

Stalled Dissertator Case Study

What the advisor says:

An English professor contacts you about a dissertation writer he's advising. The writer accepted a full-time teaching job ABD—at a university in a different state. He has finished collecting data for his dissertation—a research project in composition studies—but has only drafted small portions. The writer's current position has given him until the end of the semester to obtain his degree if he wishes to keep his job, so the writer needs to write, defend, and submit by then.

The advisor and writer meet regularly, but the advisor has observed little progress from the writer over the past year during the pandemic, and the writer has begun to ghost him at times. The advisor is unsure what else can be done—by him or anyone else—to help the writer finish. The advisor realizes that part of graduate school is demonstrating the capability to complete research independently, which the writer does not appear to be doing, but in this case he feels extra support is warranted. The writer is an excellent instructor in a job that will not require him to conduct research or publish, but it does require him to have the degree.

What the writer says:

The writer wants to finish, but he's having difficulty balancing his teaching, mental health, parental responsibilities, and dissertation writing.

He teaches full-time: in-person classes Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. He uses the time before class to grade and prepare lessons. He meets with his advisor virtually once a week.

Over the past year during the pandemic, his mental health was particularly bad—depression and anxiety were at times entirely debilitating, making him too tired to do any work. To improve his mental health, he has found it very important to exercise for an hour every morning. He also has a non-negotiable rule for himself to not work on Sundays for the sake of his mental health.

He is married and has two young children. His wife has a relatively flexible schedule and watches the kids when he's writing, though at times he is responsible for taking them to school, sports practices, dentist appointments, etc. It came up during the conversation that his faith is particularly important to him and his family.

Most of the writing he's done is material from his prospectus and conference proposals that he plans to adapt. He has a general idea in his head for his five chapters. He has Google docs set up for each chapter, but these are mostly blank apart from material from the prospectus and proposals. He has a strong sense of what his data show and how he plans to analyze his data.

He admits to not being good at time management and tends to procrastinate. He needs to have the dissertation completed by the end of the semester but doesn't have a solid plan to meet this deadline.