opportunities. Students may be able to take steps to mitigate unexpected changes in finances, such as working on or near campus. Further, students can pursue loans as a means to pay the cost of their education. Bean suggested that students who work to earn money to pay for their college education are more likely to be motivated to complete their degree. At the same time, working more than 20 hours a week can have negative consequences for students.

Chapter Summary

Despite decades of research, high dropout rates continue to be a problem in higher education. A focus on the Ed.D. student and their increased TTD relative to all other graduate degrees was highlighted. This chapter also offered a review of the factors that impact student success in college. Due to limited research on graduate students, the literature review focused on research related to undergraduate students. Many of the reasons undergraduates leave college and the strategies for enhancing student retention can be applied to graduate students, especially those who work full-time while completing their doctoral studies part-time. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the study's research design and methodology that contributes to the scholarship on graduate student retention.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Study Purpose and Research Questions

This study explored influences on Ed.D. students who have completed all required coursework for their degree, but have not finished their dissertation, in an effort to identify factors influencing TTD and degree completion. It sought to use the results to develop a model that university faculty and staff could use to identify Ed.D. students at risk of not completing their program and to suggest strategies to increase dissertation completion and facilitate a timelier TTD. This study adds to the current scholarship on graduate student retention, degree completion, and TTD for Ed.D. students in particular.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What are Ed.D. students' expectations for their TTD?
2. How prepared do Ed.D. students feel for the dissertation research phase of their academic program?
3. What impacts Ed.D. students' motivation to complete their dissertation once all coursework has been completed?
4. What barriers do Ed.D. students face while trying to finish their dissertation?

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach at a single site and surveyed a group of Ed.D. students at a private university in northern California. The target population included those students who had completed all course requirements and had not yet finished their dissertation. Students completed a survey to identify factors that influence their motivation as well as barriers to their dissertation and degree completion. The survey questions are

quantitative with one open-ended question for each of the nine themes in the framework. The data collection methods, instrument, and data analysis procedures are described below.

Data Collection

The survey used in this study was adapted from Dr. Jalynn Roberts' (2009) research on undergraduate college student retention. Roberts studied influences on undergraduate students at the university in which he was enrolled as a doctoral student and in which he was employed in the school's office of institutional effectiveness. The survey is included in Appendix A. Permission to use the study is included in Appendix B. Although Bean's (2005) nine themes of college student retention were applied to undergraduate students in Roberts' study, this study used them to explore their usefulness in relation to Ed.D. students. This study anticipated that the results could be used to expand both Roberts' and Bean's work.

Target Population and Sampling

The target population included Ed.D. students at a private university in Northern California who had completed all of their doctoral coursework and had not yet completed their dissertation. The total number of students in this target population was unknown since this information is not public. Privacy laws prohibited open access to student records. A university faculty member worked with a representative from the university's graduate studies office and the registrar to assist in acquiring a list of potential participants. A list of students was generated that the faculty member reviewed to verify accuracy. Thus, convenience sampling was employed.

Some students were removed from the list because they had defended their dissertations, although they had not yet been uploaded into ProQuest (a dissertation database), so at the time of acquiring the list of potential survey respondents they did not meet the criteria of having

completed their dissertations. A cohort of international students was also removed from the list because their experiences with the doctoral program were atypical, including completing many of their courses and their doctoral research outside of the United States. These adjustments resulted in 66 students who met the inclusion criteria for the study. It is important to note that at no time did their names or any other personal information become identifiable.

Participant Recruitment and Consent

In order to increase response rates and obtain a sufficient number of responses, rigorous, practical, and technological administrative practices were used. To assist the researcher, the faculty member at the study site sent an initial email to all students who met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix C). In addition, the faculty member posted an invitation to participate on a Facebook group for the university's doctoral students (see Appendix D). This is a closed Facebook group, which means that only students in the doctoral program are eligible to join. These two initial efforts resulted in about seven responses. Two weeks later, a second email message was sent to students which yielded three additional responses. Due to the low response rate of each of the recruitment strategies, and understanding that further efforts would not likely lead to a substantial increase in responses, no additional email or social media invitations were sent to students. Participants' consent was given when they agreed to complete and submit the survey. Students were permitted to stop the survey and leave the study at any time.

Instrumentation and Confidentiality

The instrumentation for this study was a cross-sectional survey (Creswell, 2012) based on Robert's (2009) survey used with permission. The survey included 41 multiple choice questions and 11 open-ended comment questions. The survey also included 12 demographic questions. All questions and comments were considered optional and participants could skip questions if

they chose to do so. The instrument includes an overview of the study, an invitation to complete the survey, and contact information for the university's institutional review board (IRB) administrator.

The survey was created using Google Forms. This application was selected due to its ease of use and fit for this type of survey. Although IP addresses were not collected, students could provide their email addresses, which all respondents did. The email addresses were available to be used only if additional clarification of their responses was needed. None of the respondents were contacted regarding their answers. All responses remained confidential and are reported in aggregate form in Chapter 4. The data are kept in encrypted and password-protected files. The data will be destroyed three years following the completion of this study.

It was expected that students would spend up to 30 minutes responding to the survey and completing the demographic questionnaire. Although no incentives were offered for their participation, students were assured that their responses could be used to support their work and the work of future doctoral students.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical procedures were used to analyze survey responses. Due to the low number of responses, it was not possible to use inferential statistical analyses to conduct tests regarding the reliability of answers. The questions in the survey sought Ed.D. students' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. Descriptive statistics offered the best way to understand the data that emerged from the survey (Creswell, 2012). In Chapter 4, data are presented in the aggregate and, when available, with individual narrative responses.

Validity and Reliability

Validity ensures that the interpretation of the responses to the survey questions match their intended use (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) added that reliability and validity are “...bound together in complex ways” (p. 159). Roberts (2009) ensured reliability and validity of his study’s questionnaire by collaborating with colleagues to identify appropriate variables. Roberts conducted a pilot study with 40 participants enrolled in an education course to determine if questions, directions, and answers were understandable. He then calculated the instrument’s internal consistency for each variable using SPSS. The limitations of his study included the study’s small sample size and it being time bound because he could not track the students studied to see if those who dropped eventually enrolled in following years or if they enrolled at another institution (Roberts, 2009).

Limitations

The number of participants in this study was small and may not necessarily reflect the experiences of all students who fit the inclusion criteria for the study. Influences upon students currently enrolled in this degree program and successfully working toward completion of their dissertation are interesting but are beyond the scope of this study. Further, this study was designed to focus solely on Ed.D. students. Although this study was not designed to address students enrolled in other types of doctoral programs, those who share characteristics with the respondents, such as the adult learner who works full-time and manages family obligations while enrolled, may have some similarities; thus, the initial results could apply to these types of doctoral students. Since the invitation to participate in the study was sent to students’ university email accounts, a limitation that emerged is that many of the potential respondents may not have

been accessing those accounts any longer. This limitation is further discussed in the implications section of Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research design and methods of the data collection and analysis, including the target population and structure of the survey instrument. It also explained the sampling and recruitment procedures. This chapter closed with a brief description of the validity and reliability of the methodology and the limitations of this study. Chapter 4 provides the results of the data collection process.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In Chapter 1, the importance education plays for a society to thrive as well as build and maintain a strong national economy and an increasing global competitiveness has been asserted. Many of the leaders in education come from those who have completed the Ed.D. A lengthy TTD for doctoral students can thwart their career aspirations. Students who do not complete their degrees can place strains on campus resources as well as public and government funding. Because students begin doctoral programs with the expectation that they will graduate, knowing what barriers students face in completing their dissertations can support the development of programs, services, and strategies to overcome these barriers.

This chapter presents the responses from those who completed the surveys. Although there was a small number of respondents, the initial results suggest that all respondents indicated they had substantial commitments outside of working toward their degrees. This is not surprising given that students in Ed.D. programs typically work full-time, are often early- to mid-career professionals with substantial job-related obligations and have family obligations that require their time. Due to the small number of respondents, descriptive statistics are used to present the data.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What are Ed.D. students' expectations for their TTD?
2. How prepared do Ed.D. students feel for the dissertation research phase of their academic program?
3. What impacts Ed.D. students' motivation to complete their dissertation once all coursework has been completed?
4. What barriers do Ed.D. students face while trying to finish their dissertation?

The survey used in this study was designed to answer these questions. Some research questions are addressed by multiple questions in the survey. The responses to these questions are expressed through the framework of Bean's (2005) nine themes for college student retention. This chapter begins with an overview of the respondents' demographics followed by the quantitative responses. The chapter concludes with a summary. The implications of the results as well as areas for further research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Participant Demographics

Sixty-six students were invited to participate in this study. Ten students responded and completed the survey. Of these, six indicated they were women and four indicated they were men. The primary ethnic group represented was Caucasian (five) with one participant who indicated they were Black, two who indicated they were multi-racial, one who identified as "other," and one who preferred not to answer. Most were married or in a partnered relationship (eight), while two indicated they were single. The average age of the participants at the time they completed their doctoral course work was 42.2 years and the average age at the time they completed the survey was 44.4 years. Respondents reported that family responsibilities, including children, elderly family members, and family members with special needs, impacted the time they were able to spend writing their dissertations. In addition, two respondents indicated they worked over 50 hours per week, while most (six) indicated they worked 40 to 49 hours per week. Two others reported that they worked 39 hours or less per week. Four respondents indicated that their commute to campus was over 100 miles; two commute between 25 miles and 45 miles; four commute less than 25 miles.

Of the 10 respondents, eight indicated they plan to finish their dissertations. Among those who plan to finish their dissertations, most indicated they have been working on the

dissertation for at least three years with two working on their dissertation for over five years. It is less clear why two plan not to finish. One respondent indicated they had run out of time, while the other gave no specific reason.

Bean's (2005) Nine Themes of College Student Retention

Bean's (2005) framework of college student retention was chosen because it is more comprehensive than other models that largely focused on undergraduates. The nine themes in the model include identifying intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, external environment, student background, and money and finance. Outlined below are the distribution of responses to individual survey questions based on each of the nine themes. Following the presentation of responses related to the nine themes are responses to the open-ended questions.

Most participants indicated that the university they attended was their first choice of universities (see Table 2). In addition, most indicated that the Ed.D. was their first choice of doctoral degree type. Furthermore, most agreed or strongly agreed that the degree would support their career advancement. Even though they had intentions to complete the doctorate, they all agreed or strongly agreed that they had substantial obligations outside of school. These responses could indicate an early warning sign of future obstacles that impact their ability to complete the doctorate.

Table 2
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 1: Intentions

Questions with Scale Responses

Q1. In seeking the Ed.D., [university] was my first choice of schools.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	4	1	1	0

Q2. The Ed.D. was my first choice for my degree.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	2	2	1	0

Q3. I sought this degree because it will help me take my next career step.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	4	1	1	0

Q4. I have substantial personal or professional obligations outside of school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7	3	0	0	0

Q5. Comments:

Response 1: The Ed.D. was my first choice of degrees because I knew I would attend [university] and it was the degree offered.

Response 2: Ultimately, finishing has become a goal in itself, as, by the time I am finished, I will be close enough to retirement that the original intention regarding career advancement will be moot.

Although participant responses related to institutional fit and commitment are generally positive, they are not unanimously strong in all areas (see Table 3). At the time of the study, commitment to the university might have been waning, even as satisfaction as a student remained high. Given that students previously indicated they had substantial obligations outside

of school, it is not surprising that nine of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel stress as a student. Even so, nine respondents also indicated they have ways to cope with stress.

The two qualitative responses provide additional insight into the ways that the changing landscape of higher education has impacted participant career aspirations. The second response expresses a belief that it is ultimately the responsibility of the student to complete course work and to stay connected with their dissertation chair.

Table 3
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 2: Institutional Fit and Commitment

Questions with Scale Responses

Q6. I am committed to [university] as an institution.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	4	3	0	0

Q7. I am satisfied with being a student.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	9	0	0	0

Q8. I share values, have a sense of belonging, and fit in with my classmates.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	7	1	1	0

Q9. I understand the value of my degree and its implication on my career success.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	3	1	1	0

Q10. I feel stress as a student.

Strong Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	1	0	0

Q11. I have ways to cope with the environment to reduce the stress the environment creates.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	7	1	0	0

Q12. Comments:

Response 1: When I started my program, I was hoping to become a tenured faculty member. My institution seems to be moving away from tenure and I no longer think that is likely.

Response 2: The program is extremely beneficial. I believe it's on the person to complete the work. My Chair always responds; however, it falls on me to stay connected.

Regarding Bean's (2005) third theme, psychological processes and key attitudes, participants expressed a high level of confidence in their ability to engage socially with other doctoral students (see Table 4). However, their satisfaction with being a doctoral student, while still strong, shows that not all students are completely satisfied. This could be related to the length of time it is taking to complete their dissertations rather than their relationships with their professors, dissertation chair, and dissertation committee. The relationships with these groups are rated favorably by participants.

The qualitative comments provide additional insight and illustrate the ways that participant relationships with faculty in general, and the dissertation chair in particular, reflect students' experiences. One student felt "lost" when faculty members left the university. The other two responses highlight the critical importance of the dissertation chair. One student reported a very favorable relationship with their chair. Another described a chair who was not helpful which ultimately led to disengagement and a change of dissertation chairs.

Table 4
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 3: Psychological Processes and Key Attitudes

Questions with Scale Responses				
Q13. I am confident I have the ability to survive and adapt in an academic environment.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7	3	0	0	0
Q14. I am confident I can successfully socialize and interact at [university].				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	5	1	0	1
Q15. I have the drive to engage in helpful activities (collaborating with classmates, seeking faculty help, using university help centers) to help me finish my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	6	1	1	0
Q16. I am satisfied with being a doctoral student.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	4	3	0	0
Q17. I am confident my Ed.D. will lead to employment opportunities.				
Strong Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	4	2	1	0
Q18. I am satisfied with my professors.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	5	1	1	0
Q19. I am satisfied with my dissertation chair.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	6	0	1	0
Q20. I am satisfied with my dissertation committee.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	4	3	0	0
Q21. Comments:				
Response 1: My Chair has been a great resource. The Department has been extremely helpful. It's been my lack of consistency that has caused my delay in completion.				
Response 2: I was very satisfied at the beginning of my program then professors began to leave and I felt somewhat lost.				
Response 3: I have been disengaged from my dissertation for quite some time. My initial Chair was not helpful and created some complications for me. I had to seek help from a professor to change my chair and it really was difficult for me to get back into finishing after that experience. Looking back I think if I had a different chair to start I would have finished.				

The responses related to Bean's (2005) fourth theme offer insight into participants' sense of self as well as their thoughts on related academic matters (see Table 5). They all agreed or strongly agreed that they have the skills needed to complete their dissertations. At the same time, they reported less confidence in their ability to make the choices needed to focus on their dissertation (Question 23). Although seemingly satisfied with their course work and materials presented in class, they were less favorable toward the academic advising they received.

Table 5
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 4: Academics

Questions with Scale Responses				
Q22. I have the emotional intelligence to do the right thing to achieve academic standards and say no to other happenings that can hinder my ability to finish my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	3	2	2	0
Q23. I have the academic skills to successfully complete my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	5	0	0	
Q24. The coursework taken in my degree program provided me with the content and learning experiences I was seeking.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	7	0	1	0
Q25. My professors presented course material that promotes academic values and self-efficacy.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	6	0	1	0
Q26. I am satisfied with the academic advising I received.				
Strong Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	5	2	2	0
Q27. I have social skills to know what's expected of me and act accordingly in pursuit of my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	7	0	0	0
Q28. Comments:				
Response 1: I felt my professors were great, but just had the rough experience with my initial chair.				

In regard to social factors, the participants gave favorable responses (see Table 6). Because social bonds and family support are essential to student success in a variety of endeavors, negative responses to these questions would be an indication of potential barriers students might face when completing their dissertations.

The qualitative response related to question 30 offers important feedback about the wording of this specific question. Because this response suggests that the question could be interpreted in myriad ways, it would be important to review this question before the survey is administered again.

Table 6
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 5: Social Factors

Questions with Scale Responses				
Q29. I formed social bonds with peers that help me fit in with others in the doctoral program.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	5	1	0	0
Q30. The [university] is respected by my family and provides me support.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	2	2	1	0
Q31. A doctor in education degree meets the expectation of my parents and family members.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	6	3	0	0
Q32. Comments:				
Response 1: I am unclear as to what #30 is asking. Is it asking if [the university] is providing support or my family is providing support? The wording makes it sound like [the university], but that doesn't seem to fit the question.				

The responses related to bureaucratic factors are noticeably more mixed and less favorable than responses to other themes (see Table 7). The responses to the admissions process are generally favorable, with eight participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had positive experiences. In addition, nine participants indicate they agreed or strongly agreed that they had positive experiences related to financial aid, loans, and payments. The participants were less positive regarding academic issues, including scheduling.

Although some of these areas may be outside of the purview of the school of education the students attended, the responses nonetheless speak to the importance of a university's administrative processes in supporting doctoral student success.

Table 7
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 6: Bureaucratic Factors

Questions with Scale Responses

Q33. I had a positive experience with the [university] admissions process when I applied to the program.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	4	0	1	1

Q34. I have positive experiences with the [university] financial department to address aid, loans, payment.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	7	1	0	0

Q35. I have positive experiences with the [university] administration regarding academic issues, scheduling.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	2	3	3	0

Q36. I feel empowered from my interactions with [university] staff.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	5	4	1	0

Q37. Comments: (No responses).

The external environment can have an impact on any student's experience (see Table 8). The external factors that may influence ability of adult learners to complete their dissertations are reflected in the responses to the questions posed below. Participants consistently agreed or strongly agreed that professional and family obligations can take precedence over their dissertation.

Table 8
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 7: External Environment

Questions with Scale Responses				
Q38. Professional obligations may sometimes take precedence over time to work on my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	0	1	0
Q39. Professional obligations frequently take precedence over time to work on my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	0	1	0
Q40. I have commitments to my spouse/partner that take time away from working on my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	3	1	1	2
Q41. Family obligations may sometimes take precedence over working on my dissertation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6	1	1	2	0
Q42. Family obligations frequently take precedence over working on my dissertation.				
Strong Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	2	0	3	0
Q43. Comments:				
Response 1: Even though I had various obligations; I still understood the importance of "self-management." Which is the reason my dissertation has not been completed.				
Response 2: My attempts to finish initially were work and family related in terms of time, however my own medical issues, and my wife's medical condition, have caused me to disconnect from the work.				

The responses regarding student background do not shed much light on the way this theme affects students' TTD completion (see Table 9). A minimum grade point average (GPA) is required of all students admitted to the program the participants are enrolled in. Consequently, it is not surprising that nine participants agreed or strongly agreed that they entered the program with a high GPA in previous course work.

It is reasonable to expect that participants would indicate an alignment between their professional goals and their doctoral degree. The responses to Question 45 are somewhat puzzling in that the responses do not reflect a high degree of connection between participants' professional goals and the doctorate. These responses vary somewhat from the responses to Question 3 where eight participants agreed or strongly agreed that they sought the doctoral degree because it will help them take their next career step, and to Question 17 where seven participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident the Ed.D. would lead to employment opportunities.

Table 9
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 8: Student Background

Questions with Scale Responses

Q44. I entered the doctoral program with a high GPA in my previous academic work.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	5	1	0	0

Q45. My professional goals require a doctoral degree.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	3	2	2	1

Q46. My parents' education, occupation, and income are expected by someone with doctoral level education.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	2	2	2	2

Q47. Comments:

Response 1: I don't understand what #46 is asking.

Response 2: I do not understand what question 46 is asking so I chose "neutral."

Although seven participants indicated they agreed or strongly agreed they have sufficient financial resources to cover the costs of tuition, fees, and/or housing, only five agreed or strongly agreed they have scholarships, grants, tuition discounts, or other tools to pay for tuition, fees, and costs (see Table 10). These responses are not surprising given that the respondents are all attending a private university in northern California where doctoral tuition can be high.

The qualitative response reflects a common concern regarding the lack of financial aid opportunities for graduate students in general, and doctoral students specifically at the site university.

Table 10
Participant Responses to Bean's (2005) Theme 9: Money and Finance

Questions with Scale Responses				
Q48. I have sufficient financial resources to cover costs of tuition, fees, and/or housing costs.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	4	2	0	1
Q49. I have scholarships, grants, tuition discounts, or other tools to pay for tuition, fees, and costs.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	3	1	1	3
Q50. Comments:				
Response 1: I wish there were more financial assistance opportunities for doctoral and graduate level students.				

Two questions at the end of the survey offer respondents opportunities to share additional thoughts. Their responses focused on time management, topic selection, and the dissertation chair. In offering their advice on time management, they urged other doctoral students to create a timeline, stick to it, work on the dissertation consistently, and avoid procrastination. One participant encouraged others to pick an easier topic if needed. In terms of relationships, one participant noted the importance of communicating well with family members so that they are aware of the obligations related to the dissertation, while another emphasized the importance of the relationship with the dissertation chair.

Participant responses to the open-ended question regarding advice to other students follows. Question 51 asked: What advice would you give to other students working on their dissertations?

- Response 1: Keep your momentum and don't stop working on your dissertation once you start.
- Response 2: Don't put it off. Start working on it as soon as you begin the program, even if that is just thinking about your topic.
- Response 3: Set timelines and really stick to them. Even if other obligations arrive, find ways to make up the time you scheduled.
- Response 4: Sometimes it's ok to pick the easier topic if you think you can get it done sooner.
- Response 5: Be patient and persevere.
- Response 6: Work consistently, even if only for a little time each day or week. Make a schedule and stick to it. Find time to work that does not heavily impact time with your family, late nights or early mornings, etc.
- Response 7: Have a conversation upfront with family and friends about what to expect while you are in the program and develop that understanding and forgiveness and be OK with yourself when you have to say NO. Always keep something to write with and write on nearby.
- Response 8: Make sure you get a dissertation chair that knows you and will push you to finish.

Participant responses to the general open-ended question students follows. Question 52

asked: Is there anything you would like to add?

- Response 1: This survey seemed skewed towards younger grad students as opposed to older adult grad students. This could influence your results. Parent questions are not as relevant for older adult grad students.
- Response 2: No.
- Response 3: No.
- Response 4: You didn't ask any questions about significant changes in lifestyle taking precedence over working on our dissertation; I moved abroad immediately after coursework and proposing. This is not a family obligation or work obligation, but it definitely impacted my choices and ability to work on my dissertation. Two other people in my cohort moved to different states at the same time, and none of us are finished yet.

The final two qualitative responses offer insight into the ways this pilot survey could be improved. In addition, the second response provides insight into a barrier to completion: a move out of state or out of the country.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results regarding students' TTD completion. The participants were all doctoral students who had completed their course work and were working on their dissertations. Although only 10 students responded to the survey, the results can be used to refine both the survey itself and data collection procedures. The implications of the results, as well as areas for further study, are described in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an opportunity to explain and discuss the results of this study. The key findings presented in the previous chapter merit examination to better understand students' experiences and to offer recommendations for future researchers who may wish to build on this study. In addition, this chapter offers an overview of lessons learned from this study and recommendations for educational leadership faculty and practitioners.

Restatement of the Problem

Educated societies thrive on a strong national economy and a nation's global competitiveness depends on the education earned by its citizens (Seidman, 2005). A nation's ability to effectively educate its population is often in the hands of its educational leaders, many who completed the Ed.D. (or another doctorate) as a requirement for their job. Yet, the retention rate of Ed.D. students and their increased TTD delays potential academic leaders from moving into jobs in which they can influence the field of education and its stakeholders.

Attrition in higher education has been thoroughly studied in the last few decades largely popularized by Tinto and others; however, the Ed.D. student has been underrepresented in previous research (Klenowski et al., 2011). While studying the experiences of the Ed.D. student, it is noted that the Ed.D. is a different type of student from the undergraduate and graduate students that past studies observed. The Ed.D. student is more likely to be employed full-time in demanding, mid-level jobs; be occupationally committed to their employer; and have substantial family commitments with a significant other, children, and/or aging parents (D'Andrea, 2002). Ultimately, the Ed.D. student may be over-committed with non-academic priorities while taking classes and pursuing their degree. Research shows high dropout rates as well as an increased TTD for these students (Ivankova & Stick, 2007).

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore influences on Ed.D. students who have completed all required coursework for their degree, but have not finished their dissertation, in an effort to identify factors influencing TTD and degree completion. It sought to use the results to develop a model university faculty and staff could use to identify Ed.D. students at risk of not completing their program and to suggest strategies to increase dissertation completion and facilitate a timelier TTD. This study adds to the current scholarship on graduate student retention, degree completion, and TTD for Ed.D. students in particular.

Four research questions guided this study:

1. What are Ed.D. students' expectations for their TTD?
2. How prepared do Ed.D. students feel for the dissertation research phase of their academic program?
3. What impacts Ed.D. students' motivation to complete their dissertation once all coursework has been completed?
4. What barriers do Ed.D. students face while trying to finish their dissertation?

Research Design and Methods

This study employed a quantitative study at a single site and surveyed a group of Ed.D. students at a private university in northern California. The target population was graduate students who were enrolled an on-site Ed.D. program at a private university in northern California. Students who had completed their doctoral course work but had not yet finished their dissertations were invited to participate. Of the 66 students who met the inclusion criteria, 10 responded to the survey. Due to the low number of respondents, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data presented in Chapter 4.

Major Findings

The results of this study reveal participants' very strong intentions of completing their Ed.D. degree and understanding the impact the degree can have on their professional lives. These students also expressed positive attitudes about their role as students, prior academic preparation, and their ability to be successful in the degree program. The most substantial findings were the impacts the students' external environment has had on their pursuit of the Ed.D. and the barriers they face to finishing in a timely manner. Participants suggested that external commitments—both personal and professional—often take priority over their dissertation.

Findings Related to the Literature

Much of the scholarly research on college student retention focuses on undergraduate students. There is scant research on graduate student retention, specifically students enrolled in Ed.D. programs. This study focused solely on Ed.D. students at a private university in northern California. These students, and therefore this study, is very different than other retention studies. The most substantial difference with these students was with their external environment, most notably, their personal and professional commitments that pose a challenge to finishing. Unlike other studies that investigate barriers to degree completion, these students did not discuss major challenges in regard to finances, academic rigor, peer interaction, or fitting in at the institution.

Findings by Research Question

This study was guided by four research questions. Perhaps because only 10 students completed survey, the research questions do not appear to have direct responses. Still, there is content of value to address the questions. The study sought to examine the experience of Ed.D. students in an effort to identify barriers to degree completion and increased TTD. Although the

study sought to develop a potential model to identify Ed.D. students with barriers and to suggest intervention strategies which was hampered by the small sample size, the findings do add to current scholarship on graduate student retention and student success. There are data here that provide a starting point for further research to develop a later model.

Research question 1: What are Ed.D. students' expectations for their TTD?

Although the data did not directly address student expectations for TTD, the responses addressed related matters. The responses to the questions within the first theme, intentions, showed that eight of the 10 participants chose the university as a first choice. The next question showed seven of 10 choosing the Ed.D. as a first choice of degrees. Also, eight of 10 answered that the degree would help them take the next career step. Regarding the second theme, institutional fit and commitment, eight of the 10 participants noted they understand the value of the degree and its implication on their careers.

Considering Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) attitude-behavior theory in which behavior follows intention, it can be assumed that when these students enrolled in the Ed.D. program they had every intention of finishing the degree required for their next career step. After all, eight of the 10 were able to enroll in the school of their choice and seven of the 10 also enrolled in the degree of their choice.

Research question 2: How prepared do Ed.D. students feel for the dissertation research phase of their academic program? Participants did not sufficiently answer how prepared they felt for the dissertation and research phase of their Ed.D. program. Some responses, when pieced together, provide some thoughtful insight regarding their preparation in general, but not specifically of the dissertation phase.

Question 44, under Bean's (2005) eighth theme, student background, showed that nine of the 10 students agreed or strongly agreed they entered the Ed.D. program with a high GPA in previous academic work. All 10 respondents agreed or strongly agreed they have the ability to adapt and survive in the academic environment and are confident in their ability and academic skills. More than half said they have the emotional intelligence to do the right thing to achieve academic standards and to said no regarding people, places, or things that could hinder their progress. This demonstrates that participants are academically confident due to their past successes and have a sense of self-discipline and emotional intelligence. These students all finished 56 credits of rigorous coursework in the last few years, a major milestone toward their degree completion.

Bean (2005) stated that academics, after financial reasons, is the most critical factor leading to student departure. This highlights the significance of this question and the potential barrier standing between completed coursework and the completed dissertation. Skills and abilities needed to complete the coursework are different from the skills and abilities needed to complete the dissertation. It is not understood how participants felt about their dissertation and research work. It might be surmised that participants did not understand what the dissertation journey would be like, or they were not prepared for the independent work structure of the dissertation phase. Klenowski et al. (2011) identified skills gaps among Ed.D. students who hold demanding jobs, are time poor, and who despite expertise in their professional lives, may not have the academic skills for research, doctoral level writing, the concept of theoretical frameworks, and experience a steep uphill climb when facing the dissertation.

Research question 3: What impacts Ed.D. students' motivation to complete their dissertation once all coursework is completed? The most obvious response to this question is

the professional benefits the participants expect upon degree completion. There is also some social motivation students shared, but the motivation largely seems professionally-driven.

Although this was not directly answered, there is some content in the responses that addresses motivation to finish, but not necessarily motivation during the period of the dissertation phase.

Research question 4: What barriers do Ed.D. students face while trying to finish their dissertation? All participants agreed, and seven of the 10 strongly agreed, that they have substantial professional obligations outside of school. These students not only work full-time or more, they are committed to their employer, which prioritizes their professional commitments over their academic commitments.

Personal obligations also serve as substantial barriers to Ed.D. students. Many of these students have children and are working to balance parenting obligations with writing a dissertation. They also have a significant other, a home, and/or aging parents who may need their time and energy.

Stress was shown to be a barrier to the Ed.D. student. The challenge of balancing personal, professional, and academic priorities can vary from week to week. The ability to stay focused and remain productive in research and writing activities is not easily mastered. Stress can negatively impact focus and productivity. Fortunately, nine of the 10 participants reported having ways to cope with the challenges of their academic demands and every one of them said they were confident in their ability to survive in an academic environment.

Findings Related to Bean's (2005) Nine Themes of College Student Retention

Category 1: Intentions and attitudes. The participants had very good intentions when enrolling at the university for the Ed.D. degree. They enrolled with every intention of finishing successfully, were committed to the university as their first choice, and had strong attitudes

including self-confidence and self-efficacy. These students came to the university and pursued the Ed.D. to “learn to earn.” Eight of the 10 participants agreed or strongly agreed the Ed.D. would help them move forward in their careers.

Theme 1: Intentions. Bean (2005) and Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) asserted that intention is the best predictor of college student persistence. Participants in this study enrolled with every intention of finishing successfully. The students surveyed had very high intention (Theme 1) as evidenced by eight of 10 saying that the Ed.D. would help them make their next career step.

Theme 2: Institutional fit and institutional commitment. Bean’s (2005) second theme is institutional fit and commitment. Here, seven of the 10 of participants agreed or strongly agreed, and none disagreed, that they were committed to the site university. Further, every one of the participants strongly agreed or agreed they were satisfied with being a student, and eight of 10 have a sense of belonging and fitting in with classmates.

Theme 3: Psychological processes and key attitudes. Bean’s (2005) third theme addresses students’ attitudes. All participants responded they have confidence in their ability to survive and adapt in an academic environment. They also have confidence in their ability to socialize, engage in helpful activities, and ask for help when needed. Participants are satisfied with their role as a student, with the professional opportunities the degree may offer, their professors, and their dissertation chair and committees.

Participants’ experiences appear to be positive after completion of all coursework in pursuit of the Ed.D. Most chose the site university as their first choice and all were satisfied being a student. Participants were happy with the decision to enroll in the Ed.D. program. This suggests motivation to successfully finish, but it is not clear if this is enough of a factor.

Category 2: Students interacting with the institution and the external environment.

Student interaction with the institution and the external environment represents very different student experiences than the first, intrinsic category, attitudes and intentions. It includes interactions with faculty, academic counselors, administrators, peers, family, and employers. The most significant findings in this category were found in Bean's (2005) seventh theme, the external environment. This theme was separated into two subcategories that were discussed by participants: personal interactions and professional interactions. Scores for other themes within this category including academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, student background, and money and finance, did not yield significant scores worth noting or showed inconclusive, mixed results.

Theme 7: External environment – Personal interaction. The first barrier in this theme is students' personal commitments. This includes their commitment to roles at home which may include a spouse or significant other, a parenting role if they have children, as well as caring for aging parents, and finally, maintaining and upkeeping their home. In the study, seven of the 10 participants responded that family obligations frequently take precedence over time spent on the dissertation and six of the 10 responded that commitments to their spouse/partner held a higher priority to working on the dissertation. In an open question, one student stated that work and family kept them from attempts to finish their degree. In addition, medical problems of the spouse of another participant prevented degree completion in that case.

Theme 7: External environment – Professional interaction. Another barrier to Ed.D. completion is being occupationally committed, where the student prioritizes their professional commitment to their employer over their academic commitment to themselves. Nine of the 10 participants admitted that their professional obligations frequently take precedence over the need

to work on their dissertation. Such a commitment is often non-negotiable when compared to the priorities of the degree. Other students stated they hoped for more financial assistance so they would not need to be so committed to their jobs. Ultimately, there seems to be a catch-22 in which an Ed.D. student pursues the degree for professional success, but the time spent earning to pay for their program keep them from their academic work which they intend to use for career progression. Ultimately, several participants were over-committed to their jobs and struggled balancing their family obligations with the pursuit of their degree. This barrier seems to be most problematic during the dissertation phase when the academic commitment is less structured.

Personal and time management. Participants in this study are adult learners who chose the site university as their first choice, are satisfied with being a student, and who believe they have the competence to finish their degree. Yet, they are also mostly mid-career professionals who are occupationally-committed and loyal to their employer, and who also are committed to their family members, including children and aging adults who require their time. Maintaining a full-time salary to keep up financial commitments for family and home are major detractors. Participants clearly responded that they were stressed. Here, nine of the 10 reported feeling stress as a student (see Question 10 in Table 3).

The most surprising finding in this survey came from responses to Question 51, an open-ended question asking the respondents for advice they would give to others working on their dissertation. None of them offered advice on the academic rigors others might face, such as making sense of conceptually challenging, peer-reviewed articles to find, read, analyze, and synthesize, or the challenges of doctoral level research. Rather, all eight responses gave advice on personal management. In other words, the challenge they chose to talk about was not academic, social factors, bureaucratic factors, or about commitment or even money. All eight

made suggestions regarding keeping one's momentum; setting timelines and meeting them; not putting things off; picking manageable topics; having patience, perseverance, and consistency; and saying no to other non-essential activities.

The Ed.D. student is committed to her school, her degree, and the family she has at home depending on her to finish. It takes an ability to use content learned along the doctoral journey, as well as the ability to plan for it and to execute the commitments. This requires a strong ability to plan and execute personal and time management practices.

Unexpected Findings

An unanticipated finding of this study was the challenge in working with students who were still affiliated with the university, but not actively enrolled. A faculty representative worked with the university's registrar and office of graduate studies to identify those students who had completed their doctoral course work but who had not yet defended their dissertations. It proved difficult to contact these students who were no longer on campus taking classes. They were contacted through their university email. It is suspected that many of these students were no longer checking this email address and may not have seen the cover letter asking them to participate. Another possibility for the lack of response is that students may have felt embarrassed to participate in a study about them that focused on the reasons they had not yet completed their doctoral program.

The more surprising finding is related to Question 51 in which the participants were asked to give advice to other students working on their dissertations. The finding is not related to the challenge of the content, doctoral level research, or writing the dissertation. Instead, the finding is related to time and personal management. What makes this so surprising is to learn that a substantial barrier standing between Ed.D. students and the degree they are so eagerly

pursuing is not what most would expect. It is not the academic challenge, the rigor of the dissertation, the intelligence needed, or the need for professional experience. It is not the skills needed, such as the ability to conduct doctoral-level research, dissertation-level writing, and the critical thinking skills to gather the work of others and synthesize results and findings into a study. The most surprising finding is that participants mostly agreed the most difficult barrier they faced was time. Given the challenges of balancing a full-time job, family responsibilities, and writing a doctoral dissertation, participants indicated that students need to prioritize time to complete their academic goals.

Conclusions

The focus of this study was on Ed.D. students and identifying influences on degree completion in an attempt to create a model to identify students who may be at risk of long delays in their TTD or of not completing their degree, as well as suggesting workable intervention strategies. A broader issue to consider is the bottleneck of Ed.D. students' increased TTD. Their inability to move into roles in which they can impact education locally and globally has long-term implications for society. How to support Ed.D. students to reduce the bottleneck by shortening their TTD is paramount.

One purpose of this study was to examine the Ed.D. student experience after completion of required coursework. The results from the survey showed that these students have strong intentions in choosing their degree program and the site university. They have a strong academic background with every reason to believe they would be successful. They are also motivated by the hopes of upward mobility in their professions. In the first of two of Bean's (2005) primary categories, intentions and attitudes, participants had all the internal characteristics aligned in their favor. In this study, participants reported a high level of self-confidence regarding challenging

academic situations, emotional intelligence to thrive socially, and were motivated by the professional benefits of the Ed.D. degree. These internal/intrinsic traits serve as positive factors toward timely degree completion. Clearly, this is not enough as they remain in the Ed.D. doctoral pipeline.

The results of the survey also showed that participants are demographically different from other student populations studied in student persistence research. Of the students who responded to the survey, eight were in their 40s, one was 32, and the other was 67 years of age. It was not asked if age was a perceived barrier to Ed.D. degree completion; yet, most participants in this study had a family to care for and the personal commitments that come with having dependents. Most have children, and half have a spouse/partner at home. Others answered they had either an elderly family member or a family with special needs for which they are responsible. Unsurprisingly, a large majority answered that family issues were often more of a priority than working on their dissertation. These non-negotiable, personal commitments are one of the primary barriers to degree completion found among the participants. Negative factors participants experienced were extrinsic and categorized by Bean (2005) as part of the external environment. The challenge of balancing the needs of their employers, spouses/partners, children, and other dependent family members; the needs of demanding, full-time jobs; and the needs of the dissertation led to nine of the 10 students surveyed stating that they felt stress as a student (none disagreed).

A second major barrier identified in the survey was employment. In addition to being personally committed, participants are occupationally committed, with eight of the 10 working 40 hours per week, some more than 50 hours per week. As with their personal commitments, their professional commitments are non-negotiable. All but one reported that their professional

obligations often take precedence over the needs of their dissertation work. All participants responded that they had substantial personal or professional commitments outside of school. All but one stated they experienced stress as a student, the third major barrier identified.

Other factors, such as interacting with peers in and outside the classroom, bureaucratic factors, academic interactions, money and finance, and personal background are themes Bean (2005) suggested may affect degree completion, but these did not present prominently by participants in this study.

Identifying a Model of Ed.D. Completion

The results demonstrate that some of Bean's (2005) themes are a positive influence toward Ed.D. dissertation completion, and theme seven, the external environment, work as a barrier; yet, a model to predict graduate student risk of not finishing could not be developed given the small sample size of this study. The most revealing responses to the survey were in regard to advice participants would give to others working on their dissertations. All responses focused on personal management, time management, and self-discipline. As a result, it is suggested future Ed.D. students apply strong self-discipline in their personal and time management. Ed.D. programs could develop coursework that support students in the planning and execution of the dissertation stage of their degree, not uncommon at other universities. These recommendations fall short of the initial purpose of this study to develop a more robust model based in significant data validated by the literature that only future studies might reveal.

Implications

Educated societies thrive more than less educated societies and a strong national economy and global competitiveness largely depends on the educational attainment of a nation's citizenry (Seidman, 2005). The increased TTD for doctoral students slows higher

education's ability to hire needed professors and administrative leaders to fill anticipated vacancies and prepare future industry leaders. Many of these vacant positions will require a professional with the skills learned from completing Ed.D. coursework and the dissertation. It needs educators with a doctorate in education who can take idealistic, societal theories and bring them to classrooms, dorm rooms, and chat rooms.

The challenges education faces are different more now than ever before. The student loan crisis is at historic highs; doctoral student attrition is expensive for colleges and universities and immeasurably costly for the doctoral student who leaves prior to completion (Gardner, 2008). Financial implications affect the government that funds college loans to students, many of whom are unable to pay them back.

A generation of leaders is needed to help develop the next generation of educational leaders. Tierney and Sablan (2014) concluded that the United States is falling behind in its ability to produce college graduates compared to other nations. As technology and innovation makes the globe virtually smaller and more connected, geographic distance becomes less relevant and national and worldwide conflict increases, a more educated world population is sought to minimize conflict and thrive.

This study adds to the current scholarship on graduate student retention and success in general, and Ed.D. students in particular. The conclusions from this study could help lead to increased graduation rates and decreased TTD for Ed.D. students. The findings could influence the ways college and universities with Ed.D. programs construct their program and structure delivery of coursework, develop internal operations to provide support, and communicate realistic expectations to better support degree completion.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research could expand on the small size of this single site study and compare programs at multiple sites. This could aid in recruiting a larger sample size of Ed.D. students. This larger sample size could potentially lead to a model to predict Ed.D. attrition and offer suggestions for intervention. There are some comparison studies that could arise as a result of this study.

Since nine of the 10 participants noted they were stressed in their role as a student, nine of 10 noted professional responsibilities frequently took precedence over writing time, and seven of 10 said family obligations took precedence over writing time, it would be important to investigate positive time management strategies for the Ed.D. student, as well as methods to most efficiently work through weekly goals and how faculty coaching can help students avoid unnecessarily spinning their wheels in an effort to move the dissertation closer to completion.

Since the bulk of participants in this Ed.D. study were over 40 years of age and work more than 40 hours a week while working on their dissertation for more than four years, it may be interesting to study this demographic enrolled in other graduate and undergraduate degrees to see if similar findings emerge in other degree programs enrolling similarly-aged students who also work full-time. It may also be helpful to compare the results of this study with those who have finished their Ed.D. at the study site. It would be helpful to examine the ABD experiences of the Ed.D. students who did graduate in a timelier fashion and compare their activities and experiences during the ABD time period.

The value of comparing the dissertation experience from this study with the coursework phase of the degree program, looking at difference in student the experiences, is apparent. A comparison study of their activities and experiences during the coursework phase versus the

dissertation phase may be a helpful analysis in the attempt to understand why the participants were successful in completing the coursework segment but not successful in completing the dissertation phase.

A similar study comparing faculty activities in interacting with students during the coursework phase and the interactions with students during the dissertation phase would be helpful. Another recommendation is to compare on-site against online Ed.D. degree programs in terms of their structure and student support initiatives with a focus on TTD. It would be interesting to investigate how new technologies can play a role in successfully facilitating the Ed.D. student through the dissertation phase through to degree completion. Finally, because most of the challenges the participants in this study noted are in their external environment, it would be useful to examine external environmental factors and how they influence graduate student success and TTD, especially for the Ed.D.

Recommendations for University Faculty and Administrators

Bean's (2005) Theme 7: The External Environment

Bean (2005) discussed nine separate themes of college student retention which became the theoretical framework for this study; yet, the substantial theme impacting the Ed.D. students in this study led to his seventh theme, the external environment. Most participants noted a barrier in their availability of time to work on the dissertation to frequently conflict with professional obligations, as well as spousal and parental obligations. Although these issues are beyond the sphere of control of the university, they can influence how faculty interact with students in light of the external influences over which they have no control. This is mostly in the hands of faculty who have the most interaction with students. This study found that the participating Ed.D. students were more than 40 years of age and work more than 40 hours a

week. A stronger understanding of this demographic group may also be constructive to develop an understanding of how faculty and administrators structure the program and how faculty carry out and deliver a new model to these students.

Time and Personal Management

University faculty and administrators should continue to pursue research focused on incorporating time management and personal management strategies into a learning model for the Ed.D. with pragmatic and measurable actions. Although many barriers to completion are beyond the control of faculty and administrators, they can still influence the students toward degree completion and a timelier TTD. An example would be regular feedback that continued to steer and direct the student toward their next goal. Through reflecting on my personal experience as a doctoral student, I saw months of my work be merely spinning my wheels. More coaching and feedback could have helped keep me on track and make that time more fruitful toward maintaining progress, gaining momentum, and completing the manuscript. Another example would be faculty and administrators working to break down large parts of the dissertation into more manageable chunks with reasonable deadlines. Similar to the doctoral courses that broke down courses into weekly tasks, faculty who can help do this for the ABD student would make goals seem more achievable.

The program could also be structured so that students identify a topic for their dissertation much earlier in their program and so that they can make some progress through the coursework phase. I experienced a breakdown between the last two research courses prior to finishing the coursework. The topic for my literature review was fine in the next to last research class, but my professor in my last research class would not accept the topic. I would suggest that university faculty and administration look at examples like this and seek methods that can be

applied to smooth the transition from one course to the next so that they are created to be more sequential toward writing the dissertation.

Technological options can also be reconsidered. For instance, classes could be recorded and live-streamed so students can still participate in the class live from their workplace or home. Technology can easily record class sessions for students who cannot attend live in the classroom and aids in revisiting class discussion for expanded learning. This can help mitigate the barrier of time available to focus on any aspect of the doctoral degree.

Isolation

This study noted several expert scholars who studied undergraduate students, graduate students, and doctoral students in particular. While their target audience sometimes differed, there is an agreement that socialization, in various forms, is beneficial to degree completion and TTD. I remember the immediate feeling of isolation after I completed classes. Some of the best work I had often came from a simple suggestion from a peer or something the faculty said in class. In order for university faculty and staff to make the most of the socialization element in their Ed.D. programs, they can review how the program is delivered and look for opportunities to increase socialization and helpful interactions between faculty and students as well as between students and administrators and students and peers. The model can include students working in teams on group research projects of related interest, which is a learning model with a substantial social component. This could increase student-to-faculty and student-to-student socialization important to degree completion.

My ABD Experience

Best Intentions

I remember upon starting my Ed.D. journey that I was going to have three years of coursework. I also expected that I may need another full year to complete the dissertation. Like the respondents to Research Questions 1 and 2, I had plenty of self-confidence and thought I was prepared for the coursework and dissertation, but I found that I was not nearly as ready as I needed to be. I never imagined it would take me twice as long to complete my Ed.D. as it has. However, I learned long ago about never giving up and once I was determined to start, I was just as determined to finish.

Like other participants, I was fully committed to the university, the degree program, and was satisfied being a student. Although I liked identifying as a doctoral student, like others, I also experienced stress in this role. My motivation, like the responses to Research Question 3, was professionally driven. I was seeking long-term, job security doing something I loved, teaching college students. I also hoped to find a college or university where I would work as a professor in which I can be part of the community, give back, and allow my sons to experience and one day become students there. Ultimately, my motivation was to take care of my family and give them a decent life. I hope to set an example to my young boys about the importance of education and goal perseverance.

Then I experienced a substantial setback. On the first day of my last course prior to the dissertation phase in which I expected to transition from the coursework to the dissertation stage of my degree program, my professor told me that my topic that I had spent the last four months writing would not work going forward, that I needed to come up with something else, and that the class would only be six weeks in length rather than the full semester. I no longer had a viable

dissertation topic and there was no way I could write a three-chapter proposal within the six-week timeframe given by the professor. I had to drop the course. I immediately felt isolated from the faculty and my cohort of classmates. This socialization breakdown was the beginning of a long period of isolation. I was offered an independent study course to replace the dropped course, but I never heard from the faculty member. At the end of the semester I submitted a three-chapter proposal with my initial topic and received a final grade, but no feedback. This was another isolation experience between myself and the faculty in my Ed.D. program.

My External Environment

Related to Bean's (2005) seventh theme, the external environment, I faced specific barriers which I share as a method of data triangulation and validation in this descriptive study.

My primary barrier: Isolation. I felt that I had fallen into a large pit. I was now on my own, separated by faculty, peers, and my dissertation advisor. My advisor said that he was available if I had anything new to share, but I was not able to gain any meaningful ground on my own without guidance to complete anything sufficient to share. I felt that I did not have a right to contact him unless I made real progress. I spent the next year spinning my wheels, sacrificing everything in order to find some hours during the week to write, but often months of those efforts were tossed as the content was too far off track and not suitable for the study. I eventually changed my dissertation chair and started from the beginning with a new topic. Like the nine of 10 participants in this study, I felt stressed as a student and my external environment was one of utter isolation.

My barrier and my motivation: Family. Like the other participants discussing their external environment, my barriers included being attentive to my spouse and my children while navigating through the dissertation process. Balancing these roles with substantial academic

demands was continually challenging. Contrary to my peers in the Ed.D. program, I did not get support in my home, but experienced the opposite. The time demands of this degree program and a six-figure student loan bill was a continual source of tension. This became an extreme source of my stress throughout these years. I continued to feel very isolated from the university I chose and to which I had committed.

In my final days of preparing for final dissertation defense, my younger son graduated eighth grade and my older son graduated high school and turned 18. I helped get the house ready for their graduation party but had to get back to writing the dissertation. I socialized at the party but left early so I could continue working on the dissertation. At the beginning of the program, my sons were six and 10 years old, at the end, they were 14 and 18 years old. Despite my commitment to put in the time, it came at the expense of missing out on my family and my sons' younger years.

My barrier: Employment. I too, like some of the participants in this study, was caught in catch-22—I could not get the job I wanted without the degree and could not finish the degree due to the time constraints of my adjunct faculty role and related excessive travel. During my time working on the dissertation I taught courses for 10 different universities across 20 northern California cities including an international online program. At times I turned down as many teaching assignments as I accepted. Eventually I had to resign from a part-time area chair role in order to reduce commuting and get more balance in my roles. Like the nine of the 10 participants that noted they experienced stress, I did as well.

My barrier: My money and finances. Unlike others in this study, I experienced substantial financial problems during my Ed.D. endeavor. In order to pay bills and keep my family in the only house they have ever known, we used credit cards to pay the mortgage and

over-extended credit, just to make ends meet each month. We fought off foreclosure on the home and made it this far.

My barrier: My health. At the end of my six-year mark I fell in my kitchen and suffered a serious head injury. That was followed by an immediate series of seizures and a trip to the emergency room. I suffered a concussion and severe dizziness for weeks. For the last two years my memory has been substantially affected and I still experience dizziness when looking down. However, I do not have time to think about it, or even go back to my medical specialist for a visit. I did not want any more time away from working on the dissertation.

From ABD to Ed.D.

I took my reading and writing with me everywhere for the eight years I was in this program. Despite my commitment to put in the time, it came at the expense of missing out on my family and my sons' teen years. Ultimately, I couldn't escape the pit until my new dissertation advisor became much more involved with my study. I would not have made it to the finish line without the substantial, dedicated help of my second dissertation advisor in the final months of my dissertation journey.

Ultimately, I sacrificed everything to finish this dissertation—including some very important years with my family during my sons' developmental years. I only hope that someday my family will see value in my educational endeavors, as well as their own. I started this degree program only to get a full-time job as a professor/educator so that I could support my family and allow my wife to be a stay-at-home mom. If they can realize I would never quit, and learn that one trait, my hope is that my sons will one day realize that they too, can do anything they set their goals upon.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INCLUDING DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

This study seeks to explore the lives of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) students who have completed all required coursework for their degree, but who have not yet finished their dissertation, in an attempt to identify barriers to degree completion.

Your time and effort will help further scholarship related to college persistence—most notably for the Ed.D. student. The benefits of this research will help higher education faculty, staff, and leadership better understand Ed.D. students as they pursue their degree. This can lead to adjustments in higher education faculty and staff to more effectively assist these students toward their graduation.

Please answer each multiple-choice question—they are required in order to complete the survey. At the end of each section is a “comments” box. These questions are optional.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call the [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, [REDACTED] or IRB Administrator [REDACTED].

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Email address: _____

1. INTENTIONS

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

1	In seeking the EdD, [REDACTED] was my first choice of schools.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2	The Ed.D. was my first choice for my degree.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3	I sought this degree because it will help me take my next career step.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4	I have substantial personal or professional obligations outside of school.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5	Comments (optional):					

1. INSTITUTIONAL FIT AND INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT (LOYALTY)

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

6	I am committed to the [REDACTED] as an institution.	SA	A	N	D	SD
7	I am satisfied with being a student.	SA	A	N	D	SD
8	I share values, have a sense of belonging, and fit in with my classmates.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9	I understand the value of my degree and its implication on my career success.	SA	A	N	D	SD
10	I feel stress as a student.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11	I have ways to cope with the environment to reduce the stress the environment creates.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12	Comments (optional):					

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES AND KEY ATTITUDES

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

13	I am confident I have the ability to survive and adapt in an academic environment.	SA	A	N	D	SD
14	I am confident I can successfully socialize and interact at [REDACTED].	SA	A	N	D	SD

15	I have the drive to engage in helpful activities (collaborating with classmates, seeking faculty help, using university help centers) to help me finish my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
16	I am satisfied with being a doctoral student.	SA	A	N	D	SD
17	I am confident my Ed.D. will lead to employment opportunities.	SA	A	N	D	SD
18	I am satisfied with my professors.	SA	A	N	D	SD
19	I am satisfied with my dissertation chair.	SA	A	N	D	SD
20	I am satisfied with my dissertation committee.	SA	A	N	D	SD
21	Comments (optional):					

3. ACADEMICS

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

22	I have the emotional intelligence to do the right thing to achieve academic standards and say no to other happenings that can hinder my ability to finish my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
23	I have the academic skills to successfully complete my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
24	The coursework taken in my degree program provided me with the content and learning experiences I was seeking.	SA	A	N	D	SD
25	My professors presented course material that promotes academic values and self-efficacy.	SA	A	N	D	SD
26	I am satisfied with the academic advising I received.	SA	A	N	D	SD
27	I have social skills to know what’s expected of me and act accordingly in pursuit of my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
28	Comments (optional):					

4. SOCIAL FACTORS

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

29	I formed social bonds with peers that help me fit in with others in the doctoral program.	SA	A	N	D	SD
30	The [REDACTED] is respected by my family and provides me support.	SA	A	N	D	SD
31	A doctor in education degree meets the expectation of my parents and family members.	SA	A	N	D	SD
32	Comments (optional):					

5. BUREAUCRATIC FACTORS

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

33	I had a positive experience with the [REDACTED] admissions process when I applied to the program.	SA	A	N	D	SD
34	I have positive experiences with the [REDACTED] financial department to address aid, loans, payment.	SA	A	N	D	SD
35	I have positive experiences with the [REDACTED] administration regarding academic issues, scheduling.	SA	A	N	D	SD
36	I feel empowered from my interactions with [REDACTED] staff.	SA	A	N	D	SD
37	Comments (optional):					

6. THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

38	Professional obligations may sometimes take precedence over time to work on my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
39	Professional obligations frequently take precedence over time to work on my dissertation	SA	A	N	D	SD
40	I have commitments to my spouse/partner that take time away from working on my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
41	Family obligations may sometimes take precedence over working on my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
42	Family obligations frequently take precedence over working on my dissertation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
43	Comments (optional):					

7. BACKGROUND

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

44	I entered the doctoral program with a high GPA in my previous academic work.	SA	A	N	D	SD
45	My professional goals require a doctoral degree	SA	A	N	D	SD

46	My parents' education, occupation, and income are expected by someone with doctoral level education.	SA	A	N	D	SD
47	Comments (optional):					

8. MONEY AND FINANCE

Please highlight whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), are “neutral” (N), “disagree” (D), or “strongly disagree” (SD) with the following statements. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers in the “Comments” section.

48	I have sufficient financial resources to cover costs of tuition, fees, and/or housing costs.	SA	A	N	D	SD
49	I have scholarships, grants, tuition discounts, or other tools to pay for tuition, fees, and costs.	SA	A	N	D	SD
50	Comments (optional):					

51	What advice would you give to other students working on their dissertations?
52	Is there anything you would like to add?

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic information has an influence on a student's likeliness to finish a degree program. As a result, please answer the following questions. Although demographic information will be reported in the aggregate, it will not be used to identify any specific students.

1. Your current age: _____ years
2. Your age when you finished your doctoral course work at [REDACTED]: _____ years
3. Are you still planning to complete your dissertation? ___ yes ___ no
4. If you answered “no” to Question 3, please check one of the reasons below:
 - a. The degree is no longer relevant to my career goals
 - b. I don't have a research topic that interests me
 - c. I have run out of time and would have to repeat courses in order to complete the program
 - d. Other:

5. If you answered “yes” to Question 3, please indicate how long you have been working on your dissertation since completing your course work:
- a. More than three years but less than four years
 - b. More than four years but less than five years
 - c. More than five years but less than six years
 - d. More than six years but less than seven years
 - e. More than seven years
6. Please indicate your ethnicity. Check all that apply:
- a. Asian
 - b. Black
 - c. Caucasian
 - d. Latina/o/x
 - e. Native American/Native Hawaiian
 - f. Pacific Islander
 - g. Multi-racial
 - h. Other:
 - i. Prefer not to answer
7. Your gender
- a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Other:
 - d. Prefer not to answer

8. Do you have family responsibilities that may impact your ability to spend time working on your dissertation? Check all that apply.

- a. Children
- b. Spouse/partner
- c. Elderly family members
- d. Family members with special needs
- e. Other:
- f. Prefer not to answer

9. Marital status

- a. Single
- b. Not married, in a partnered relationship
- c. Married
- d. Other:
- e. Prefer not to answer

10. What is your GPA in your Ed.D. program?

- a. 3.5 or higher
- b. 3.0 – 3.49
- c. Less than 3.0

11. How many hours do you work a week in your primary professional position?

- a. 50+ hours a week
- b. 40 – 49 hours a week
- c. 30 – 39 hours a week
- d. 20 – 29 hours a week

- e. 10 – 19 hours a week
- f. Less than 10 hours a week

12. How long is your commute to the [REDACTED] Campus?

- a. More than 100 miles
- b. 75 – 99 miles
- c. 50 – 74 miles
- d. 25 – 49 miles
- e. Less than 25 miles

APPENDIX B: APPROVAL TO ADAPT AND USE SURVEY

Correspondence to and from Dr. Jalynn Roberts (in reverse chronological order)

From: Roberts, Jalynn [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 21, 2018 8:51 PM
To: Christopher Page [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Permission For Use of Survey

That's fine. Keep me posted on your results.

From: Christopher Page [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, January 20, 2018 10:28 PM
To: Roberts, Jalynn [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Permission For Use of Survey

Dear Dr. Roberts:

In re-reading our trail of messages, I realize I may have been unclear about what I plan to use for my study.

Attached is a PDF of the survey instrument I plan to use. You'll see that it is modeled after your survey in that the questions were developed based on your survey as was the response scale.

I'm seeking your permission to use the survey as adapted for my study on doctoral students.

Thank you,

Christopher Page
Professor – Business and Communications
[REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Jalynn Roberts:

I would like your written permission to use a survey design from your dissertation, "Student Satisfaction and Persistence – A Study of Factors Which Are Vital To Student Retention."

I am a Doctor of Education student at [REDACTED] in northern California conducting dissertation research on influences upon Ed.D. students who completed all required coursework but not the dissertation.

My survey is built upon Bean's (2005) nine themes of college student retention.

If this is acceptable to you, please respond by email. If is okay with amendments, please specify and I will ask again when they are made.

Thank you,

Christopher Page
Ed.D. Candidate



APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAILS

Email 1: Sent via email on November 20, 2019

Dear Doctor of Education Student:

[A] doctoral candidate from [REDACTED], Christopher Page, is conducting research for his dissertation and is seeking your beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to completing your dissertation.

The following information about participating in the survey is from Chris:

THIS SURVEY IS CONFIDENTIAL. NO UNIVERSITY STAFF, FACULTY, OR STUDENT WILL KNOW IF YOU COMPLETED THIS AND THE CONTENT OF YOUR RESULTS.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS.

Your commitment to complete this is about 15-25 minutes.

Your participation in this survey will help add to and further scholarship.

The overview of the study is to identify the attitudes, behavior, and behavior of doctoral students who have completed all required coursework but are yet to complete their dissertation.

PLEASE take 15-25 minutes to complete this survey and have your thoughts and opinions be counted in this body of scholarly academic research.

Thank you!

Link to the survey: *(removed to protect confidentiality of the study site.)*

Email 2: Sent on December 3, 2019

If you haven't had an opportunity to complete this short survey, Christopher Page, doctoral candidate, would appreciate your feedback.

He needs about 20 more responses to meet his goal for this pilot study.

As he notes below, the survey will take no more than 25 minutes and mostly takes about 15 minutes.

Please scroll down for a link to the survey.

Thank you for helping out a peer who is working on his dissertation – [name of faculty member]

Dear Doctor of Education Student:

[A] doctoral candidate from [REDACTED], Christopher Page, is conducting research for his dissertation and is seeking your beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to completing your dissertation.

The following information about participating in the survey is from Chris:

THIS SURVEY IS CONFIDENTIAL. NO UNIVERSITY STAFF, FACULTY, OR STUDENT WILL KNOW IF YOU COMPLETED THIS AND THE CONTENT OF YOUR RESULTS.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS.

Your commitment to complete this is about 15-25 minutes.

Your participation in this survey will help add to and further scholarship.

The overview of the study is to identify the attitudes, behavior, and behavior of doctoral students who have completed all required coursework but are yet to complete their dissertation.

PLEASE take 15-25 minutes to complete this survey and have your thoughts and opinions be counted in this body of scholarly academic research.

Thank you!

Link to the survey: *(removed to protect confidentiality of the study site.)*

APPENDIX D: FACEBOOK RECRUITMENT POSTING

Message posted to the closed Facebook group for doctoral students at the site university:

How would you like to contribute to further academic research with just a few minutes of your time? Christopher Page, doctoral candidate at University of the Pacific, is conducting a study about influences on Ed.D. students who have completed their doctoral course work but have not yet finished the dissertation.

If you are interested in participating in his study, please click on the link below.