Kansas State University Libraries

New Prairie Press

Adult Education Research Conference

2018 Conference Proceedings (Victoria, BC Canada)

Making the Case for Doctoral Student Success Through Group Advising and Dissertations

Diane D. Chapman
NC State University, ddchapma@ncsu.edu

Michelle Bartlett
NC State University, mebartle@ncsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://newprairiepress.org/aerc

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons, Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Online and Distance Education Commons, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons

Recommended Citation

Making the Case for Doctoral Student Success Through Group Advising and Dissertations

Diane D. Chapman & Michelle Bartlett
North Carolina State University

Background

Research shows that many doctoral students experience feelings of isolation when working on their dissertations. While some of this comes from the end of participating in formal classes, some isolation comes because of the culture of completing one's doctorate i.e., "this is what all students experience; doctoral work is supposed to be difficult." Doctoral students in particular feel that their journeys through academia are loaded with obstacles and hurdles (Ali & Kohun, 2007). The isolation doctoral students experience has been shown to be detrimental to learning and results in poorer student outcomes such as the failing to complete one's program, taking longer to program completion, and lower quality output.

To complicate matters, faculty advisors are being tasked with greater advising loads. These larger loads result in less time spent with each student and can cut into faculty research and teaching productivity levels. At the same time, there are calls in higher education to make learning less competitive and more collaborative. Team-based approaches are widely accepted as the best way to solve large complex problem in practice, but traditional student advising and dissertation work is done primarily taking a traditionally individual approach (Keck, Sloane, Liechty, Fiese, & Donovan, 2017).

Group Advising

One way of accommodating a large advising load and at the same time reducing student feelings of isolation is by implementing group advising sessions. Group advising brings two or more students together for regular advising sessions. In addition, group advising can be technology-enhanced, accommodating students at a distance who are often less engaged with faculty members. While group advising sessions naturally lend themselves to group problem solving and brainstorming, they can also be used to address issues relevant to individual dissertations. The benefits to group doctoral advising are significant to advisor as it reduces needs for repetition of efforts, (eliminating the need for communicating the same things to

multiple students), it fosters interdependence within the group, it fosters shared accountability, and advisors have time to focus on finding systematic aspects of advising rather than performing all advising as one-off scenarios. Students have found benefits too, such as having more people to go to for advice, increased confidence in their abilities from hearing the stories of others, and increased structure in their times between sessions (Chapman, 2017). Participants have mentioned that the sessions work best when they are facilitated as opportunities to learn and solve problems collaboratively. Some students from these sessions have formed their own accountability and writing groups. It is only natural to look at how this type of advising might also benefit and the process of group dissertation work.

Group Dissertations

Group dissertations can be found in the literature on a spectrum from a group of students working on the same topic but working on individual projects to a group of students working on one study that is written in one document. McNamara, Lara- Alecio, Irby, Hoyle, & Tong, (2007) wrote about different types of group dissertations. A meta-analytic model where a group of students examine a problem of practice from multiple perspectives. Various methodologies could be used to examine a topic. McNamara, Lara- Alecio, Irby, Hoyle, & Tong, (2007) also discuss an evaluation model where a group of students examine the same research questions but with different participants to provide a big picture. For example, if the topic is the community college advising process, one doctoral candidate may examine the students' perspective, while another examines the advisors, and another the administrators' perspectives. Pros such as students being more likely to complete their dissertation, having a deeper understanding of a topic, and gaining writing, editing and feedback support (Burnett, 1999) can be discussed. As well as cons such as increased coordination efforts for the students and faculty advisor as well as needing to manage conflict. We would like to discuss with colleagues, at the roundtable, what has worked well, what are some potential obstacles, and what are some best practices, such as groups creating a set of norms (Vickers, 2016), for chairing group dissertations.

Session Objectives

This roundtable session will share what has worked for group advising, explore the role, potential structures, processes of group advising, and will look at how to enhance these sessions with technology. In addition, session participants will discuss how group advising sessions can naturally lead into group dissertation work. The session will end with a brainstorm on how to

best tackle group dissertations to increase faculty efficiency while still retaining rigor and dissertation quality.

References

Ali, A. & Kohun, F. (2007). Dealing with social isolation to minimize doctoral attrition: A four-stage framework. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 2*, 33-49.

Burnett, P. C. (1999). The supervision of doctoral dissertations using a collaborative cohort model. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 39*(1), 46–52.

Chapman, D. D. (2017). *Breaking down isolation: Using group doctoral advising sessions to promote engagement, support, and efficiency with doctoral students*. Presentation at the 2017 conference of the International Society for Exploring Teaching and Learning, Oct. 12-14, 2017, Orlando, FL.

Keck, A.-S., Sloane, S., Liechty, J. M., Fiese, B. H., & Donovan, S. M. (2017). Productivity, impact, and collaboration differences between transdisciplinary and traditionally trained doctoral students: A comparison of publication patterns. *PLoS ONE, 12*(12), e0189391. http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189391

Khullar, D. (2016, Dec. 22). The upshot: How social isolation is killing us. *The New York Times*, December 22, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/22/upshot/how-social-isolation-is-killing-us.html?_r=0

McNamara, J., Lara-Alecio, R., Irby, B., Hoyle, J., & Tong, F. (2007, May 22). Doctoral program issues: Commentary on companion dissertations. Retrieved from http://cnx.org/content/m14542/1.1/

Van Wyke, J.M. (2016, Feb 29). Collaborate: An imperative for graduate students. *Inside Higher Ed*, February 29, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/02/29/why-grad-students-should-seek-out-opportunities-collaboration-essay

Vickers, J. (2016). The process in completing a nontraditional group dissertation in practice for the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, the Ed. D. Educational Leadership Program at Lynn University. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction, 15*(1), 39-43.