# Advising Doctoral Students in Education Programs

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*Because almost one half of students enrolled in American doctoral programs do not complete their degrees, the factors that lead to doctoral student attrition need to be identified. Research suggests that the nature of the advisor–advisee relationship contributes to the persistence levels of doctoral students. In this study, we conducted a content analysis of institutional documents related to advising in two types of doctoral programs in education. Using data collected from a purposeful sample from universities, we analyzed policies, procedures, and expectations related to doctoral student advising. The findings lead to important implications for clarifying roles of advisors and expectations for graduate student advising*.

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Research suggests that almost one half of doctoral students do not complete their degrees (Lovitts, 2005) because of an incompatible or enigmatic advisor–advisee relationship (e.g., Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Golde, 2005; Jacks, Chubin, Porter, & Connolly, 1983; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Smith, 1995). In some cases, doctoral students find the facets and the expectations of the advisor–advisee relationship unclear (Foss & Foss, 2008). In other cases, the relationships are characterized by lack of interaction, trust, and intellectual support (Golde, 2005). Because many doctoral students perceive professional risks involved in changing advisors (Golde, 2005), some simply choose to transfer to other graduate programs. Even for those who remain in their initial track, poor advising leads to an extended time to earning the degree for some doctoral students (Wao, Dedrick, & Ferron, 2011). Because of the impact of doctoral advising upon degree progress, higher education personnel (i.e., faculty, administrators, and other staff) should encourage effective doctoral advising.

A number of scholars have highlighted factors that influence effective doctoral advising, including characteristics and roles of the advisors. Effective advisors of doctoral students are perceived as accessible, helpful, socializing, and caring, while advisors who are inaccessible, unhelpful, and uninterested in students are considered less effective (Barnes, Williams, & Archer, 2010). Additionally, several researchers have noted the important roles of doctoral advisors as reliable information sources, departmental and occupational socializers, advocates, and role models (Winston & Polkosnik, 1984). Others have suggested that doctoral advisors need to also engage in mentoring behaviors aimed at the professional development of their graduate students (Cavendish, 2007; Heppner & Heppner, 2003). For example, faculty advisors take an interest in the graduate students' well-being, initiate important contacts for them, and help them adjust to unfamiliar settings (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006). In addition, Hollingsworth and Fassinger (2002) found that mentoring contributes to the development of research skills and acts as a predictor of student productivity.

In their study of graduate advising, Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, and Hill (2003) discussed differences between the interpersonal and the instructional components of academic advising. Interpersonal components focus on the relationship concerns between advisors and advisees, such as the development of a positive rapport and the importance of conflict resolution. In contrast, the instructional components of academic advising focus on the didactic or task-focused nature of advisor–advisee interactions (Kahn & Gelso, 1997), such as selecting courses, forming a doctoral committee, and completing comprehensive exams. Both the interpersonal and the instructional components characterize the essential components of advising graduate students.

Although the components of the advising process apply across disciplines, research suggests that doctoral students in education programs require longer time to complete the degree than doctoral students in other fields (Bowen &

Rudenstine, 1992). In fact, between 1980 and 2006, the median duration between starting and completing graduate school increased from 10.7 to 12.7 years for doctoral students in education fields compared to 7.7 to 7.9 years for doctoral students in all fields (Hoffer, Hess, Welch, & Williams, 2007); this time frame includes that time necessary for completing master's degrees prior to earning doctoral degrees. Some reports estimate the attrition rate for doctoral students in education programs to be as high as 70% (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Because research suggests that education students experience consistently high attrition rates and extraordinary long time-to-degree rates, graduate advisors need to better understand advising expectations of and effective practices for supporting doctoral students in education programs.

We undertook this qualitative study to understand the roles and expectations for doctoral advising as communicated through university documents accessible via the Internet. To that end, we analyzed written policies, procedures, and expectations related to advising in K-12 and Higher Education PhD programs.

## Conceptual Framework

Concepts explained in some of the literature about role expectations form the framework of this study. According to Reina and Reina (2006), individuals enter relationships with explicit and implicit expectations. Failure to satisfactorily negotiate implicit expectations can result in strained relationships, misperceptions about the intent of inquiry or advice, and program attrition (McCormack, 2005). In the realm of advisor–advisee relationships, unacknowledged expectations—those unarticulated by the doctoral advisees or unmet by the advisor—can create a barrier to positive multiyear relationships (Harding-DeKam, Hamilton, & Loyd, 2012). Therefore, explicit, research-informed role expectations about doctoral advising must be disseminated in the process of developing positive advisor–advisee relationships.

## Method

In this study, we addressed the research question: What roles and expectations for doctoral advising are communicated through university documents accessible via the Internet? To answer the research question, we designed and conducted a content analysis of institutional documents about doctoral advising in two types of education programs: the PhD in K-12 Education and the PhD in Higher Education. A content analysis is a useful method for "identifying, organizing, indexing, and retrieving data" (Berg, 2004, p. 225) and may include investigating both manifest and latent content. Manifest content refers to "elements that are physically present and countable," while latent content refers to an "interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physically presented data" (Berg, 2004, p. 229). In this study, we analyzed both the manifest and latent content of the documents selected for inclusion.

### Sample Selection

In 2004, the Council of Graduate Schools initiated the PhD Completion Project, a study to identify interventions designed to increase PhD completion rates (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). Funding was provided to 21 private or public U.S universities, hereafter the *research partners*, classified as either research/high or research/very high according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2015). All of the research partners agreed to provide baseline completion and attrition data and to create and pilot interventions aimed at improving completion rates and reducing attrition.

The research partners represent the demographic diversity of doctoral education in the United States from all regions. A total of 239 departments and programs across these 21 universities participated in the project. To identify documents for this study, we looked at the programs featured by the 21 research partners because of their commitment to improving doctoral student advising. In particular, we chose a sample of doctoral programs in each of 12 institutions that offered at least one of the two education programs of interest (see Table 1). Nine of the 12 institutions in the sample are land-grant universities, and 2 are among the 20 largest universities in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

### Data Collection

We reviewed the web sites of the 12 sample institutions to identify the documents for the study. We aimed to analyze every institutional document available on the Internet that provided information about doctoral advising in the two education programs of interest. We chose not to contact institutions for additional information, because we wanted to base our study only on documents readily accessible to all graduate

**Table 1.** Institutions and doctoral programs

| | Program | |
|---|---|---|
| **Institution** | **K-12** | **Higher Education** |
| Florida State University | X | X |
| Marquette University | X | |
| Michigan State University | X | X |
| North Carolina State University | | X |
| Ohio State University | X | X |
| Pennsylvania State University | X | X |
| Purdue University | X | X |
| University of California, Los Angeles | | X |
| University of Georgia | X | X |
| University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | X | X |
| University of Michigan | | X |
| University of Missouri | X | X |

students and their faculty advisors. We looked only at documents created by either faculty members or administrators at the sample universities and excluded resources referenced on or linked to web sites created by outside entities (e.g., guides about mentoring that were created by other educational organizations).

The specific documents that we collected from within the selected programs included departmental bylaws or other departmental documents outlining faculty or graduate student expectations ($n$ = 14); college-level graduate student handbooks ($n$ = 6); university-level graduate faculty handbooks ($n$ = 4); and university-level graduate student handbooks ($n$ = 10). The final data set consisted of 52 single-spaced, printed pages of text referencing the topic of interest drawn from 1,600 pages of handbooks and bylaws accessed from 61 different web sites. From the 52 pages of text, we analyzed 451 individual statements (i.e., a couple of sentences or one short paragraph focused on one relevant topic of interest).

**Data Analysis**

In the first step of the analysis process, we independently reviewed the data and recorded observations about it. After discussing the observations, we followed Weber's (1990) guidance for examining qualitative content by using an inductive analysis of the data. We developed an initial scheme with the following codes: selection of faculty advisor, process of changing advisors, written expectations of doctoral students, written expectations of academic advisors, and faculty accountability for advising.

After we met as a group to discuss the first round of coding, we realized that we needed to look more deeply into the data. To that end, we utilized the literature related to the interpersonal and instructional components of doctoral advising (e.g., Schlosser et al., 2003) to create a second coding scheme for analyzing the data. That second coding scheme included eight individual codes based on concepts related to either interpersonal or instructional components of advising. For instance, the phrase *faculty responsibility for regular meetings with students* describes one of the codes related to the interpersonal components of advising.

After the second round of data analysis, we looked for themes that emerged from an overall analysis of the coded data. During this process, we employed several techniques. First, we used the constant comparative method (as per Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to compare each new code with the text assigned to it. We also used a word-based technique to identify emergent themes (as per D'Andrade, 1995) by analyzing salient word repetitions (e.g., *mentor* and *advisor*). In the final stages of identifying emergent themes, we searched for information that we expected to find in the data but seemed to be missing from it. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), much can be learned from a text, including assumptions of the writers, by the information not included in the write-up. With the use of the above techniques, we identified five overarching themes from the analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

We used several important strategies to increase the trustworthiness of this study. First, we analyzed the data until we reached the point at which no new themes emerged; Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to this as "theoretical saturation" (p. 188). By setting the stopping point, we were less likely "to move beyond the face value of the content in the narrative," and thus engage in "premature closure" (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1990, p. 123).

Second, we enhanced the credibility of the study by using analyst triangulation, which involves having two or more people independently analyze the same qualitative data and compare their findings (Patton, 2002). With more than one analyst on the research team, we gained multiple

perspectives and opportunities to challenge individual biases. We also increased trustworthiness of the study by establishing an audit trail; that is, we documented all research decisions and activities throughout the course of the project (as per Whitt, 1991).

## Results

Five themes emerged from the data that communicate roles and expectations of doctoral students and their advisors in the two types of education programs we examined. The themes highlight constraints in selecting and changing advisors, the desire for research-interest congruence as the assumed reason for student desire to change advisors, the value placed on instruction over relationship in advising, confusion between advising and mentoring, and the stronger emphasis placed on accountability for student progress than for faculty advising.

### Constraints in Selecting and Changing Advisors

One theme that emerged from the study focuses on the opportunity (or lack thereof) for doctoral students to select their own advisor and to change advisors. Documents from the majority of institutions (9 of 12) reflect a process by which advisors are assigned to doctoral students based upon student matriculation into selected education programs. This process is exemplified in the following statement in the *Doctoral Degree K-12 Educational Administration Student/Faculty Handbook* at Michigan State University: "Upon admission to the doctoral program, students are assigned an initial faculty advisor" (2013, p. 8). Although the documents seem to suggest that none of the sample institutions offer a process by which new doctoral students select their advisor upon matriculation, documents from three of the institutions suggest that advisors are either assigned or selected. For instance, the *Standards & Procedures for Graduate Study at UCLA* (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], 2015) document contains the following information:

> At matriculation, a graduate student usually selects, or is assigned, a faculty adviser who assists the student in program planning and completing degree requirements. Sometimes this role is temporarily assumed by a faculty adviser assigned to the program as a whole. When a student's master's or doctoral committee is established, the chair of the committee assumes the adviser's role. (p. 4)

Most of the documents in the study did, however, contain language about a doctoral student's option to change advisors during the course of his or her graduate program. Interestingly, such statements often featured cautionary language, such as the following statement in the University of Michigan (2015b) *How to Get the Mentoring You Want: A Guide for Graduate Students* document: "Seek the advice of a trusted faculty member and other professional staff to determine whether it is in fact desirable to change your advisor" (p. 17). Moreover, in most of the documents, the process outlined for changing advisors was either not mentioned or explained in very vague language. For instance, according to the *Graduate School Bulletin* from Marquette University (2013), "Students who want to change advisers should check with their department for additional information and instructions" (p. 30). The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2015a) *College of Education Graduate Handbook* explains, "A change of advisers is handled within the student's department" (¶2). The cautionary and vague terms in these documents communicate the message that doctoral students must seriously consider the decision to change advisors and need to be self-directed in determining the process.

### The Assumed Reason for Changing Advisors

Another theme in the study highlights an assumption made about the reason doctoral students might desire a change of advisors. Although they reflected existing processes for doctoral students to change advisors, documents from the institutions in this study communicated primarily one valid reason for doing so: incongruence of research interests. For instance, the University of Michigan (2015a) *Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education With a Concentration in Public Policy in Postsecondary Education Requirements* contained the following statement:

> As a student's interests are honed with gained knowledge and experience, a change of advisor may be in the student's best academic interest. Faculty members work closely together in an annual academic review of student progress to ensure each

> student's needs are being met and that all students are achieving progress toward degree. (¶2)

Similarly, the UCLA (1993) *Policies and Recommendations to Improve Time-to-Degree in UCLA's Graduate Degree Programs* contains the following statement:

> Throughout his or her entire graduate program, every graduate student shall have a faculty adviser (or faculty advisory committee) whose interests are as similar as possible to those of the student. . . . As the student's interests develop, he or she must be able to change advisers easily. (pp. 1-2)

Interestingly, none of the documents found in our study communicate the possibility that interpersonal conflicts unrelated to research interests might motivate doctoral students to change advisors. Although the following statement from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2015c) *Graduate Student Appeals* recognizes the possibility of interpersonal conflicts between doctoral students and faculty other than their advisors, it implies that the relationships between doctoral students and their advisors are positive:

> Students who have a grievance should use informal resolution before initiating a formal grievance. Students in Education are encouraged to discuss the issue with the faculty or staff member with whom the problem has arisen. If a satisfactory solution is not forthcoming, the student should discuss the issue with his or her adviser. (¶8)

Although a grievance process exists at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the potential reasons for a grievance are not described. Furthermore, and most relevant to this study, the assumption inherent in the featured written statement suggests that such a grievance may relate to a faculty member other than the student's advisor. The students are not given any guidance about ways to resolve conflicts with their own advisors.

**Instruction Valued Over Relationship**

An additional theme that emerged from the data reveals a stronger emphasis on the instructional components of advising than on the interpersonal aspects of advising (Schlosser et al., 2013). To be specific, we found 247 statements about the instructional components of advising, but of the 21 statements of interpersonal components of advising, 14 came from one institution (University of Michigan).

An example of a statement focused on the instructional components of academic advising can be found in The Ohio State University (2010) *School of Educational Policy and Leadership Graduate Studies Handbook*:

> If the student and the student's advisor determine that an alternate multicultural or foundation course would better meet the needs of the student's program, a petition may be submitted to the Graduate Studies Committee to allow an alternate course on the plan of study. The petition should include a letter from the student explaining the choice of an alternate course and a letter of support from the student's advisor explaining how that course meets the criteria for multicultural courses as set forth by the Graduate Studies Committee, and a copy of the course syllabus. (p. 32)

Another instructional component, the implementation of the preliminary examination, is discussed in a statement found within the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2015b) *Graduate College Handbook*:

> The chair of the preliminary examination committee must be a member of the Graduate Faculty. The committee chair is responsible for convening the committee, conducting the examination, and submitting the Preliminary Exam Result form to the unit in which the student is enrolled and to the Graduate College. (¶18)

In contrast, an example of such a statement focused on an interpersonal component of advising is as follows: "Graduate students and faculty members share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility" (Michigan State University, 2014, p. 4). The Pennsylvania State University (2014) *University Bulletin* provides another example: "Continuing communication among the student, the committee chair, the

dissertation/performance adviser, and the members of the committee is strongly recommended, to preclude misunderstandings and to develop a collegial relationship between the candidate and the committee" (¶33). In spite of the aforementioned examples, a paucity of statements characterized our findings on the interpersonal components of advising in the documents reviewed for this study.

**Confusion Between Advising and Mentoring**

Another theme that emerged from the data reflects the inconsistency with which key terminology was used throughout the documents. In particular, the wording did not effectively distinguish between *advising* or *advisor* and *mentoring* or *mentor*. Both forms of each term were used in various places within the documents but without clear differentiation; in some cases, both terms appeared in the same sentence:

> All requests for conditional admission of an applicant will be forwarded to the Graduate Studies Committee with letters of support from the prospective advisor and the section chair. . . . The letters should also indicate that there is significant support within the section for the student's admission and that the assigned faculty advisor is willing to mentor the student over and above normal advising responsibilities. (Ohio State University, 2010, p. 8)

Similarly, the following statement can be found in the *UCLA Graduate Student Academic Rights and Responsibilities* (2003) document: "We will communicate regularly with faculty mentors and advisers, especially in matters related to research and progress within the graduate program" (p. 2).

In other cases, such as in the North Carolina State University (2015) *Department of Leadership, Policy and Adult and Higher Education Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Standards and Procedures* document, the term *mentoring* seems to describe the instructional components of advising:

> Teaching and mentoring graduate students refers to developing innovative instructional materials or new courses, supporting and directing graduate students to successful completion of advanced degrees serving as the chair or member on thesis or dissertation committees, and working collaboratively with graduate students on research, teaching, or community-based projects. (¶10)

The term *advisor* (*adviser*) was used as a noun 219 times in the documents, and the term *mentor* was used as a noun 14 times. Moreover, the terms *advise* or *advising* used as a verb appeared 39 times. The verbs *mentor* or *mentoring* appeared 8 times within the documents from 9 of the institutions, but they appeared 53 times within the documents for the following institutions: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Florida State University, University of Michigan.

**More Accountability for Students Than for Faculty Advisors**

A different theme that emerged in this study focuses on the issue of accountability in doctoral advising. The documents we analyzed emphasized the importance of holding doctoral students accountable for making satisfactory progress toward their degrees, but they provide minimal accountability measures for specific faculty attitudes and behaviors that reflect effective advising as described in the literature (e.g., Barnes, Williams, & Archer, 2010).

A number of the institutional documents contain information for both advisors and doctoral students about expectations for students' continued progress toward their degrees. For instance, the University of Michigan (2015c) *Rackham Graduate School Quick Tips for Promising Practices: Annual Review* document contains the following statement: "Review student progress one time per year. Annually assess student progress, set goals and identify milestones. Require students to prepare progress reports in advance" (¶1-3). We found another example on the University of Georgia Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy (2015) web site:

> Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy graduate students routinely meet with their major professor(s) or other assigned advisors, including at least once per semester to discuss progress toward their degrees and their registration needs for the following semester. All graduate students must meet standards for satisfactory work and timely progress toward a degree, as

> specified in individual degree and program information by the department and by the Graduate School.

The University of Missouri (2016) *Graduate Studies Annual Review of Graduate Student Progress* contains this statement: "The Graduate School requires all master's, education specialist and doctoral students to submit an annual report of academic progress" (¶1).

Despite the institutional documents that featured statements about accountability for doctoral students' progress toward degree completion, few mentioned the importance of the following with or for advisees: regular meetings with advisees (more than once a semester); professional development, mentoring, or career guidance; development of a positive relationship; healthy conflict resolution; or program guidance (Schlosser et al., 2003). The performance indicators for advisors found within departmental bylaws did not explain the advising behaviors expected of the faculty:

> Performance Indicators for Promotion from Assistant to Associate: A record of effective and sustained advisement of undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral students, and student organizations, as appropriate to one's department, position and standing. (University of Missouri, 2013, p. 5)

Documents describing reviews of faculty advising tend to reveal reactive rather than proactive practice, and they advance the viewpoint that audits are deemed necessary only at the discretion of program leadership:

> The head of a graduate program may also initiate a review at any appropriate time. Reviews may be appropriate when there are allegations against a graduate faculty member of incompetence or negligence with respect to graduate faculty duties, including the teaching, supervising, and mentoring of graduate students. (Purdue University, 2011, p. 4)

More often than not, expectations related to faculty advising of doctoral students are stated in vague terms without any clear measurable outcomes. For instance, the *Policies and Recommendations to Improve Time-to-Degree in UCLA's Graduate Degree Programs* explains:

> All those involved in personnel actions should look favorably on evidence that a faculty member has been engaged and effective as an adviser and mentor of graduate students and/or as a provider of apprenticeship opportunities. Such faculty work should contribute to students' timely acquisition of the knowledge and skills valued in their degree program and is worthy of reward. (UCLA, 1993, pp. 3-4)

As a result of broad generalized guidance, few external incentives are offered as motivators for faculty members to engage in behaviors characteristic of effective advising (Barnes et al., 2010).

## Discussion

Research has shown that doctoral advisors play a major role in a graduate student's life (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Holland, 1998). Advisor characteristics appear to influence, at least in part, students' overall attitudes about their doctoral experience, the nature of the relationship that they experience or can experience with their advisors, as well as their ability to make progress toward their degree program goals (Barnes et al., 2010). Several sources reported unsatisfactory advisor–advisee relationships as a primary cause of doctoral student attrition (e.g., Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Golde, 2005; Maher et al., 2004; Smith, 1995), and graduate students in education programs leave at higher rates than those in other academic disciplines (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Hoffer et al., 2007). Therefore, we analyzed the roles and expectations for doctoral advising communicated through university documents accessible via the Internet.

The themes that emerged in this study communicate roles and expectations of doctoral students and their advisors in education programs that do not align with research findings concerning effective doctoral advising. First, the data suggest that, in most of the education programs included in the sample, advisors are assigned to the students rather than being selected by students. According to Fischer and Zigmond (1998), selection of an advisor constitutes one of the first and most significant decisions a graduate student makes. Other researchers have also found that the ability to select an advisor can significantly affect the quality of an advisor–advisee relationship (Hilmer & Hilmer, 2007; Lovitts, 2001; Schlosser et al., 2003). Because advisors play a significant role in the academic life and satisfaction of their advisees

(see, e.g., Holland, 1998; Schlosser et al., 2003), the inability to choose an advisor upon matriculation into an education program may contribute to the attrition rate. Although some valid reasons are given for assigning advisors (e.g., faculty workloads, compatible research interests), the literature shows the value of student choice of their own advisor.

The research suggests that unsatisfactory advisor–advisee relationships contribute to doctoral student attrition (e.g., Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Golde, 2005; Maher et al., 2004), but we found that the documents reviewed contained very little information about changing advisors. The guidance that was provided was both vague and cautionary. Moreover, the documents implied incompatibility of research interests as the primary reason a student might consider changing advisors. While such incompatibility justifies a change of advisor, interpersonal conflicts could also culminate into an advisee's desire to change an advisor (Friedman, 1987; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Even for advisors and advisees with compatible research interests, other interpersonal factors might strain the relationship between the two; these conflicts were not directly addressed in the documents we analyzed.

The existing literature about doctoral advising shows an emphasis on the interpersonal components of the advisor–advisee relationship (Barnes et al., 2010; Barnes & Austin, 2008; Winston & Polkosnik, 1984). However, our findings demonstrate that university documents reflect more of an emphasis on program guidance procedures (e.g., completing a program of study, developing a dissertation proposal) than on the characteristics and roles that reflect effective doctoral advising. For instance, Cavendish (2007) pointed out that advisees report more satisfaction with their advisor–advisee relationships when they receive mentoring support from their advisors. However, in the online documents we studied, mentoring was rarely acknowledged as a valued part of the duties and responsibilities of a faculty advisor. Also, existing literature does not clearly distinguish between the roles of mentors and advisors (Harding-DeKam et al., 2012); this lack of differentiation is revealed in university documents that do not adequately address the importance of both mentoring and advising in doctoral student relationships with their advisors.

Finally, the documents we analyzed for this study emphasize the importance of holding doctoral students accountable for making satisfactory progress toward their degrees but provide minimal accountability measures for specific faculty attitudes and behaviors that reflect effective advising. This contrasts to the obligations associated with faculty teaching for which feedback is often sought (via course evaluations) and subsequently utilized in decisions about merit salary increases. Moreover, promotion and tenure decisions are often based on the research productivity of faculty members. Yet, feedback and accountability mechanisms outlined for doctoral advising are missing despite research that suggests that poor or ineffective advising contributes to doctoral student attrition (e.g., Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Golde, 2005; Maher et al., 2004; Smith, 1995).

## Limitations

The challenge of locating key documents from institutional web sites constitutes a key limitation of the study. We found many of the web sites difficult to navigate and contained inactive links. For those reasons, we may have been unable to access and analyze some important documents.

Also, we acknowledge that institutional expectations are not always adequately communicated through written documents. Without collecting data directly from faculty members and administrators from the relevant university departments of the selected institutions, we cannot determine the extent to which the advising expectations communicated in the documents reflect the primary expectations of faculty advisors in the researched departments.

## Implications

In spite of the limitations, important implications emerge when reviewing the results of this study. A clearer picture of responsibilities for both faculty advisors and graduate students needs to be created. Specifically, procedures for the assignment and change of advisors when students' needs warrant such consideration must be established. Too often the responsibility for communication and initiation of important dialogue rests solely on the student, who may lack understanding about procedures or awareness of important political webs. Expectations shared with faculty advisors and written in institutional documents must include guidelines for conflict resolution, opportunities for students to select major advisors regardless of the reason, and clear processes related to changing advisors.

Furthermore, advising and mentoring roles need to be clarified and distinguished in written expectations for doctoral advising, and doctoral advisors should participate in both enterprises with their advisees. While those not in faculty positions might be powerless to make direct changes to institutional documents or to other forms of formal communication about advising and mentoring expectations, they might indirectly effect change. For example, professionals interested in academic advising, such as members of NACADA or those who work for a campus academic advising office, could work with appropriate faculty members (including department heads) to provide information on the academic literature that explains elements of effective doctoral advising and mentoring.

We suggest that faculty advisors need increased accountability for excellence in doctoral advising. Effective methods of evaluation related to faculty performance in student advising should communicate the importance of quality advising. Because doctoral advisors often receive no training, practice, or mentoring with regard to advising practices (Harding-DeKam et al., 2012), the leadership may ask seasoned faculty advisors to create professional development sessions that prepare other faculty members for new performance expectations and to instill appropriate attitudes and behaviors that lead to student satisfaction, effective communication, and achievable goals. Creating avenues for students to offer feedback into this process for individual faculty improvement as well as for overall departmental program effectiveness will help target identified goals to improve advisor accountability, and ultimately, the quality of doctoral student advising.

In conclusion, we call for a more in-depth review of doctoral student advising and additional investigation into understanding both graduate students' and faculty advisors' perceptions in this area. If administrators in higher education place a priority on doctoral student success, then they must encourage additional research in this area. Doctoral student advisees must respond to these efforts with honest and forthright input to improve the process and to work toward building trusting relationships with advisors. Together, advisors and advisees can establish a well-articulated path to help doctoral students achieve their academic goals.

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