

Faculty and Student Perspectives on What Helps Counselor Education Doctoral Students towards Program Completion

Eric R. Baltrinic

Jennifer A. Waugh

Steven Brown

Kent State University

Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to describe and illustrate a strategy for uncovering student and faculty perspectives about program retention and completion in a department of counselor education and supervision and then to use those perspectives as a springboard for recommending policy innovations. The concourse for this investigation was comprised of the available counselor education literature concerning programmatic and personnel influences favoring or impeding program completion, supplemented by interviews with faculty, current students, and a review of program materials. The resulting Q sample (N=47) was administered to faculty and graduate students (n=15). Analysis revealed three Q factors: those participants who view the students as flourishing under the guidance of an encouraging faculty, those concerned with issues of diversity, and those who stress the importance of external supports of family and friends. These factors, conceived as decision structures, serve as a basis for recommending various courses of action designed to address problems that are implicit in the three perspectives. The results have implications beyond the specific department by providing strategies and procedures that can be adopted in other organizational settings.*

Obtaining a doctoral degree is no small task. Assuming the necessary qualifications to apply, prospective students must be admitted from a pool of applicants. If admitted, most students take on the challenge of mustering the emotional, psychological, social, and financial resources to undertake the task of pursuing the degree, a task that will often take years. Despite the obvious challenges, the rewards of doctoral degree pursuit and completion are tangible, including furthering career goals, engaging in research and scholarship, developing peer and faculty connections, and teaching, among others.

While PhD holders represent a statistical minority, taken together there are a significant number of individuals in pursuit of a doctoral degree across the United States alone. Yet, research suggests that only about 50% of doctoral students in a variety of fields manage to complete their programs (Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Further, the humanities experience higher dropout rates than the sciences (Bowen and Rudenstein (1992; Lovitts, 2001).

There are many factors that can impact student progress, some that facilitate it and some that impede it, but there is general agreement that student retention and potential for program completion is enhanced when both faculty and student perspectives are made clear and are taken into account, particularly in early stages of the program (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). There are a number of key factors influencing doctoral student persistence in programs that are described by Blair (1999) who reviewed attrition and persistence studies in higher education from 1970 to 1999. Key factors included department culture, student-faculty relationships, financial support, student support, and program satisfaction.

Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) found that program match was the most influential factor in doctoral students' persistence towards program completion. Program match consisted of two key components: a) *academic match*, which compares the reasons for pursuing a degree and student goals with a program's curriculum and focus, and b) *social-personal match*, which refers to the students' evaluation of their relationships with faculty and fellow students. The key factors from Blair (1999), such as department culture, student support, financial support, and relationships and Hoskins and Goldberg (2005), such as students' reasons for degree pursuit and their evaluation of faculty and student relationships represented the foundation of doctoral students' *persistence decisions* (Blair, 1999) and were used for the concourse development in the current study. Specifically, the Q set was developed to include a spectrum of statements that incorporated individual, relational, and departmental views assuming that both individual and environmental aspects of the doctoral experience affect program persistence.

The purpose of this study was to describe and illustrate a strategy, that could assist in uncovering student and faculty perspectives regarding ideal program progression in a department of counselor education and then to consider how those perspectives could be used as a springboard for recommending policy innovations for consideration in order to enhance program retention and completion.

Methods

There are many principles and propositions concerning academic progression, retention, and completion that can be found in a variety of more-or-less authoritative sources, from scholarly books and articles to academic lectures to personal blogs and discussions, including students' private discussions among themselves about how best to survive a doctoral program of study. This volume of communicability in Q methodology is referred to as a *concourse* (Stephenson, 1978), which constitutes the sum total of all that can be said about any particular topic.

In this particular case, the features of a departmental program that might contribute to academic success—including pedagogy, relations among students and faculty, personal and institutional attributes, etc.—were gathered from a variety of sources. The sources included a doctoral handbook, the professional literature assigned in a residency seminar, notes generated during the course of the seminar class and from presentations by tenured faculty members. Interviews with faculty members and students enrolled in a university counseling program were also conducted. Some examples of concourse statements are as follows:

- Students are encouraged to stay aware of their needs, strengths, and weaknesses to be psychologically healthy. (Boes, Ullery, Millner, & Cobia, 1999)
- Faculty acknowledges that students contend with a variety of issues related to diversity. (CACREP, 2009)
- The faculty promotes student–faculty relationships. (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005)
- Faculty and students provide mentoring in research. [Department Doctoral Handbook]
- Power struggles occasionally erupt without warning. [interview]

Each statement is an example of a belief that might be considered by individual participants to contribute in a positive or negative way to program retention and completion.

The Q set comprised $N=47$ statements (see Appendix) and was sorted by doctoral students and faculty members in a university department of counselor education. Participants ordered the statements from most important (+4) to most unimportant (−4) features of *this department* insofar as the issue noted in the statement had an impact on program completion. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the sorts and post-sort interviews was obtained through Kent State University. Nine doctoral students and six faculty provided data. Factors were extracted using the centroid method and rotated by varimax criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1: Operant Responses

<i>Pts</i>	<i>Factor Loadings</i>		
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>
1.	63	-09	16
2.	18	-19	55
3.	41	37	49
4.	-02	56	39
5.	52	01	29
6.	15	78	-20
7.	-04	23	56
8.	15	40	20
9.	38	14	44
10.	38	08	-16
11.	20	22	56
12.	58	18	21
13.	23	71	05
14.	42	29	14
15.	-06	51	14

Note: Loadings in boldface significant ($p < .01$); decimals to two places omitted.

There is a degree of universality in the Q sample inasmuch as some of the statements were taken from a professional literature that is accessible to anyone else. On the other hand, statements taken from students' notes and interviews with faculty may be more local and even idiosyncratic. Particularized responses of this kind are compatible with Kantor's (1978) specificity principle and in no way undermines the generalized purpose of this study, which is to illustrate procedures that can be used in other contexts even though the contexts themselves may differ substantially. Gathering information about propositions that refer to program completion, regardless of program type or location of the university, and allowing the factors at issue in that setting to be revealed and enhance programmatic decision-making. This can apply to any and all counselor education programs, and in fact to other programs and organizations, academic or otherwise.

Factor Interpretations

Factors A, B, and C in Table 1 document that the Q-sort statements were arranged in three different ways, indicating there are three different understandings among those involved in this particular program about what most contributes to successful program completion. The boldface figures show that participants 1, 5, 10, 12, and 14 share a common perspective (Factor A), participants 6, 8, 13, and 15 share another (Factor B) and participants 2, 7, and 11 define yet another

(Factor C). A few participants display mixed views: Participant 3, for instance, is significantly associated with both A and C, and participant 4 is related to both B and C; participant 3 comes close to being significantly related to all three factors, which suggests that the three points of view are not incompatible and in fact can actually co-exist within a single perspective. All participants are related to at least one factor. Faculty members and students were found in all three of the factors. The task is now one of providing an interpretation of the factors, for which attention is drawn to the array of factor scores for each of the three groups.

Factor A: Student Individualism with Program Guidance

Factor A speaks to student accountability and an awareness of personal responsibility for maintaining psychological health, but also recognizes the helpful role played by the members of the faculty. This factor favors a program that encourages connections among fellow students (not unlike a cohort model) and communication with faculty and students about professional and personal issues as key ingredients for the successful navigation of a counselor education doctoral program. The department is viewed as a community, and a nurturing one in which the students are coming to professional maturity and the faculty members are offering encouragement. This interpretation is based on the statements and factor scores (see Appendix), a few of the most salient +4 and +3 statements are shown:

(41) The faculty actively assists students with structuring and completing the dissertation.

(17) Faculty strives to maintain positive relationships with students.

(38) Financial aid is available.

(47) Communication between students and faculty is kept open to address any issues.

(9) The faculty prepares students for professional employment and assists them in obtaining skills and knowledge relative to continued professional development.

(35) Faculty and students provide mentoring in research.

The supportive character of the environment is readily apparent: Financial support is available and the faculty encourages warm interpersonal relations and readily offers timely advice for dissertation work and for locating employment. This picture is rendered clearer in terms of select distinguishing statements, such as the following, which serve to differentiate Factor A from the other factors (scores for all three factors are listed with Factor A scores in bold):

- | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|--|
| +4 | -2 | -2 | 33. Students are encouraged to stay aware of their needs, strengths, and weaknesses to be psychologically healthy. |
| +3 | -3 | +4 | 18. The program encourages connections among fellow students. |
| +2 | -1 | 0 | 22. Students are encouraged to talk about personal or professional issues and concerns as they arise. |
| 0 | -3 | -3 | 25. The knowledge and skills gained through master's training and post-master's experience helps a student cope with stress and anxiety of a doctoral program. |

Observe the prevalence, in the above, of the term *encourage*: The students and faculty members who define Factor A see the organizational climate as supportive and as inducing psychological health, a view that is not shared by Factors B and C. Note, however, that Factor C joins A in perceiving the department as encouraging peer relations (Item 18). The zero score for statement 25 would typically be overlooked since it generally conveys a lack of salience—being midway between most important (+4) and most unimportant (-4) along the Q-sort scale—but the strong negative reactions by Factors B and C suggest that Factor A regards post-baccalaureate training as relatively more helpful in achieving success at the doctoral level.

Factor A is even more distinguished from B and C by those statements that A regards as relatively more unimportant, as follows:

- | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|--|
| -4 | -2 | -1 | 10. The faculty promotes a student-program match. |
| -4 | -1 | 0 | 16. The faculty considers student-program fit. |
| -3 | +3 | +2 | 28. The faculty is open to suggestions to alter the program to meet students' personal requirements. |
| -3 | +2 | -4 | 23. The department incorporates peer groups, including same-race peers, during graduate education. |
| -3 | +1 | +2 | 42. Negative racial climates on the campus are kept from spilling over into the program. |
| -2 | +2 | +1 | 8. Disrespectful behaviors, gestures or comments are addressed and considered in student retention. |

Given the positive assessments of the faculty registered in the +4 and +3 statements above, it is unlikely that factor A is being critical of the faculty for not promoting student-program match (Item 10) or student-program fit (Item 16); rather, Factor A likely regards these matters as the responsibility of students and as beyond the limits of faculty

responsibility. This notion is reflected in the post-sort interview statement: “A student should know whether the program is a good fit before they begin, it is their [the student’s] responsibility.” The same can be said about the broader social, racial, and personal conduct norms within which the department is embedded (Items 8, 23, 42): These are not matters of importance so far as retention and completion are concerned. Item 28 may reflect a different dynamic. That is, faculty members who belong to Factor A may consider it the responsibility of students to adapt to the program as structured. For their part, the students on Factor A are under contract as graduate assistants and are therefore integral parts of the program. Their personal requirements and the requirements of the graduate program are therefore in sync, hence there is no demand for programmatic alteration.

The perspective of these nurtured individualists constituting Factor A fits well with a traditional counseling program that emphasizes retention and completion by acquiring individual tools as most important towards that end. Students who matriculate from Bachelor’s to doctoral studies, and thus are inculcated with a more traditional progression towards program completion, may feel more at home here.

Factor B: Program Diversity with Student Support

The students and faculty defining Factor B are concerned with *institutional accountability* as it relates to acknowledging student diversity issues that accompany them into doctoral programs. Such issues might include program curriculum flexibility and relevance to various students’ professional goals, the active efforts of faculty and students to minimize any potential impact of a predominately white learning environment, the use of supportive peer groups (involving the same race if needed), and the promotion of institutional support for students struggling to fit in to the doctoral program.

As with Factor A, Factor B appreciates the faculty and program, but with a different set of concerns. Foremost is diversity, mainly in racial terms (scores for all three factors, with Factor B scores in bold):

- 2 **+4** -1 39. Faculty acknowledges that students contend with a variety of issues related to diversity.
- 3 **+3** -2 34. Faculty members are diverse and representative of the student population.
- 1 **+2** 0 45. Faculty and students endeavor to minimize the impact of a predominately white learning environment.
- 3 **+2** -4 23. The department incorporates peer groups, including same-race peers, during graduate education.

There is an appreciation in this context of a faculty that is diverse (Item 34), and that is sensitive to the diversity needs of students (Item 39). This diversity might help minimize the impact of the predominantly White environment (Item 45), and see to it that the cohort itself is racially sensitive (Item 23). This is an important issue for Factor B in terms of progressing through the program, a matter about which Factors A and C apparently did not regard as most important.

Factor B is appreciative of the faculty and curriculum for another reason—programmatic flexibility. As the scores below indicate, persons comprising this factor appreciate the good fit between their goals and the program as well as the faculty's openness to program alterations as personal needs require:

- +1 +4 +1 11. The doctoral program contains a curriculum relevant to a student's reasons and goals.
- 3 +3 +2 28. The faculty is open to suggestions to alter the program to meet students' personal requirements.
- 2 +1 -3 32. The college provides support for students who struggle with fitting into the program.

Although Factor B regards the college as willing to assist struggling students (Item 32), this particular statement receives a significantly lower score within B than statements 11 and 28 listed above,^{§§} which is perhaps due to the fact that it is the *college* rather than the *department* that is implicated in the statement. It is presumably less important for the college to provide the support than for the department to do so.

There are also several statements with negative scores that distinguish Factor B from the other two factors. Most of these refer to extracurricular experiences and resources (health amenities, student organizations, and so forth) and especially peer relations. Persons in line with Factor B were shown to regard these extracurricular experiences and resources as unimportant in relation program completion:

- 0 -4 -2 37. The campus and surrounding community provide ample opportunities for healthy eating habits, adequate rest, and regular exercise.

§§ Using the *z*-score version of the factor scores, the standard error for factor B is given as $\sigma_B = .243$; the standard error of the difference within the factor is therefore $\sigma_d = \sqrt{2}(.243) = .344$. The factor score for statement No. 28 is 1.34 and for No. 32 is .45, which produces a value of $z = (1.34 - .45) / .344 = 2.59$ ($p < .01$). Interpretations of Q factors often focus on distinguishing statements only (i.e., statements with significantly different scores *among* factors) and take little notice of statements that are significantly different *within* factors, which often point the way to interesting *intra*-factor insights.

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------|----|-----|--|
| -1 | -4 | -2 | 36. | Student organizations are available for doctoral students. |
| +1 | -3 | +1 | 2. | The faculty employs teaching models that assume the student is an active participant. |
| -1 | -3 | 0 | 15. | The college provides alternative intellectual experiences beyond the program curriculum. |
| +3 | -3 | +4 | 18. | The program encourages connections among fellow students. |

One noted exception in the above grouping is statement 2, which refers to teaching models requiring active classroom participation. This is a statement related to teaching and learning style that Factor B regards as rather immaterial as far as program completion is concerned.

Over and above diversity among both faculty and students, Factor B appears mainly concerned with what goes on in the classroom. A department organized around Factor B's orientation might be a good fit for non-traditional, non-White, diverse students (including non-matriculいたors) who are not accustomed to traditional institutional perspectives.

Factor C: Reciprocal Relationships with Community Consideration

The Factor C group of students and faculty acknowledges the ecology of two-way relationships between faculty and students working in *mutual accountability*, including the acknowledgment of the role of supports that exist outside the program such as friends and family, as central considerations leading towards program completion. Faculty diversity in philosophy and practice along with flexibility towards program prospectus coupled with support in professional development are seen as helpful towards program completion as well. This can be observed in those statements most strongly embraced (+4 and +3) by this factor:

(31) The program faculty establishes healthy and productive relationships with students.

(18) The program encourages connections among fellow students.

(7) The doctoral program attempts to establish a learning community where students develop professionally.

(47) Communication between students and faculty is kept open to address any issues.

(17) Faculty strives to maintain positive relationships with students.

(41) The faculty actively assists students with structuring and completing the dissertation.

For the most part, these ideas are also accepted by Factors A and/or B, especially the former (see Appendix), but there are two statements with high positive scores that distinguish Factor C from the other two factors:

- 0 0 **+4** 13. The faculty promotes student–faculty relationships.
- +1 0 **+3** 4. The curriculum includes the development of teaching and supervision competencies.

When viewed from the positive pole of this factor, these individuals, both students and faculty, experience themselves as members of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) (Tönnies 1887/1957), and more specifically a *skills* community, in which participants are encouraged to relate to one another during a process of enhancing capabilities.

This sanguine surface at the positive end of Factor C is countered by strains at the negative end, where it is apparent students do *not* engage in self-evaluation (Item 24), where the students and faculty are *not* involved in self-care (Item 40), where financial aid is *not* available (Item 38), and where students are *not* trained to accept and integrate feedback (Item 6)—all of this in a department of counseling:

- 0 -1 **-4** 24. Prospective students engage in self-evaluation to determine if they are ready to make room for the goal of a doctoral degree.
- +1 0 **-3** 40. Faculty and students engage in adequate self-care strategies.
- +3 +4 **-3** 38. Financial aid is available.
- 0 -1 **-3** 6. Students are trained to demonstrate the ability to accept and integrate feedback.

Two possibilities might account for the paradox of positive assessment at one end of the factor and negative assessment at the opposite end: (a) Given the condition of instruction—to sort the statements from important to unimportant—Factor C may simply be saying that things such as engagement, accepting feedback, and financial aid are unimportant; or (b) the factor may be ambivalent or conflicted about the program, regarding close interpersonal relations as desirable while experiencing them as absent.

There is evidence elsewhere that the latter may be the case, *viz.*:

- +2 +2 **-1** 19. Students have clear expectations and goals.
- +2 +2 **-1** 44. Supports are provided to counter feelings of isolation and marginalization.
- +3 +3 **0** 9. The faculty prepares students for professional employment and assists them in obtaining skills and knowledge relative to continued professional development.

The statements above are located in the relatively non-salient middle of the Q-sort distribution as far as Factor C is concerned, but this is in stark contrast to the positive assessments rendered by Factors A and B.

Factor C experiences a relative absence of goals and expectations (Item 19), of supports to counter isolation (Item 44), and of faculty assistance in skills acquisition (Item 9). Consequently, Factor C may feel a sense of *anomie* (Durkheim, 1897/1951)—of feeling marginalized and rootless in a social process that, in contrast, is being enjoyed by Factors A and B.

There are two other statements that are also found in the ostensibly non-salient middle of Factor C's Q distribution but in the strongly negative end in Factors A and B:

- 3 -3 +1 30. Faculty encourages open communication with family and friends to address students' experiences.
- 4 -4 0 20. The program offers part time study.

The students and faculty associated with Factor C may regard ties with family and friends outside the academic community to be relatively more important for students without strong ties inside that community. The score for Item 20 may indicate that these students lack a fulltime connection to their program, which may help account for their distance and sense of marginalization.

Students who need flexibility for part time study and who may be actively employed and not on a fulltime assistantship track may find themselves in Factor C. Relationships and support from all sides—peers, faculty, family, and friends—may be key as program completions may be dependent on balancing real-world work and program demands.

Summary

Factor A. The students in this factor are well adjusted to a program that fits them and encourages their professional development. Both students and faculty perceive warm interpersonal relationships and are appreciative of them. The students' security is underwritten by financial support, which may include a graduate assistantship or funding. In this secure setting, Factor A is willing to engage in introspection and to share personal issues.

Factor B. This factor is especially sensitive to issues of diversity and regards faculty acknowledgement of this matter to be of the highest importance and without which programmatic progress would be substantially more difficult. Factor B is also appreciative of program flexibility and for departmental support for students who are struggling. The department may be experienced as a safe space, with events and activities outside the academic setting being relatively unimportant.

Factor C. The students comprising this factor have a more tenuous connection to the program; consequently, they appear more ambivalent toward it. On the one hand, they perceive the faculty as supportive and as encouraging open and positive relations, but on the other hand they

experience an isolation and lack of faculty attentiveness made worse by a lack of financial support. This can be seen in Item 44, *supports are provided to counter feelings of isolation and marginalization*, which this group ranked as important.

Discussion

Pursuing a doctoral degree is both a challenging and rewarding process. Despite the typical supports offered to graduate students, program attrition rate remains relatively high (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). A comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that assist students towards completion is beyond the scope of the current study. In fact, there is a great variety between doctoral programs, their respective faculties, resources, and the students (Boes, Ullery, Millner, & Cobia, 1999). In the spirit of "a desire to understand" the authors of this study employed Q methodology (Stephenson, 1953) to uncover student and faculty perspectives about program retention and completion in one department of counselor education in the mid-west United States. Q methodology has been used pragmatically and effectively to assist groups of people with clarifying their own perspectives (Brown, 1980) and gaining access to a group's collective wisdom (Gargan & Brown, 1993). It can assist in providing perspectives of problems and solutions, (Mattson, Byrd, Rutherford, Brown, & Clark, 2006), and facilitating decision-making (Durning & Brown, 2006).

The current study supports the findings of Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) that student's perceptions of program-match influences program persistence. This study extends those findings by describing the type of support (that is, factors A, B, and C) that facilitates program persistence. Results also suggest the importance of financial support, program awareness of diversity, faculty assistance with program tasks such as the dissertation, and faculty relationship-building efforts as important to program persistence. Overall, it is a combination of both individual (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Blair; 1999) and programmatic qualities that assist doctoral students with a solid foundation for program persistence. While the results may inform both students and faculty members, the recommendations emphasize the decisions of program faculty members and their role in affecting program persistence.

In this study and in the spirit of Q methodology, subjective versus categorical meanings were ascribed to the emergent factors (A, B, and C) and were not generated *a priori* (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The study's factors, conceived as *decision structures* (Stephenson, 1987), are intended to serve as a basis for various programmatic recommendations designed to solve problems that are implicit in the factors. *Decision structures*, in simple terms, can be conceptualized as "knowledge (of some subjective kind) brought to a conclusion from which decisions for

action are possible” (Stephenson, 1987, p. 39). In this case, the “knowledge” we are speaking of represents the complementary and varied perspectives of faculty and staff members from a counselor education department and doctoral students in various stages of completion.

Data representing both consensus and distinguishing perspectives that emerged from the current study should be considered when appraising a student’s progression in the counselor education doctoral program. Decision structures (that is, Q factors) may be discussed among faculty members in appropriate forums. Forums for faculty-to-faculty discussions include formal and informal faculty meetings. Faculty–student interactions often occur formally and informally during advising sessions, impromptu meetings, classroom discussions, and planned events (such as Chi Sigma Iota meetings and conferences).

Recommendations generated from faculty discussions can be systematically processed using a series of questions intended to stimulate faculty reflectivity around a student’s progress. Faculty members can then follow up during advising sessions based on the resultant assessment of a student’s program status. Thus, plans-of-action can be rooted in the collective wisdom of the faculty (representing various factors) and implemented individually with students (representing various factors). Adapted from the supervision literature (Neufeldt, 1996, 1997; Ward & House, 1998; Young, Lambie, Hutchinson, & Thurston-Dyer, 2011), the construct of reflectivity can be viewed as the process by which members of a department engage in mindful discussions that allows for the processing of multiple perspectives, knowledge, and *decision structures*. Further, the process of reflectivity entails “co-developing and co-investigating” hypotheses “*in this case for students who are struggling with program progression*” (Neufeldt, 1996; italics added). A suggested starting point lies in the realm of self-evaluation with the *key faculty question*:

What is your perspective on what helps doctoral students’ program progression, and how does this perspective impact your sentiment towards struggling students?

With respect to advising practices, faculty members often maintain large Master’s and doctoral student advisee loads. How is this managed and students’ progress monitored? As currently established, are staff in proactive advising sessions alert to students from various factors? Students representing all factors could benefit from “outreach” activities like brief check-in emails, faculty initiated advising meetings, and quarterly social activities. Often, it is left to the student to initiate advising sessions. This may not always be the most helpful perspective from the standpoint of Factors B and C.

At times, a more detailed assessment of a student's progression status is the key to understanding how a department might intervene if problems should arise. With the faculty's perspective and a sense of the factor that best describes the student's perspective as a starting point, additional assessment criteria may be utilized including: years in program; estimate of student professional goals (such as faculty or practitioner); traditional or non-traditional student status; relationship status (potential bond; peer-peer; faculty-peer); graduate assistant status; employment outside of program; involvement in scholarship; involvement in teaching; financial support; family support; and cohort relationship potential. This list is by no means exhaustive. In an effort to be responsive to all students, who represent a variety of perspectives, it behooves a faculty to establish criteria and a process for student-program status evaluation. Toward that end, a question for reflection is:

How do you currently measure how a doctoral student is progressing in the program including the faculty's assessment of student strengths and potential barriers?

Once information has been gathered on a student's progression status, what is to be done with it? Assessment information should be linked to some plan of action such as mobilizing department or college resources to assist students. Department resources may include peer mentoring programs, individual advising sessions, prospectus development, residency seminar, "open-door" perspectives on impromptu meetings, deep reflection classroom discussions, opportunities for teaching and scholarship, graduate assistantships, and full-time/part-time flexibility, among others. Additional questions include:

What are the resources currently in place to assist doctoral students in your program that represents Factors A, B, and C?

What needs to change (if anything) in terms of resource development and allocation for counselor education doctoral students based on an awareness of varying factors?

Conclusion

The present study illustrates multiple perspectives on what helps doctoral students towards program completion. Consensus around the importance of relationships, involvement in scholarship, assistance with the dissertation, and financial support held by Factors A, B, and C were not surprising findings. A traditional matriculation through a doctoral program through graduate assistantships and full-time study is not the only path towards completion. Further, non-traditional students and those who work outside of the program may require additional attention

to stay ahead of any prospective problems through concerted outreach, systematic assessment, and intervention planning by the department.

Obtaining additional information about doctoral student expectations and contextual supports when they first arrive may assist departments with anticipating resource deployment. Bernard (2006) suggests that the programs obtain qualitative and quantitative information about students' reasons for program selection and sustainability. This information could be collected as part of the admission

procedure. As students' life circumstances may be subject to change during the course of study, it may be helpful to periodically update their information, particularly their plans for program sustainability.

Counselor education doctoral programs share many similarities guided by oversight policies and procedures (such as that of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs). However, it is important to attend to the idiosyncratic qualities of a program as well, which lie primarily in the makeup of faculty members and the student body. This study can be replicated at other sites to assist departments with increasing their own knowledge, reflectivity, and resource potential.

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Appendix: Q Sample and Factor Scores

		A	B	C
Factor Scores				
1	The faculty represents various points of view in terms of philosophy of human services and modes of practice.	-1	+1	+2
2	The faculty employs teaching models that assume the student is an active participant.	+1	-3	+1
3	The clinical practitioner aspect of the program integrates both theory and application.	-1	+1	+1
4	The curriculum includes the development of teaching and supervision competencies.	+1	0	+3
5	Professional identity is fostered through collaborative scholarship with faculty and other students.	+2	0	+2
6	Students are trained to demonstrate the ability to accept and integrate feedback.	0	-1	-3
7	The doctoral program attempts to establish a learning community where students develop professionally.	+2	0	+3
8	Disrespectful behaviors, gestures or comments are addressed and considered in student retention.	-2	+2	+1
9	The faculty prepares students for professional employment and assists them in obtaining skills and knowledge relative to continued professional development.	+3	+3	0

		A	B	C
		Factor Scores		
10	The faculty promotes a student-program match.	-4	-2	-1
11	The doctoral program contains a curriculum relevant to a student's reasons and goals.	+1	+4	+1
12	The program is tolerant of unexpected events in a student's life.	+1	-1	+2
13	The faculty promotes student-faculty relationships.	0	0	+4
14	The program faculty recognizes students' reasons for pursuing a degree.	-1	-2	-1
15	The college provides alternative intellectual experiences beyond the program curriculum.	-1	-3	0
16	The faculty considers student-program fit.	-4	-1	0
17	Faculty strives to maintain positive relationships with students.	+4	+1	+3
18	The program encourages connections among fellow students.	+3	-3	+4
19	Students have clear expectations and goals.	+2	+2	-1
20	The program offers part time study.	-4	-4	0
21	Prospective and current students seek out faculty and peer support.	0	-1	+1
22	Students are encouraged to talk about personal or professional issues and concerns as they arise.	+2	-1	0
23	The department incorporates peer groups, including same-race peers, during graduate education.	-3	+2	-4
24	Prospective students engage in self-evaluation to determine if they are ready to make room for the goal of a doctoral degree.	0	-1	-4
25	The knowledge and skills gained through master's training and post master's experience helps a student cope with stress and anxiety of a doctoral program.	0	-3	-3
26	The department arranges for full time study.	-2	-2	-1
27	Employers seem willing to be flexible with students' schedules.	-2	-2	-2
28	The faculty is open to suggestions to alter the program to meet students' personal requirements.	-3	+3	+2
29	Minimal financial support is provided.	0	0	-2

		A	B	C
		Factor Scores		
30	Faculty encourages open communication with family and friends to address students' experiences.	-3	-3	+1
31	The program faculty establishes healthy and productive relationships with students.	+2	+3	+4
32	The college provides support for students who struggle with fitting into the program.	-2	+1	-3
33	Students are encouraged to stay aware of their needs, strengths, and weaknesses to be psychologically healthy.	+4	-2	-2
34	Faculty members are diverse and representative of the student population.	-3	+3	-2
35	Faculty and students provide mentoring in research.	+3	+2	+2
36	Student organizations are available for doctoral students.	-1	-4	-2
37	The campus and surrounding community provide ample opportunities for healthy eating habits, adequate rest, and regular exercise.	0	-4	-2
38	Financial aid is available.	+3	+4	-3
39	Faculty acknowledges that students contend with a variety of issues related to diversity.	-2	+4	-1
40	Faculty and students engage in adequate self-care strategies.	+1	0	-3
41	The faculty actively assists students with structuring and completing the dissertation.	+4	+3	+3
42	Negative racial climates on the campus are kept from spilling over into the program.	-3	+1	+2
43	Faculty promotes students' varied career goals.	+1	0	0
44	Supports are provided to counter feelings of isolation and marginalization.	+2	+2	-1
45	Faculty and students endeavor to minimize the impact of a predominately white learning environment.	-1	+2	0
46	Power struggles occasionally erupt without warning.	-2	-2	-4
47	Communication between students and faculty is kept open to address any issues.	+3	+1	+3