2014

Demystifying the Advisor’s Role in Doctoral Students’ Persistence during the Dissertation Stage

Brantley Paige Willett
DEMYSTIFYING THE ADVISOR’S ROLE IN DOCTORAL STUDENTS’ PERSISTENCE
DURING THE DISSERTATION STAGE

By

BRANTLEY PAIGE WILLET

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Degree Awarded:
Fall Semester, 2014
Brantley P. Willett defended this dissertation on November 7, 2014.
The members of the supervisory committee were:

Tamara Bertrand Jones
Professor Directing Dissertation

Alysia Roehrig
University Representative

Kathy Guthrie
Committee Member

Linda Schrader
Committee Member

Robert Schwartz
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for the guidance and support of my advisor, Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to work for you my first year in the program and build a relationship with you. You have been an outstanding advisor and supporter throughout my journey. I cannot thank you enough.

To my committee members, Dr. Kathy Guthrie, Dr. Alysia Roehrig, Dr. Linda Schrader, and Dr. Robert Schwartz- I am appreciate of your guidance and insight in helping me develop and complete this study.

To my parents-You two have always been my biggest fans and supporters. Thank you for helping me and encouraging me every step of the way. I am truly thankful that I have such amazing parents. Love you both so much.

Grandmommy-I know you have been watching over me and providing me with strength to accomplish this goal. I love you and miss you!

Carrie Henderson-I couldn’t have asked for a better classmate and friend. Thank you so much for your support and encouragement the past four years. Estee Hernandez-I am thankful for your friendship and the many laughs we have shared. Abbey Ivey-I am thankful that Carrie introduced us and for your friendship. Sarah Clark-I am appreciative of your friendship and willingness to always help me, especially with my move and career.

To my Clayton State co-workers/friends-Thank you for your support during my transition to working full-time while still finishing this degree. Your support and encouragement made this an easy transition. Thank you for always checking in on me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................... v

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ vi

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................1

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW ..............................................................................14

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY .....................................................................................44

CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS ....................................................................................................64

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION ..............................................................................................118

APPENDICIES ............................................................................................................................142

A. EMAIL TO FAUCLTY DISSERTATION ADVISORS FOR QUESTIONNAIRE..............142

B. FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVSIOR QUESTIONNAIRE INFORMED CONSENT – QUESTIONNAIRE .....................................................................................................................143

C. CODING FOR GENERAL ADVISING, ACADEMIC INTEGRATION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION ..........................................................................................................................149

D. INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVISORS ..............................151

E. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER ........................................................................154

F. INFORMED CONSENT FORM – INTERVIEW ...................................................................155

G. EMAIL TO FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVISORS FOR INTERVIEW .......................156

H. JOURNAL ENTRY ................................................................................................................157

I. SCREEN SHOT-NVIVO .........................................................................................................159

References ....................................................................................................................................160

Biographical Sketch .....................................................................................................................166
LIST OF TABLES

4.1 Functions .................................................................................................................................68
4.2 Characteristics ..........................................................................................................................70
4.3 General Advising Strategies .....................................................................................................72
4.4 Academic Integration ...............................................................................................................74
4.5 Social Integration .....................................................................................................................75
4.6 Threats and Related Strategies ...............................................................................................90
LIST OF FIGURES

2.1 Girves and Wemmerus (1988) conceptual model of graduate student degree progress ........23
2.2 Girves and Wemmerus (1988) model of doctoral student degree progress .........................23
2.3 Tinto (1993) conceptual model of graduate student degree progress .................................26
2.4 Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) model of doctoral student time-to-degree .........................29
4.1 Participants’ Gender ........................................................................................................66
4.2 Participants’ Age ..............................................................................................................66
4.3 Participants’ Race/Ethnicity .............................................................................................67
4.4 Years Served as Faculty ..................................................................................................67
ABSTRACT

The dissertation stage, a time of independent research for doctoral students, is characterized by a lack of interactions with peers and faculty members, including the faculty dissertation advisor, that are typically present during earlier stages of doctoral programs (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009). As a result, students in the dissertation stage may experience isolation. This isolation, a result of a lack of interactions with faculty and peers, can lead to dropout from the doctoral program (Ali & Kohun, 2006).

Given that students have the most frequent interactions with the dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage (i.e., Ali & Kohun, 2006), this study aimed to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage. Specifically, the study answered (1) how faculty dissertation advisors define their role during the dissertation stage, (2) general strategies advisors use during the dissertation stage to help students persist, (3) strategies used by advisors to assist different types of students during the dissertation stage, and (4) how advisors facilitate academic and social integration at the dissertation stage.

This study utilized a mixed methods research design to understand dissertation advisors’ role in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Specifically, faculty dissertation advisors from the college of education at a research university in the southeastern region completed a questionnaire and a subset of these faculty participated in a follow-up interview.

Consistent with Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings, results showed that participants utilized several functions, including collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising to perform their role during the dissertation stage. Participants also valued several characteristics, friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest, when performing their role.
role as dissertation advisor. Additionally, participants indicated they use a series of general strategies, which Barnes and Austin termed as “helping advisees be successful”.

Interview findings also identified five categories of threats to students’ persistence during the dissertation stage, as well as corresponding strategies participants used to help advisees maneuver these threats to persistence. The themes included advisees’ personal responsibilities, psychological concerns, time, dissertation project hurdles, and isolation.

While Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence failed to elaborate on how the dissertation advisor facilitates academic and social integration during the dissertation stage, results indicated that, in general, faculty dissertation advisors do at least encourage advisees’ academic integration by helping advisees plan and conduct research, aiding in their professional and workforce development, and encouraging them to publish articles and/or publishing articles with advisees. Additionally, dissertation advisors encourage advisees to connect with their peers and with faculty members inside and outside the academic department. However, less than half of participants encouraged advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community.

Results of this study can be used to further research on the doctoral student experience and the advisor’s role in that experience. Additionally, findings from this study can be used by dissertation advisors, academic departments, and university administrators in policy and standards of practice to help ensure students’ persistence during doctoral programs, especially during the dissertation stage.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today’s society, it is increasingly common for jobs to require employees to attain graduate or professional degrees, including doctoral degrees (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). The National Science Foundation (2012) indicated that:

Doctoral education develops human resources that are critical to a nation’s progress—scientists, engineers, researchers, and scholars who create and share new knowledge and new ways of thinking that lead, directly and indirectly, to innovative products, services and works of art. In doing so, they contribute to the economic growth, cultural development, and rising standard of living of a nation. (p. iv)

To account for the different human resources required in the Education field, two types of doctoral degrees are offered: the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) (Andersen, 1983; Golde & Walker, 2006; Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). Traditionally, the Ph.D. prepares scholars for research, whereas the Ed.D. is seen as a “professional degree” used to prepare practitioners for the education field. However, it is not uncommon for researchers to attain an Ed.D. and practitioners to earn a Ph.D. (Deering, 1998).

Given the importance of doctoral education for economic growth, cultural development, and raising the standard of living, higher education institutions and, more specifically, academic departments seek to enroll students who will persist through all stages of a doctoral program, Ph.D. or Ed.D., to degree completion. However, Golde (2000) stated “paradoxically, the most academically capable, most academically successful, most stringently evaluated, and most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system—doctoral students—are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals” (p. 199). With the commitments and the
intensity of doctoral programs, approximately 40-50% of doctoral students do not persist and earn their doctoral degrees (Church, 2009; Golde, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Furthermore, approximately 30% of students dropout during the dissertation stage (Gardner, 2009).

In a meta-synthesis of 118 studies on doctoral student attrition and persistence, Bair (1999) found that the most cited element to doctoral degree completion was the relationship between the student and the advisor. Students’ relationships with their faculty dissertation advisor are particularly crucial during the dissertation stage (i.e., Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 1993) when support is generally lacking (Gardner, 2008b, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

With almost half of doctoral students failing to complete their degrees and 30% of the dropout occurring during the dissertation stage, the issue of doctoral student persistence is imperative as students’ failure to graduate can result in financial, personal, and professional ramifications (Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Furthermore, while the overall time to degree (graduate school entry to doctoral completion) has decreased during the past 15 years, students in the education field still have the longest time-to-degree compared to students in science and engineering fields, as indicated by the 2011 Survey of Earned Doctorates (NSF, 2012). Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) indicated that prolonged time-to-degree decreases the desirability of undergoing doctoral level work.

The lack of formal structure and the isolation commonly experienced during the dissertation stage (i.e., Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b) are two main indicators of why doctoral candidates may not receive the support and guidance needed for their persistence.
Furthermore, Ali and Kohun (2006) acknowledged:

The feeling of isolation among doctoral students is a major factor that contributes to the high attrition rate at doctoral programs. Yet despite this recognition, the feeling of isolation has yet to be addressed fully in the design of some doctoral programs. (p. 21)

Despite the lack of structure and isolation that are common during the dissertation stage (i.e., Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b), students’ faculty dissertation advisors play a major role in students’ persistence, especially during the dissertation stage (i.e., Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 1993), when there may be a lack of academic and social integration.

**Vincent Tinto’s Conceptual Model of Graduate Student Persistence**

Persistence is “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of the doctoral degree” (Bair, 1999, p. 8). Factors related to persistence and pertinent to the study include the student/advisor relationship (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Gardner, 2008b; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 2000; Grover, 2007; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Maher et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) and students’ academic and social integration (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993), all of which are components of Vincent Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence. Tinto’s (1993) model is used to frame this study and is the primary model in current research depicting doctoral student persistence.

Per the model, doctoral students enter programs with certain individual attributes, and these attributes, “most notably gender, age, race, ability, and social class, and individual educational experiences prior to entry to graduate school help shape individual goals (educational and career) and commitments (goal and institutional) at entry” (Tinto, 1993, p. 239).

Doctoral students also enter programs with “external commitments” such as work and family obligations, as well as individual financial needs for funding the degree program. All of these
aspects ultimately influence doctoral students’ experiences, specifically their academic and social integration, within the academic and social systems of the department and institution. Tinto (1993) is widely known for his identification of the concepts of academic and social integration as students interact within the academic system (e.g., classroom relations, faculty relations, graduate positions) and the social system (e.g., peer and faculty relations) of a higher education institution.

**Academic and Social Integration**

Academic integration includes educating students, helping students gain skills for the workforce and research, gaining the knowledge of the field, publishing articles, and presenting at conferences (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Social integration involves doctoral students forming friendships and connections in the academic department and possibly in the campus-wide community (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993). The basic premise of Tinto’s (1993) model is that the more doctoral students are integrated into their academic and social systems, the more likely these students are to persist throughout the doctoral program, as integration promotes and increases commitment to degree completion (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

Golde (2000) and Tinto (1993) also asserted that for doctoral students academic and social integration are strongly connected, with the academic and social systems often interacting with one another. Frequently, the student’s classmates and faculty members become the student’s social network. Research suggests that for doctoral students, academic integration supports persistence more than social integration (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 1996). However, Tinto (1993) argued the importance of social integration:

Social membership within one’s program becomes part and parcel of academic membership, and social integration with one’s peers and faculty becomes closely linked
not only to one’s intellectual development, but also to the development of important skills required for doctoral completion. (p. 232)

Within his model, Tinto (1993) acknowledged the importance of the faculty dissertation advisor during doctoral programs. For ongoing academic and social integration, students’ relationships with faculty, particularly the faculty dissertation advisor, are especially important as these individuals provide guidance and support, as well as assist students in gaining the academic competencies required for coursework and dissertation completion (Tinto, 1993).

Advising

Advising is a relationship between a faculty member and a student in which the faculty member helps the student solidify the program of study, navigate the institution and department, understand university and departmental policies, and monitor progress towards degree completion (Lyons, Scroggins, & Rule, 1990). In addition, the advisor may also serve as a mentor to the student (Lunsford, 2012). The advisor is also typically the student’s major professor, hereafter referred to as faculty dissertation advisor, on the dissertation committee (Lyons et al., 1990). As the faculty dissertation advisor, the primary responsibilities include guiding the student through what Gardner (2009) explained are the typical elements of the dissertation stage: developing and defending a research proposal, collecting and analyzing data, completing the final dissertation write-up, and undergoing the final dissertation defense.

Barnes, Williams, and Stassen (2012), in a web-based survey on graduate student/advisor experiences and satisfaction at a doctoral-extensive university, identified reasons why students selected their advisor. The top two major reasons included having similar research interests and an advisor’s interest in students’ success. Other reasons also included a desire to work with a
reputable faculty member in the field and an advisor’s “reputation for being a good advisor to graduate students” (p. 321).

Several studies underscore the importance of the advisor/student relationship in doctoral programs (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Gardner, 2008b; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 2000; Grover, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Maher et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007). Lovitts and Nelson (2000) noted that a student’s decision whether to persist in the doctoral program or dropout is most influenced by his/her relationship with the faculty advisor. The faculty dissertation advisor and student relationship is especially important during the dissertation stage (Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 1993), which is characterized by isolation and a lack of communication with faculty and peers (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009).

**Dissertation Stage**

There are typically three to four stages in doctoral programs (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Grover, 2007; Tinto, 1993). These stages are characterized by the main components of doctoral programs including: (1) coursework, (2) preliminary examination(s), (3) the prospectus, and (4) the dissertation. However, the structure of these stages depends on the academic program and the referenced literature (e.g., Ali & Kohun, 2006; Grover, 2007; Tinto, 1993).

Gardner (2009) outlined the typical elements of the dissertation stage, although these elements vary among doctoral programs. With the guidance of the faculty dissertation advisor, the student is responsible for creating a research topic and developing research questions. Gardner elaborated that the student must have an understanding of the discipline, how to conduct research, and methodologies to undergo dissertation research. The student then develops the dissertation proposal, detailing the proposed dissertation study. After a successful proposal
defense, Gardner stated that the student is allowed to collect and analyze data. Once the study is finished and all dissertation chapters are written, the student defends the dissertation and, if successful, is officially “Doctor.” Gardner suggested that the dissertation stage is tedious and filled with several potential obstacles, including isolation, and that this process can take months, even years, to complete.

The dissertation stage is also a time of independent research for students and “is characterized by the students working alone with their advisor in the absence of extensive daily social interaction and communication with their peers or with other faculty” (Ali & Kohun, 2006, p. 29). Tinto (1993) also acknowledged that students in the dissertation stage shift from engaging with several faculty members in previous stages of doctoral programs to few faculty members, mainly the faculty dissertation advisor and faculty on the dissertation committee.

Furthermore, the dissertation stage is distinct in that students no longer have the set structure of regular class meetings (Gardner, 2008b) where the opportunity for academic and social integration occurs through regular interaction with faculty (Tinto, 1993). The focus on independent research and the lack of structure through regular class meetings impede students’ ability to interact with faculty and often result in feelings of isolation during the dissertation stage (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009), which can lead to dropout from the program (Ali & Kohun, 2006). Despite the isolation of the dissertation stage, a positive relationship with the faculty dissertation advisor facilitates progress and contributes to degree completion (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

**Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I sought to (a) define the role of the faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage from the faculty dissertation advisor’s perspective, (b) identify specific
strategies successful faculty dissertation advisors employ during the dissertation stage to promote persistence, and (c) understand how advisors facilitate and promote students’ academic and social integration during the dissertation stage.

Tinto’s (1993) model does not offer a great deal of insight on the faculty dissertation advisor and student relationship during the dissertation stage. Rather, his mention of the relationship is brief and mainly suggests that the faculty dissertation advisor is the individual with whom a student has the most contact with during the dissertation stage, aside from the occasional contact with dissertation committee members. Additionally, his model suggests that academic and social integration occurs prior to the student entering the dissertation stage. However, given the importance of continued academic and social integration for persistence, results of this study provide additional insight on how faculty dissertation advisors aid in facilitating and promoting students’ academic and social integration, and ultimately their persistence during the dissertation stage.

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the overarching research question:

How do faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage?

Additional questions of interest included:

1. How do faculty dissertation advisors define their role in the dissertation stage?
2. What general strategies do faculty dissertation advisors use during the dissertation stage?
3. How do advising strategies used by faculty dissertation advisors during the dissertation stage differ by doctoral student types?
(4) How do faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic integration during the dissertation stage?

(5) How do faculty dissertation advisors promote social integration during the dissertation stage?

**Research Design**

Doctoral student persistence is a contemporary issue, especially with the risk for student dropout at the doctoral level and during the dissertation stage where approximately 30% of doctoral students dropout (Gardner, 2009). To better understand this contemporary issue, this study utilized a mixed methods research design using quantitative and qualitative methods (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The quantitative portion of the study involved a brief online questionnaire completed by faculty dissertation advisors. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative portion of the study included in-depth interviews with faculty dissertation advisors who agreed to a follow-up interview (Stake, 2000). Interviews were analyzed using open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Participants were faculty dissertation advisors from one college of education at one research institution in the Southeastern region who graduated at least three students during the fall 2003 to fall 2013 time period. Detailed information about the research design can be found in Chapter 3, the methodology section.

**Significance of Study**

The routine interactions and support students have through the structure of the coursework stage and earlier stages of doctoral programs are relatively absent during the dissertation stage, and can result in infrequent interactions with faculty, including the faculty dissertation advisor (Gardner, 2008b, 2009). Sternberg (1981) stated, “The truth of the matter is
that, although the American educational system is characterized at almost all levels by ‘support systems’-remedial programs, tutors, counselors…virtually the entire support structure vanishes for doctoral candidates undertaking a dissertation in education” (p. 13). Since the faculty dissertation advisor is the student’s main point of contact and support during the dissertation stage (i.e., Tinto, 1993), this study adds to the literature by offering an understanding of “how” faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage, previously lacking.

Additionally, this study fills several other gaps in the literature. For example, existing research on the doctoral student experience has been primarily focused on students’ perspectives of their own experiences during doctoral programs instead of the faculty role (e.g., Barnes & Austin, 2009; Earl-Novell, 2006; Gardner, 2008a, 2008b; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 2000; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). By focusing on the faculty perspective, this research offers a more holistic understanding of advising during doctoral programs, specifically at the dissertation stage, rather than the student only perspective that is dominant in current literature. In previous literature, several researchers focused on disciplines other than education (e.g., Earl-Novell, 2006; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Gardner, 2008a, 2008b; Golde, 2000; Herzig, 2002). Identifying strategies used by and perspectives of faculty dissertation advisors in education offers a better understanding of methods to aid in students’ persistence, especially given these students’ prolonged time-to degree (i.e., NSF, 2012).

Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of literature examining strategies advisors use when working with specific types of students (i.e., international, Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., full time vs. part time, etc.). Findings from this study identify specific methods that advisors can use to better
ensure students’ persistence during the dissertation stage and to counter the effects of isolation. Furthermore, based on these findings, departments can examine the formal and structured advising and support systems that aid in students’ persistence, particularly during the dissertation stage.

**Definition of Terms**

Pertinent terms and variables are defined as:

*Persistence:* Persistence is “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of the doctoral degree” (Bair, 1999, p. 8).

*Academic Integration:* The academic integration of doctoral students is defined as educating students, helping students gain skills for the workforce and research, gaining the knowledge of the field, publishing articles, presenting at conferences, etc. (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

*Social Integration:* Social integration refers to doctoral students forming friendships and connections in the academic department and possibly in the campus-wide community (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

*Advising:* Advising is a relationship between a faculty member and a student in which the faculty member helps the student solidify the program of study, navigate the institution and department, understand university and departmental policies, monitor progress towards degree completion, and/or serves as the student’s major professor/committee member on the dissertation committee (Lyons et al., 1990).

*Faculty Dissertation Advisor:* For the purposes of this study, a faculty dissertation advisor is the major professor on a dissertation committee.
Assumptions

There were three main assumptions that influenced this research. It was assumed the researcher would have access to faculty for questionnaire and interview completion. It was assumed that participants were faculty dissertation advisors in the education field and successfully graduated at least three students during the fall 2003 to fall 2013 time period. It was also assumed that participants would answer questionnaire and interview questions honestly and to the best of their ability.

Limitations

The following study had some limitations. The research participants were not representative of all academic disciplines; therefore, the results of this study are not representative of all faculty dissertation advisors. Furthermore, the results of this study are only representative of the participants in the study and do not represent all faculty dissertation advisors in all colleges of education across institutions. Additionally, the respondents self-selected to participate in the study, thus it is possible that those who participated are more likely to mentor students and have a hands-on approach to advising. Therefore, results are not generalizable to all advisors.

During the first interview my telephone was not working properly and part of the audio recording was not audible. There were sections of other interviews where I could not understand what the participant was saying. To adjust for this limitation, I used member checking and follow-up questions with participants.

For the questionnaire portion of the study, respondents were rating general statements. It is possible that they agreed with one part of a statement but not another portion of the statement; therefore, questionnaire results may not be completely accurate.
During interviews participants gave answers based on their initial recollection. It is possible that participants utilized additional strategies mentioned by other participants, however, did not include those strategies in their own responses. There were also open ended questions in the questionnaire that participants failed to answer; these instances were noted in the findings section in Chapter 4.

**Delimitations**

This study had a specific focus on how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage and not all possible factors influencing student persistence. The study also only focused on faculty in the education field in one college of education at one university in the southeastern region of the United States.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The dissertation stage is a time of independent research for doctoral students. As a result, this stage is characterized by structural isolation that can leave students without consistent interactions with their faculty dissertation advisor, who plays a pivotal role in dissertation completion. This study utilized a mixed methods research design to understand dissertation advisors’ role in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage. The following chapter includes a review of current literature related to this study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sought to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence, as well as their academic and social integration, during the dissertation stage. The following literature review covers information regarding: American graduate education, doctoral degrees in education, the stages of doctoral programs, measures of student success, models pertaining to doctoral student success, and factors of student success.

American Graduate Education

Graduate education in the United States began at Yale University in 1814 when students who completed a bachelor’s degree were given the opportunity to pursue graduate level courses (Goodchild & Miller, 1997). However, the first doctoral program was not created until the pioneering efforts of Daniel Coit Gilman, a bachelor’s degree recipient at Yale (Goodchild & Miller, 1997). Gilman developed the Proposed Plan for a Complete Organization of the School of Science Connected with Yale College, which he published in 1856. Within this plan was a proposal for the first doctor of philosophy degree. Gilman’s plan provided significant contributions for Yale’s first doctoral degree, which contained four requirements: “discrete study, languages, an examination, and a thesis” (Goodchild & Miller, 1997, p. 20). The first American doctorate was granted in 1861 by Yale University (Rosenburg, 1961). Today, more than 400 universities in the United States offer doctoral programs (Golde, 2006).

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, an organization dedicated to improving teaching and learning, developed the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) in 2001 with the primary function of “aligning the purpose and practices of doctoral education in
six disciplines”: chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics, and neuroscience (Golde, 2006, p. 6). As such, American doctoral education serves to:

Educate and prepare those to whom we can trust the vigor, quality, and integrity of the field. This person is a scholar first and foremost…someone who will creatively generate new knowledge, critically converse valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application. We call such a person a ‘steward of the discipline.’ (Golde, 2006, p. 5)

Doctoral education is highly discipline-specific, thus, the academic department is largely responsible for setting the standards for doctoral education and preparing stewards of the discipline (Hirt & Muffo, 1998). Departments establish guidelines for and oversee admission, curricula, and students’ performance and progress. Hirt and Muffo (1998) noted that these decisions reflect discipline norms rather than policies of the institution as a primary purpose of doctoral education is to socialize students into a discipline more so than an institution.

**Doctoral Degrees in Education**

The field of education, one focus of the CID, is a multidisciplinary field encompassing a broad range of specialties that are practice-oriented (e.g., educational administration, educational leadership, curriculum and instruction, and educational policy) and research-oriented (e.g., educational psychology) (Golde & Walker, 2006). Being a multidisciplinary field, scholars have acknowledged the struggle within the field to balance practice and research, leading to the designation of two doctoral degrees in education: the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) (Golde & Walker, 2006). The purpose of the Ph.D. is to develop researchers, professors, and scholars whereas the Ed.D. is designed to prepare practitioners (Golde & Walker, 2006; Shulman et al., 2006).
Andersen (1983) compiled a historical overview of the two degrees using data from Woody (1947), Moore, Russel, and Ferguson (1960), and Robertson and Sistler (1971). The first Ph.D. in education was granted to a student in 1891 and by 1969, 72 institutions had Ph.D. programs in education. By 1982, 116 universities had established Ph.D. programs in education. The first Ed.D. was awarded at Harvard University in 1921 and by 1982, 128 institutions had Ed.D. programs (Andersen, 1983).

While the purposes of the degrees differ, the two degrees are actually more similar in terms of program regulations (Andersen, 1983). Specifically, Andersen (1983) found both degree programs usually require three years of residency, 80 plus hours of coursework post bachelor’s degree, and a five to seven year time limit for degree completion. However, Ph.D. students typically have to choose a minor outside of their program whereas this requirement is not typical of Ed.D. programs (Andersen, 1983).

In a more recent study, Deering (1998) also found more similarities between the degrees than differences, with the main difference being the focus of the dissertation. Given the practical focus, Ed.D. students typically choose a dissertation topic reflecting a practical problem in the field (Andersen, 1983; Deering, 1998). In contrast, Ph.D. students are expected to complete a dissertation of original research that adds to knowledge in the field (Deering, 1998). Andersen (1983) stated:

It is logical to conclude that the degrees will continue to serve different philosophical goals but be similar in programmatic requirements, knowledge bases, competency standards, and in employment expectancies. This is suggested…also by the historical evolution of the two degrees. (p. 56)
Regardless of the degree pursued, doctoral students in education typically work full-time and pay their tuition out of pocket or rely on funding from their employers (Golde & Walker, 2006). Given a full-time work status, most doctoral students in education enroll part-time, attending night and/or weekend classes. Part-time enrollment is especially typical of students in Ed.D. programs as these programs were created for working professionals (Laden, 2002). Despite students’ enrollment status, part-time or full-time, students in education doctoral programs who persist to degree completion experience the common elements of doctoral programs. The next section will describe each stage/phase of programs with an emphasis on the dissertation stage.

**Stages of Doctoral Programs**

While the groupings of the stages/phases of doctoral programs, Ph.D. and Ed.D., vary among academic disciplines and academic departments, the literature tends to note that the stages/phases include the elements of coursework, the preliminary examination, the prospectus, and the dissertation. For example, Grover (2007) identified the stages of doctoral programs as the stage of exploration, the stage of engagement, the stage of consolidation, and the stage of entry. These stages represent doctoral students’ maturity in terms of “how a doctoral student is positioned with respect to knowledge creation within his or her field as well as the specific institution” (p. 10).

The stage of exploration includes first year students who begin doctoral coursework and start to understand that doctoral programs are more intense and demanding than master’s programs, and many students are unaware of the intensity and commitments a doctoral program requires until they begin the program (Grover, 2007). This stage includes discussions with more advanced doctoral students who give them advice on handling the pressures and demands of
coursework, research, preliminary examination(s), and the job market. During this stage, first year students also get to know faculty members.

During the stage of engagement, doctoral students complete coursework and preliminary examinations (Grover, 2007). This stage is marked by doctoral students developing a greater understanding of the realities/demands of the program and the professional field they plan to enter. Students also have increased interactions with faculty members and may begin to join faculty in conducting research. This stage is followed by the stage of consolidation in which doctoral students formulate dissertation ideas, make solid commitments to their research, and make connections within the professional field to prepare for the eventual job search (Grover, 2007). Grover’s (2007) stages of doctoral programs conclude with the stage of entry in which students balance the urge to enter their professional field with the reality of completing the dissertation. Grover stated that one mistake doctoral students make at this stage is taking a full-time job before completing the dissertation, meaning these students are at risk for delayed completion and possibly dropout because their attention shifts from the dissertation to the demands of the job.

While Grover’s stages offer one description of the doctoral process, Tinto (1993) described a similar process including coursework, the preliminary examination, the prospectus, and the dissertation. Tinto explained three stages of doctoral programs: the stage of transition, the stage leading to candidacy, and the completion of the prospectus and the dissertation. He argued that doctoral student persistence is a longitudinal process with students’ past and future events impacting their experience throughout these stages. Additionally, Tinto argued that existing longitudinal studies on graduate student persistence assume that the graduate student experience remains rather constant over time meaning that the “events that shape persistence
early in the graduate-student career are essentially the same as those that shape persistence later in that career” (p. 235). However, anecdotal evidence and qualitative research (i.e., Tinto & Wallace, 1986) proposed that there is variation during the doctoral process, leading to the development of three distinct stages of the doctoral experience.

The stage of transition includes students’ first year in their doctoral program and involves students learning the norms of the academic department and joining the academic and social systems of the department and university (Tinto, 1993). The second stage, the time before admittance to doctoral candidacy, involves the student learning the knowledge and skills to complete doctoral level research and the preliminary examination; essentially, this is the coursework stage of the program. The primary focus of this study is students in the dissertation stage as this is the primary stage when students are considered “all but dissertation” (ABD) (Sternberg, 1981; Laden, 2002). Tinto (1993) noted that the dissertation stage includes “the time from the gaining of candidacy, through the completion of a doctoral research proposal, to the successful completion of the research project and defense of the dissertation” (p. 237).

More specifically, Gardner (2009) elaborated on the typical elements of the dissertation stage, although these elements vary among doctoral programs. With the guidance of the faculty dissertation advisor, the student is responsible for creating a research topic and developing research questions. Gardner elaborated that the student must have an understanding of the discipline, how to conduct research, and methodologies to undergo dissertation research. The student then develops the dissertation proposal, which details the proposed dissertation study. After a successful proposal defense, Gardner stated that the student is allowed to collect and analyze data. Once the study is finished and all dissertation chapters are written, the student defends the dissertation and, if successful, is officially “Doctor.” The dissertation stage is
tedious and filled with several potential obstacles, including isolation. Gardner stated that this process can take months, even years, to complete.

**Measures of Doctoral Student Success**

The overall goals for students going through doctoral programs is their persistence throughout the stages of doctoral programs and their success in earning the degree. There are several terms researchers used to describe student success; however, the terms retention, persistence, and attrition appear to be the three most widely cited. While the definitions of these three terms vary among studies, Bair (1999) in a meta-synthesis of 118 studies on doctoral student persistence and attrition, described retention as “used to indicate that a college or university has retained a student or students toward the completion of the doctoral degree” (p. 8).

For years, student retention was attributed to personal abilities and motivation (Tinto, 2006). The blame for student dropout was taken away from institutions and placed on the students. During the 1970’s, researchers began to understand the role institutions played in student retention and how the overall institutional environment contributes to students’ persistence and/or dropout at a particular institution (Tinto, 2006).

Persistence then is “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of the doctoral degree” (Bair, 1999, p. 8). The opposite of student persistence is attrition, the “discontinuance of a student’s progress toward a doctoral degree” (Bair, 1999, p. 8). In other words, attrition is “drop-out” from the university. Additionally, various studies on doctoral education use other measures of student success, including time-to-degree, the length of time a student takes to complete graduate education (Ferrer de Valero, 2001) or to complete the doctoral degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) and degree progress, the completion of doctoral
program milestones (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Given that this study focused on advisors’ role in students’ persistence, Bair’s (1999) definition for persistence was used in this study.

Models Pertaining to Doctoral Student Success

Based on the above definitions, researchers have developed models of doctoral degree progress, persistence, and time-to-degree. Girves and Wemmerus (1988) and Tinto (1993) developed models of degree progress and persistence, respectively, with considerable influence from Tinto’s (1975, 1982, 1987, 1993) widely cited research on and model of undergraduate student departure. Tinto described undergraduate student departure as a continual progression of interactions with the student and the institutional environment, also taking into account the student’s levels of commitment to graduating and commitment to the institution. He distinguished between the academic and social integration of undergraduate students as these forms of integration relate to their decision to dropout or persist at an institution.

Academic integration for undergraduate students includes their grade achievement and intellectual development during college (Tinto, 1993). Social integration involves students’ successful interactions with peers and faculty/administrators and their participation in extracurricular activities, with peer interactions having the most influence. Tinto (1993) stated that students can be socialized into one system, academic or social, but not the other, which may influence their decision to leave an institution. For example, an undergraduate student may have a strong academic record and a good relationship with faculty members but no social life with peers at the university and therefore decide to leave the institution. An understanding of undergraduate student departure led to the development of Girves and Wemmerus’ (1988) model of doctoral student degree progress.
Girves and Wemmerus

Girves and Wemmerus (1988) developed a model of doctoral student degree progress based on Tinto’s (1975) work and subsequent literature (e.g., Bean, 1980, 1982, 1985; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979) on undergraduate student retention. Girves and Wemmerus argued that while the research on undergraduate student retention served as a theoretical basis, these studies often omitted the importance of financial support and failed to represent persistence beyond freshman to sophomore years. Furthermore, these studies “often controlled for age, gender, and ethnic groups and excluded involuntary dropouts” (p. 165). These criticisms led to the development of a more contemporary model of doctoral student degree progress.

At the doctoral level, Girves and Wemmerus (1988) identified that doctoral student progress involved three milestones: (1) completion of doctoral level coursework, (2) passing of the preliminary examination and admittance to doctoral candidacy, and (3) graduation with a doctorate. The researchers’ conceptual model of graduate student degree progress (Figure 2.1) involved two stages. The first stage included “(1) department characteristics, (2) student characteristics, (3) financial support, and (4) student perceptions of their relationship with the faculty” (p. 165). The second stage contained four intervening variables which Girves and Wemmerus anticipated to be affected by first-stage variables and to be related to degree progress. Second stage variables included grades, involvement in the graduate program, satisfaction with the department, and alienation/isolation.
In testing their conceptual model of graduate student degree progress, the researchers found two models that distinguished between degree progress for master’s and doctoral students (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Figure 2.2 shows Girves and Wemmerus’ (1988) model of doctoral student degree progress.

**Figure 2.1.** Girves and Wemmerus (1988) conceptual model of graduate student degree progress.

**Figure 2.2.** Girves and Wemmerus (1988) model of doctoral student degree progress.
Girves and Wemmerus described the 162 doctoral student participants in their study as enrolled in “more life-oriented disciplines” although some participants were enrolled in applied and soft disciplines. Participants were also likely to be either married or in a relationship and to have children. For doctoral student degree progress, Girves and Wemmerus found that involvement in the doctoral program, influenced by financial support and students’ perceptions of faculty members, as well as their relationships with faculty members, was significant to degree progress.

Researchers found that the type of financial support accrued was especially important as students who received funding through a graduate/teaching assistantship or fellowship typically became more involved in the program and department through their work with faculty members, which contributed to degree progress and ultimately graduation (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Particularly important was the student/advisor relationship as the advisor becomes a support system in helping the student maneuver the degree program and the department. Additionally, departmental characteristics directly affected degree progress; however, researchers did not clarify what characteristics positively contributed to degree progress.

Within this model, doctoral student involvement, defined by Girves and Wemmerus (1988) as students’ experiences with projects and activities with faculty and peers, is related to Tinto’s (1975) concept of academic integration. However, satisfaction/alienation, as related to Tinto’s concept of social integration, was not a predictor of degree progress for doctoral students. Furthermore, Girves and Wemmerus found that grades were not significant to degree progress. As a result, they suggested that passing the preliminary examination(s) and the dissertation might be more critical for degree completion.
Although Girves and Wemmerus (1988) found that alienation (isolation) was not a predictor of doctoral student degree progress, more recent literature suggests that isolation and a disconnect from the academic and social world of the department is a challenge to persistence (e.g., Gardner, 2009; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) and contributor to doctoral student dropout, especially during the dissertation stage (Ali & Kohun, 2006). This more recent research implies the importance of Tinto’s (1993) concept of social integration for doctoral students, which involves doctoral students forming friendships and connections within the department and university setting for their persistence (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

**Tinto**

Tinto (1993) acknowledged the contributions to research on graduate education (e.g., Becker et al., 1951; Benkin, 1984; Cook & Swanson, 1978; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Matchett, 1988; Ott, Markewich, & Ochsner, 1984; Zwick, 1991). However, he stated that research up to that point had “not been guided either by a comprehensive model or theory of graduate persistence or by the methodological strategies that have been successfully employed in the study of undergraduate persistence” (p. 231). Tinto elaborated that graduate student persistence is a longitudinal process in which students’ past and future events influence their experience throughout the program; however, very few studies adopted a longitudinal perspective and those that did had “greatly oversimplified the process that leads to graduate degree completion” (p. 235). Tinto further stated that Girves and Wemmerus’ (1988) model was the closest to those necessary for institutional assessment and policy.

Per Tinto’s (1993) model (Figure 2.3), doctoral students enter programs with certain individual attributes, and these attributes, “most notably gender, age, race, ability, and social class, and individual educational experiences prior to entry to graduate school help shape
individual goals (educational and career) and commitments (goal and institutional) at entry” (p. 239). Doctoral students also enter their programs with “external commitments” such as work and family obligations, as well as specific financial needs for funding the degree program. All of the above factors influence doctoral students’ experiences within the academic and social systems of the academic department and institution and ultimately their academic and social integration.

**Figure 2.3.** Tinto (1993) conceptual model of graduate student degree progress.

**Academic and social integration.** Tinto (1993) is widely cited for his concepts of academic and social integration as students interact with the academic and social systems of a higher education institution. The academic system concerns events that are academic in nature (i.e., classroom experiences, research) and the social system involves events that are social (i.e., departmental potlucks, happy hours). However, the academic and social systems are often interconnected as doctoral students interact with faculty, staff, and peers inside and outside the classroom (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Students’ individual attributes, goals and commitment to
goals, external commitments, and financial needs play a role in how students interact with the academic and social systems (peers, faculty, staff) within the academic department and institution, and ultimately influence their levels of academic and social integration and persistence during the doctoral programs (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration for doctoral students involves educating students, helping students gain skills for the workforce and research, gaining the knowledge of the field, publishing articles, presenting at conferences, among other tasks (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Social integration involves doctoral students forming friendships and connections in the academic department and possibly the campus-wide community (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993).

As doctoral students progress through the stages of doctoral programs their interactions with faculty and peers within the academic and social systems of their academic department and institution vary (Tinto, 1993). While the academic components of Tinto’s stages of doctoral programs were previously described, Tinto also addressed the nature of student’s interactions with faculty and peers during his three stages. These stages represent times when doctoral students decide to persist or dropout and the nature of students’ interactions with peers and faculty. During Tinto’s (1993) first stage of doctoral programs, the stage of transition, doctoral student persistence:

Will mirror individual goals and commitments as well as individual perceptions as to the relevance of institutional programs to those goals…movement from transition to subsequent membership involves a series of judgments about the desirability of membership and the costs and benefits of further involvement. (p. 236)

Whereas during the first stage students are concerned with establishing membership within the department and program, forming relationships with faculty and peers, and
committing to goals, the pivotal point of Tinto’s (1993) second stage, the stage leading to candidacy, is students’ development of the knowledge and skills required for doctoral level research and passing the preliminary examination. Students’ interactions with faculty, and to an extent peers, inside and outside of the classroom are key to persistence during this stage as these interactions help students develop the necessary knowledge and skills. How faculty members perceive students’ abilities is crucial as these interactions could later influence whether they agree to serve on a dissertation committee or as a dissertation advisor.

Persistence in the third stage, the completion of the dissertation, is marked by a student’s interactions and relationship with the dissertation committee and primarily the dissertation advisor/chair as these are the individuals guiding prospectus and dissertation completion (Tinto, 1993). Students generally have few interactions with peers. A poor relationship with these individuals, especially the dissertation advisor, could hinder students’ persistence during this stage.

Tinto’s (1993) model does not offer a great deal of insight on the faculty dissertation advisor and student relationship during the dissertation stage. Rather, his mention of the relationship is brief and mainly states that the faculty dissertation advisor is the individual “who is most likely to shape completion” (p. 241). Additionally, his model suggests that academic and social integration occurs prior to the student entering the dissertation stage. However, given the importance of continued academic and social integration for persistence, this study sought to gain additional insight on how faculty dissertation advisors aid in facilitating and promoting students’ academic and social integration and ultimately their persistence during the critical dissertation stage.
Wao and Onwuegbuzie

Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) developed a model (Figure 2.4) of doctoral student time-to-degree, the length of time it takes to complete the entire doctoral degree, using Tinto’s (1993) research, Strayhorn’s (2005) model of graduate student persistence, and Girves and Wemmerus (1988) to understand how combining the factors relating to persistence impact doctoral time-to-degree. Although Strayhorn’s (2005) research included doctoral students in a study on graduate student persistence, the study was not specific to doctoral students; therefore, Strayhorn’s model is not discussed in detail in this literature review.

![Figure 2.4. Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) model of doctoral student time-to-degree.](image)

Data collection involved two phases, a quantitative and a qualitative phase (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The quantitative phase involved researchers using discrete-time event history modeling to analyze secondary data on one college of education’s doctoral students during a 16-year time period. Secondary data included student-level data (gender, age, ethnicity, master’s degree grade point average, GRE scores) and program-level data (size of program, size of department, proportion of White students admitted to a program, proportion of females admitted to a program). The qualitative phase involved interviews with four doctoral students,
three current and one graduate, and eight professors (associate or full) from one college of education. In general, researchers found that time-to-degree involved factors associated with five domains: academic, social, economic, personal, and external factors.

Quantitative results indicated that the median time-to-doctoral degree in this particular college of education was 5.8 years (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Of the student-level variables, master’s grade point average was positively correlated to students’ finishing the doctorate; however, “race, age, GPA, and GRE verbal score at admission, were not significantly related to TTD whereas the significance of gender in favor of female students disappeared when program-level covariates were included in the model” (p. 123). Additionally, several program-level variables influenced time-to-degree, including: size of department, proportion of female students, and mean GRE quantitative score.

Qualitative findings revealed several factors of academic integration related to time-to-degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). In reference to structure, faculty noted that factors such as the availability of course offerings and revisions to the program can all affect the length of time it takes students to complete the degree program. Students cited several aspects of program structure, including the “number of credit hours, course sequencing, rigor of courses, and practical application courses,” as affecting time-to-degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, p. 125). Faculty also noted that doctoral students who received adequate preparation (i.e., experience with research and writing) for doctoral level coursework and research tended to have a faster time-to-degree. Additionally, those students enrolled in a doctoral program part-time had longer time-to-degree. Furthermore, the ease with which students were able to develop a dissertation topic moderately contributed to their time-to-degree. Lastly, faculty discussed providing students with information regarding program completion to aid in time-to-degree. Wao and
Onwuegbuzie concluded that “findings from both phases suggest that academic integration (followed by social integration) is of paramount importance” (p. 129).

In reference to social integration, Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) found that the relationship with the advisor impacted students’ time-to-degree. For instance, faculty indicated that students who were able to meet with their advisors, receive timely feedback, and develop a mentoring relationship had a shorter time-to-degree. The student’s dissertation committee was also of importance. Specifically, students indicated that access to committee members, committee members who were familiar with their dissertation topic, and members who were easier to get along with and supportive aided in their time-to-degree.

In terms of economic integration, students and faculty mentioned that working full-time slowed degree completion as students’ primary focus is job responsibilities (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). However, a student indicated that serving as a graduate assistant, in which the student works for and receives funding from the department, promoted a faster time-to-degree because the job responsibilities related to the student’s research. External factors also moderately impacted time-to-degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). For example, family obligations (i.e., childbirth, ill parent) distract attention from degree completion. Additionally, faculty and students cited motivation, a personal attribute, as related to time-to-degree; having motivation to persist to degree completion helps students progress.

While Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) depict similar elements (i.e., academic integration, social integration, personal factors, finances) as Tinto’s (1993) model, their model represents time-to-degree not persistence, the focus of this study. Furthermore, Tinto (1993) discussed how the stages of doctoral programs, specifically the dissertation stage which is the focus of this study, contributes to his model. In contrast, Wao and Onwuegbuzie provide a more general
overview of the factors associated with time-to-degree without discussing the impact of the stages/phases of doctoral programs.

**Factors of Student Success**

In addition to the development of models relating to doctoral student success, existing research also notes various individual factors related to doctoral student success, including advising, isolation, departmental climate, personal circumstances, time-to-degree, finances, and motivation. The following sections describe each factor in more detail.

**Advising**

Advising is a relationship between a faculty member and a student in which the faculty member helps the student solidify the program of study; navigate the institution and department, understand university and departmental policies; and monitor progress towards degree completion (Lyons et al., 1990). The advisor is also typically the student’s major professor/faculty dissertation advisor on the dissertation committee. Additionally, advisors function to socialize students into an academic department and help students learn departmental and behavioral norms (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988).

Barnes and Austin (2009) interviewed “25 exemplary doctoral advisors who have graduated a large number of doctoral students” from natural science, humanities, and social science, to learn more about the role of the faculty advisor, from the advisor’s perspective (p. 297). Participants identified several aspects of their role as an advisor, including aiding in students’ overall success during program completion (e.g., dissertation feedback, selecting committee members, overcoming setbacks), helping students become “independent researchers”, and helping students grow professionally (e.g., participating in professional organizations/conferences, publishing articles).
Additionally, participants specified certain functions (collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising) they use to perform the above responsibilities (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Barnes and Austin (2009) explained that through collaboration, advisors and advisees team up on research projects and presentations. They suggest that mentoring involves assisting advisees with their professional growth throughout degree completion. By advocating, advisors “protect students from being thwarted by the system or by particular people in the system” (p. 309). However, advisors sometimes have to chastise advisees to enforce appropriate behavior when their behaviors are deemed inappropriate.

Through interviews, Barnes and Austin (2009) found that advisors utilized several characteristics while working with doctoral advisees. Advisors stressed the importance of having friendly, professional, supportive, caring, honest, and collegial relationships with students. Through these relationships, advisors set boundaries with students so the relationship is not a friendship outside of the academic setting but one in which the advisor cares about and supports the student, is honest with the student regarding dissertation feedback and progress, and respects the student’s input on projects and collaborations. Furthermore, advisors mentioned being accessible to students when students need assistance.

Students may enter a doctoral program already matched with an advisor; however, some choose an advisor after enrollment or change advisors after enrolling (Golde & Dore, 2001). Golde and Dore (2001) issued The Survey on Doctoral Education and Career Preparation, a survey for doctoral students in arts and sciences, to understand their experiences and what was and was not conducive in doctoral education. Survey results indicated the top seven reasons doctoral students chose their advisors, including (a) having similar intellectual interests, (b) currently conducting interesting research, (c) a reputation as a high quality researcher, (d) an
understanding of specific methodologies, (e) a willingness to work with a student, (f) an appreciation for a quality dissertation, and (g) a reputation as a good advisor.

Barnes et al. (2012) studied doctoral students’ experiences/satisfaction with their doctoral advisors and found similar results as Golde and Dore (2001) as to why students selected their advisors. Participants included 870 doctoral students at a doctoral-extensive institution enrolled in one of four colleges: Education, Humanities and Fine Arts, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Of those students who chose their advisor, the two primary reasons for selecting their advisors included the advisor having similar research interests and an advisor’s concern for students’ success. Additional reasons also included a desire to work with a reputable faculty member in the field and an advisor’s strong reputation for working with graduate students.

Evidence suggests that “good or bad, the quality of the relationship between doctoral student and advisor directly influences the quality of the doctoral education experience” (Zhao et al., 2007, p. 264). Zhao et al. (2007) further suggested that the ideal advisor/advisee relationships in doctoral education are those in which the advisor also serves as a mentor. While the advisor’s standard role is to help students navigate degree completion and the institution, as well as university and departmental policies (i.e., Lyons et al., 1990), mentors provide students’ with psychosocial/psychological support, career guidance, and role modeling (Jacobi, 1991).

Lunsford (2012) administered a survey on doctoral student outcomes to understand the effects of advisors who also mentored their advisees. Participants included 477 doctoral students (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) at two universities enrolled in engineering, science, education, humanities, mathematics, or social science doctoral programs. Results indicated that students who received psychosocial mentoring from their advisor were more satisfied with their relationship with their
advisor. Those students who received career mentoring were more likely to publish articles, present at conferences, and remain on track with degree completion.

Lovitts and Nelson (2000) emphasized the importance of the student-advisor relationship when they stated “that the single most important factor in student decisions to continue or withdraw is the relationship with the faculty adviser” (p. 50). Lovitts and Nelson indicated that those who finish the doctoral degree have more satisfaction with the relationship than students who dropout. However, some students change advisors during the doctoral program, possibly due to a poor working relationship and dissimilar research interests (Ferrer de Valero, 2001). Ferrer de Valero (2001) elaborated on the possible negative consequences of switching advisors:

Changing the major advisor usually means changing the dissertation topic. The consequences of these changes are worse, in terms of time to degree, if the student switches advisors at later stages of the program. Even in cases where the student could continue working on the same research topic, the previous work had to be refocused, and major changes needed to be made to comply with the perspective of the new research advisor. Such changes imply an extension of time to graduation. (p. 362)

Switching advisors during the dissertation stage, as explained by Ferrer de Valero, can prolong the degree program.

Literature also specifically addressed the importance of the faculty-student advising relationship during the dissertation stage. As previously indicated, during the dissertation stage students shift from interacting with multiple faculty members to a few, mainly the student’s dissertation advisor and committee members (Tinto, 1993). Although using the terms advisor and mentor interchangeably, Tinto (1993) stated that during the dissertation stage the student’s relationship with the faculty advisor/mentor was the most important contributor to program
completion. Additionally, when referencing the challenges of the isolation of the dissertation stage, discussed below, Gardner (2009) also specified that the support of the dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage is of the utmost importance for students’ degree completion.

The current literature presented notes that faculty dissertation advisors are crucial to students’ success (i.e., Barnes et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Lunsford, 2012; Tinto, 1993; Zhao et al., 2007); however, there is a lack of research that explains “how” faculty dissertation advisors help students persist, particularly from the faculty perspective. Due to the importance of the faculty dissertation advisor, especially during the dissertation stage (i.e., Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 1993), this study sought to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence specifically during the dissertation stage. Faculty dissertation advisors’ role during the dissertation stage is especially important given the isolation and lack of interactions with faculty and peers that is common during this stage (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009).

**Isolation**

Specifically during the dissertation stage, several researchers noted the isolation many students endure, thus challenging students’ ability to persist during the dissertation stage due to the lack of interactions and support from faculty members and peers (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009). Gardner (2008b), in a qualitative study on doctoral student socialization, explained that students entering the dissertation stage are accustomed to the structure and routine of the coursework phase and are often not prepared for the independence of the dissertation stage. Similarly, in a qualitative phenomenological study using open-ended interviews of 76 individuals who graduated from a doctoral program in education to understand the factors related to doctoral student degree persistence, Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) also noted how
during the coursework stage students were accustomed to faculty instruction and guidance, whereas the dissertation stage was independent, “unfamiliar”, and “unstructured”. Particularly, students cited difficulties managing their own deadlines for finishing the dissertation and putting in the time necessary to complete the dissertation. Accompanying the newly found independence is isolation from faculty and peers; students no longer take classes and do not have frequent interactions with faculty and peers as they work on independent research (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009).

Additionally, during the dissertation stage students shift from engaging with several faculty members to a few, mainly those on the student’s dissertation committee and the faculty dissertation advisor (Tinto, 1993). Some students also experience a lack of interactions with their primary advisor/dissertation chair, particularly if these students are finishing their dissertations from a distance or primarily off-campus (Gardner, 2008b). Ali and Kohun (2006), in a paper on students’ feelings of isolation and attrition in an Information Systems and Communications doctoral program, noted that the dissertation stage is when doctoral students are the most isolated due to infrequent and few interactions. This isolation can lead to dropout from the doctoral program. Ali and Kohun (2006) acknowledged:

The feeling of isolation among doctoral students is a major factor that contributes to the high attrition rate at doctoral programs. Yet despite its recognition, the feeling of isolation has yet to be addressed fully in the design of some doctoral programs. (p. 21)

This isolation and a lack of interactions during the dissertation stage suggest a lack of academic and social integration, both important for students’ persistence per Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence. The additional factors discussed below have been
mentioned in the research literature as hindering/promoting students’ success during doctoral programs.

**Departmental Climate**

Ferrer de Valero (2001) studied factors impacting doctoral student time-to-degree and completion rates in several departments (science, engineering, social science) at one research university using a mixed methods approach that included two phases. During the first phase, the median time-to-degree and median completion rate for 876 Ph.D. students in science, engineering, and social sciences were calculated. Based on time-to-degree and completion rates, departments were grouped into one of four departmental types: high completion rates/short time-to-degree, low completion rates/short time-to-degree, high completion rates/long time-to-degree, and low completion rates/long time-to-degree. The second phase included interviews with 24 doctoral students and 16 faculty members.

Ferrer de Valero (2001) found that departmental climate, defined as “the sense of community within the department...attitudes towards students, students’ participation in departmental activities, and peer support,” affects doctoral student persistence as students in a supportive environment are more likely to persist to degree completion (p. 351). Departments with high completion rates were found to have positive attitudes toward students, increased student participation in departmental activities, and peer support, all of which contributed to students’ persistence and degree completion. However, departments with low completion rates were found to have more negative attitudes toward students, but peer support remained positive. Additionally, students in low completion rate/long time-to-degree departments reported a lack of departmental activities and conflict within the department which contributed to a poor departmental climate and, therefore, low completion rates. Results suggest that departmental
climate may relate to a student’s ability to academically and socially integrate during the dissertation stage, and an unfriendly departmental environment may discourage students’ interactions with faculty and peers.

**Personal Circumstances**

Researchers have identified personal circumstances as a factor of doctoral student persistence (Maher et al., 2004; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). In a quantitative study (survey) on degree progress female doctoral students in education, Maher et al. (2004) sought to understand factors impacting degree progress and whether there was variation among these factors based on the length of time it took these women to finish their degree programs. The study included survey data from 27 alumni who finished their degree in less than 4.25 years (early-completers) and 36 alumni who completed the degree in 6.75 years or more (late-completers). All alumni graduated from the same institution.

Personal circumstances, including child-care responsibilities, marital issues, and family obligations (e.g., aging parent, death in family), affected women’s persistence, especially for late-completers, because these factors delay completion as attention was needed on other responsibilities than completing the degree (Maher et al., 2004). Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) found the following personal factors relating to delayed degree completion: job promotions and job layoffs, deaths in the family, and children and family obligations as factors affecting persistence. Specifically in Tinto’s (1993) model, he noted that during the dissertation stage students may have external commitments that also influence persistence and degree completion.
Finances

Finances, another commonly cited factor related to doctoral student persistence, can also affect students’ time-to-degree and persistence. Those students receiving funding, and sufficient funding, instead of paying out of pocket, for example, are more likely to complete the doctoral degree (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Maher et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993).

Specifically, the availability and type of funding are two primary concerns for doctoral students (Hirt & Muffo, 1998). At the undergraduate level students rely on financial aid packages while doctoral students rely on grants, fellowships, assistantships, and departmental funding (Hirt & Muffo, 1998). Departments also have control over which students receive departmental funding and how much these students receive (Hirt & Muffo, 1998). Therefore, some students in the department may be more likely to persist, especially if they receive departmental funding. However, within the education field few assistantships, teaching or research, are offered (Golde & Walker, 2006). Furthermore, those students working full-time during their doctoral program may not seek assistantships and would have to pay their tuition or receive funding from their employer (Golde & Walker, 2006).

Girves and Wemmerus (1988) found that the type of financial support impacted doctoral students’ involvement in their program and department. Students receiving financial assistance through an assistantship or fellowship had more involvement within the academic department/program and were more likely to graduate given the development of relationships with faculty members and frequent interactions with faculty through these positions. Earl-Novell (2006), in a qualitative study on how Ph.D. students’ (4 female, 16 male) experiences of program features and integration strategies in a mathematics doctoral program aided in their persistence, found that funding through fellowships helped promote persistence as these students could
devote considerable time to coursework and research. In addition, students receiving a Fellowship had the opportunity to gain teaching experience, which provided them with increased contact with faculty members, an aspect of the teaching experience aiding in students’ persistence. Findings of Girves and Wemmerus (1988) and Earl-Novell (2006) suggest that the relationships students develop with faculty members during their teaching assistantships/experiences influences and motivates them to persist. Unfortunately, students working full-time or outside of the department tend to have less departmental involvement and fewer interactions with faculty (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988).

Like the researchers mentioned above, Tinto (1993) also noted that in addition to the faculty dissertation advisor and external factors, finances play a role in doctoral students’ persistence during the dissertation stage. However, Tinto (1993) stated that it is challenging for a student to obtain financial support during the dissertation stage since “most graduate financial aid packages are frontloaded. They are designed to allow people to begin graduate study but not configured to enable them to finish” (p. 241). Additionally, since financial support relates to students’ involvement in the academic department (i.e., Girves & Wemmerus, 1988), financial support and the type of financial support may influence students’ academic and social integration during the dissertation stage and may be a factor advisors assist students with during this stage.

**Motivation**

Researchers noted that students who are motivated to persist through a doctoral program are more likely to complete the degree (Grover, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). In a mixed methods study on factors aiding in students’ persistence, Ivankova and Stick (2007) found intrinsic and extrinsic motivation aided in doctoral program completion for students. The quantitative phase involved survey data from 207 current or former
students from a distributed doctoral program in educational leadership. The qualitative phase included interviews with four of these students. The distributed doctoral program allowed students to finish the program using online technologies with the option of taking some courses on-campus. Ivankova and Stick found that intrinsic motivation, or motivation from within the individual, included “personal challenge, responsibility, love for learning, and experiencing the new learning format” (p. 121). Extrinsic motivation, or motivation from external factors, included career advancement, achieving the title of doctor, and a pay raise.

Consistent with the results of Ivankova and Stick (2007), Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) found several factors motivating students, including the accomplishment of a life-long goal, an appreciation for education, overcoming the challenge of a doctoral program, and professional/career advancement. Grover (2007) elaborated that “students must embody a minimum threshold of motivation…for success. Motivation is required in order to be willing and enthusiastic about engaging in the unstructured and often frustrating process of knowledge creation” (p. 9). Motivation may also be especially important for persistence during the isolation of the dissertation stage when interactions with peers and faculty are typically lacking. While Tinto’s (1993) model does not address motivation, the literature presented underscores that students’ motivation assists with program completion.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of American graduate education, as well as doctoral degrees in education and the stages of doctoral programs. Furthermore, this chapter provided a discussion on doctoral student success, including measures of student success, current models pertaining to doctoral student success, and factors of student success. Additionally, the chapter provided justification for this study’s focus on persistence and the use of Tinto’s (1993) model of
doctoral persistence as a framework for the study. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of this study, designed to answer the overarching research question, “How do faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how the faculty dissertation advisor aids in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage as the advisor is the students’ main source of support and contact within the academic community during the dissertation stage (Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 1993). Specifically, I sought to define the role of the faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage from the faculty dissertation advisor’s perspective, identify specific strategies successful faculty dissertation advisors employ during the dissertation stage to promote persistence, and understand how advisors facilitate and promote students’ academic and social integration during the dissertation stage. Therefore, this study answers the following overarching research question:

How do faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage?

The sub questions included:

(1) How do faculty dissertation advisors define their role in the dissertation stage?

(2) What general strategies do faculty dissertation advisors use during the dissertation stage?

(3) How do advising strategies used by faculty dissertation advisors during the dissertation stage differ by doctoral student types?

(4) How do faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic integration during the dissertation stage?

(5) How do faculty dissertation advisors promote social integration during the dissertation stage?
The following chapter includes the research design of the study, participant information, the context of the study, data collection and analysis procedures, limitations and delimitations of the research, and ethical considerations.

**Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed methods research design using quantitative and qualitative methodology (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The quantitative portion of the study involved faculty dissertation advisors completion of a brief online questionnaire. The qualitative portion of the study included interviews with six faculty dissertation advisors who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. A mixed methods approach was used to help me gain more in-depth information on how faculty dissertation advisors aid in their advisees’ persistence during the dissertation stage.

**Participants**

Criterion sampling was used to select participants for this study. Criterion sampling includes “all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). Specific criterion for inclusion in the study included: associate and full professors in the college of education at one institution in the Southeastern region who have served as a faculty dissertation advisor and who have graduated three or more doctoral students within a 10 year time frame, from Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 semesters. A broad time frame was chosen since dissertations can take years to complete (Gardner, 2009). Associate and full professor rank was included in the criteria, as well as having graduated three or more students, to help ensure advisors had sufficient experience advising students through the dissertation stage.

Participants were identified from a list of all faculty provided by the administrative services office in the college of education. The list was narrowed down to 55 faculty members
who met the criteria of associate or full professor; this list did not include how many students each faculty member graduated during the fall 2003 to fall 2013 semesters. Two qualifying checks were implemented to ensure those who participated in the study met the criteria of having graduated three or more students during the fall 2003 to fall 2013 semesters. The first was in a bolded statement in the initial email (Appendix A) sent to faculty members on the list asking for their participation in this study. The statement read, “If you are an associate or full professor who has graduated at least three doctoral students during the fall 2003-fall 2013 semesters and are willing to participate in my research study, please click the link at the end of this questionnaire.” The second qualifying check was a statement in the second question of the questionnaire (Appendix B) that read, “The following questionnaire is for associate or full rank professors who have graduated at least 3 doctoral students during the fall 2003-fall 2013 semesters.” Those who met the qualifications then clicked the icon next to the statement “I meet the qualifications and agree to proceed.”

I received one email from a faculty member stating that she had not graduated three or more students and did not meet the qualifications, and one email from a former faculty member stating he no longer worked at the university. I also had one faculty member complete the survey but had only graduated two students; therefore, those responses were not counted in the final analysis. This feedback reduced the list of potential participants to 52 faculty members.

Two faculty members started the questionnaire but did not answer any questions beyond the first question informing participants of the purpose of the study and confidentiality. Twenty-one faculty members, 10 associate professors and 11 full professors, completed the questionnaire in its entirety, which totaled a 40% response rate. Of those 21 faculty members, 11 agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. However, when contacted via email about completing an
interview, only six faculty members, three full professors and three associate professors, actually completed a follow-up interview. Information about each faculty member interviewed is provided in Chapter 4.

**Context of the Study**

The college of education is housed within a very high research university as classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Carnegie, n.d.). The college offers bachelor’s, master’s, specialist, and doctoral programs. This college of education has four doctoral degree granting departments.

**Questionnaire Development**

Findings from Barnes and Austin’s (2009) study identified “three major themes: (1) advisors’ responsibilities, (2) advising functions, and (3) characteristics of the advising relationship and advisors’ behaviors” (p. 304). These three themes describe how advisors view and perform their roles as advisors. In their research, Barnes and Austin interviewed faculty advisors from natural science, humanities, social science, and education. The findings reported were a synthesis of faculty comments from those disciplines. A suggestion of Barnes and Austin was to explore advising within a particular discipline more in-depth. Responding to this call, participants of this study were faculty dissertation advisors in education. Given that Barnes and Austin’s (2009) qualitative findings align with the purpose of this study, their work served as the framework for the quantitative portion of this study.

Descriptions of the findings from each of Barnes and Austin’s (2009) main themes were used to develop questionnaire statements. Each statement was placed under the appropriate themed section, Advisor Responsibilities, Characteristics and Behaviors of the Advisor/Advisee Relationship, or Advisor Functions. Since Barnes and Austin’s findings do not distinguish
between the stages of doctoral programs, questionnaire statements were modified to reflect a focus on the dissertation stage.

The questionnaire had two required response questions, the first informed participants about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and asked them if they agreed to participate in the study. The second statement helped to ensure participants met the qualifications for the study (associate or full professor and graduated at least three students during the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 time period). The data gathering portion of the questionnaire consisted of 35 statements followed by two final questions, one asking participants if they would be willing to participate in a follow up interview and if yes, another question asking for contact information.

Within the Advisor Responsibilities section there were 16 statements using a five point Likert rating scale of “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”, and participants were asked to rate the statements in the section. To assist in answering the research questions, I coded each statement in the Advisors’ Responsibilities section was coded as representing a general advising strategy (GA), an aspect of academic integration (AI), or an aspect of social integration (SI) (see Appendix C). Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings included most aspects of Golde’s (2000) and Tinto’s (1993) definitions of academic integration. There was not a direct question about educating students, one aspect of the definition, but I considered educating students to involve helping students gain skills for the workforce and research, gaining knowledge of the field, publishing articles, and presenting at conferences, which were all mentioned in Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings. The statements representing social integration (SI) were created based on Golde’s (2000) and Tinto’s (1993) definitions of social integration; these statements were not listed in Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings. Six of the statements reflected advisors’ general
advising responsibilities, four of the statements reflected social integration, and six of the statements reflected academic integration.

There were four statements in the Advisor Functions section, used to understand how advisors perform their role as a faculty dissertation advisor. In this section, the description of the “mentor” function was expanded upon to include psychosocial support, career development, and role modeling, derived from the comprehensive definition provided by Jacobi (1991). The Advisor Functions section had a four point Likert rating scale ranging from “very similar” to “not similar”, and participants were asked to rate how much each function characterized how they perform their role as a faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage.

There were five statements in the Advisor Characteristics and Behaviors section, used to understand characteristics advisors viewed as important in displaying to their advisees during the dissertation stage. The statements within this section were measured using a four point Likert rating scale ranging from “very important” to “not important”.

The final section of the data portion of the questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and included eight open-ended questions and two multiple choice forced response items (faculty rank and program). Demographic questions were asked to gather information about participants’ age, race/ethnicity, and gender. Additional questions included how many of their students (Ed.D. and Ph.D.) successfully completed their dissertations during the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 semesters, how many students each advisor currently advises and how many of those students are at the dissertation stage. This section also asked about each participant’s faculty rank, department, program, and number of years as a faculty member in the program.

The questionnaire was loaded into Qualtrics, an online survey system provided through the researcher’s university. Through the use of Qualtrics, I was able to email each potential
participant an email (Appendix A) asking for their participation in the study and an individualized link to track each participant’s responses. Through Qualtrics, I was also able to track which faculty members from the list took the questionnaire and those who had not yet responded.

**Interview Guide Development**

The qualitative portion of the study involved interviews with faculty members who agreed to participate in an interview as indicated by their response in the questionnaire. To organize and structure interviews, I developed an interview guide. Patton (2002) acknowledged that interview guides allow researchers to organize interview questions and help researchers focus the conversation with each participant during interviews. Questions in interview guides are related to the research questions and are developed to elicit in-depth responses regarding the focus of the study.

As a follow-up to the questionnaire, the interview guide allowed me to gain more in-depth information to faculty dissertation advisors’ responses to questionnaire items regarding advising strategies and characteristics and functions they displayed/used to perform their roles as faculty dissertation advisors. The interview guide also allowed me to gain an understanding about the strategies advisors use for helping students through issues that may impede students’ persistence during the dissertation stage, as well as strategies used when working with specific types of students (i.e., full-time/part-time, Ed.D./Ph.D., delayed persisters, and international students). This added component of strategies based on student type has not been addressed in the literature to my knowledge. See Appendix D for the complete interview guide.

The first prompt on the interview guide stated, “Describe for me general advising strategies that you use to support your doctoral advisees during the dissertation stage.” The
purpose of this prompt was to elicit responses about general strategies faculty dissertation
advisors use during the dissertation stage when working with all advisees and to potentially elicit
responses about how dissertation advisors facilitate academic and social integration during the
dissertation stage.

The next question originally asked participants, “What characteristics do you think you
demonstrate to your advisees during the dissertation stage?” This intent of this question was to
learn about additional characteristics participants think they demonstrate to advisees that were
not listed on the questionnaire. The question was followed by, “Based on the questionnaire you
took, friendly, professional, collegial, and accessible are characteristics you used to describe your
advisor/advisee relationships. What are specific examples of how you demonstrate those during
the dissertation stage?” This question referenced the Characteristics and Behaviors of the
Advisor/Advisee Relationship section of the questionnaire. Based on how the questionnaire was
set up in Qualtrics, I had access to how each participant answered this section, and I was able to
directly ask them about their responses in this section. The intent was to ask participants about
the characteristics they selected that were “very important” and “important” in performing their
roles as faculty dissertation advisors and to get examples of how they demonstrated each
characteristic. For the characteristics participants selected as “somewhat important” and “not
important,” I would then ask them why they selected somewhat important or not important for a
given characteristic.

However, during the first interview, I noticed that the participant’s responses to the
Characteristics and Behaviors section were repetitive, and the faculty member seemed annoyed
with the redundancy. I emailed the faculty member asking for suggestions on how to improve
this question. Based on feedback, for future interviews the question was changed to, “Based on
the questionnaire you took, friendly, professional, collegial, supportive, caring, accessible, and honest are characteristics you used to describe your advisor/advisee relationships. Are there other characteristics you think you demonstrate to your advisees during the dissertation stage and why?” I would then probe for examples. If the participant rated a characteristic as “somewhat important” or “not important” I would still ask the participant why he/she rated the characteristic as “somewhat important” or “not important.”

The next question of the interview guide originally stated, “What are terms you would use to describe how you perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage?” This question was asked to learn about other functions participants think they use to perform their roles as faculty dissertation advisors that were not listed on the questionnaire. This question was followed by, “Collaborator, mentor, advocate, and chastiser are functions you indicated you use to perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor. What are specific examples of how you demonstrate those during the dissertation stage?” For this question I also pulled participants’ responses to the questionnaire and asked them about the functions they rated as “similar” and “very similar.” For the functions they rated as “somewhat similar” and “not similar,” I would ask them why they rated those functions as such.

Again, after the first interview, I noticed that the faculty member’s responses were repetitive so I also emailed the faculty member asking for suggestions on how to improve questioning for the Advisor Functions section. For future interviews, the question was changed to, “Collaborator, mentor, advocate, and chastiser are functions you indicated you use to perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor. Are there other functions you think you use to perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor and why?” I would also probe for specific
examples. If a faculty member rated a function as “somewhat similar” or “not similar” I would ask him/her why.

The next section of the interview guide was related to issues that impede students’ progress at the dissertation stage. I asked, “What do you think are the top three issues that impede students’ progression at the dissertation stage” and “What examples do you have of students you have advised who experienced all or some of these issues? How did you help them?” For this section, I hoped for at least three issues but welcomed as many as participants wanted to mention.

The final section of the interview guide was related to strategies faculty dissertation advisors use to help specific types of students at the dissertation stage. Types of students included: those who progressed through the coursework stage at a steady pace but did not make consistent progress during the dissertation stage, full time vs. part time students, Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., and international students. Additional information about the actual process of interviewing is detailed in the data collection section below.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Before data collection began, I received approval to conduct the study from my university’s Human Subjects Committee. The approval letter is dated March 11, 2014 (Appendix E). Data were collected from March 19, 2014 until May 30, 2014.

**Informed Consent**

Each participant was provided an informed consent form for participation in the questionnaire (Appendix B) portion of the study and an informed consent form for participation in the interview (Appendix F). Participants’ voluntary participation throughout the study via informed consent was a key element in conducting this research study. The informed consent
form “assures that prospective human subjects will understand the nature of the research and can knowledgeably and voluntarily decide whether or not to participate. This assurance protects all parties, both the subject, whose autonomy is respected, and the investigator” (Informed, n.d., para. 1).

The informed consent forms acknowledged agreement to partake in the study and notified interviewees that their responses in the interviews are confidential. This form also assured participants that their interview responses and documents were only shared with the researcher, and the results of the study included pseudonym’s rather than the participants’ actual names. These forms followed the guidelines outlined by the university’s Human Subjects Committee and Institutional Review Board (Informed, n.d.).

**Data Collection**

A list of faculty members in the college of education was obtained and narrowed to include only participants who met the criteria of associate or full professor rank. An email (Appendix A) was sent to each of these faculty members through the online Qualtrics survey system informing them of the purpose of the study and requesting their voluntary participation if they have graduated three or more students during the fall 2003-fall 2013 time period. The email also included an individualized link to the questionnaire so I could track each participant’s responses and also view who on the list had not completed the questionnaire. Those who did not take the questionnaire after the initial email was sent were sent at least one more email continuing to ask for their participation in the study during the course of data collection.

Those faculty members who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview were contacted via email (Appendix G) to schedule an interview. Once an interview was scheduled, I emailed each participant an informed consent form (Appendix F) to participate in the interview. I also
emailed each participant the interview guide (Appendix D) containing only the interview questions, with the proper information pulled from his/her questionnaire responses. The interview guide each participant received did not include any of the instructions or descriptor items listed in the interview guide in Appendix D (i.e., probe as needed; instructions for pulling questionnaire responses; description of the interview setting; interviewer comments, observations, and reflections on the interview). Informed consent forms and interview questions were emailed to all participants at least three days before the date of the interview; however, most were sent at least one week prior. Each participant emailed the informed consent form back to me or sent me an email stating he/she agreed to participate in the interview as a method of giving consent to participate in the interview. I also verbally asked each participant before the start of an interview if he/she agreed to participate in the interview and if he/she gave me permission to audio record each interview.

All interviews were conducted via telephone for convenience purposes and also due to physical distance between the researcher and the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Merriam (2009) discussed three methods of collecting data during interviews: audiotaping interviews, writing down data throughout the interview, and taking notes after the interview concludes, which Merriam stated is the “least desirable” method of data collection. All interviews were audio recorded, and I also took notes on the interview guide during the interview in the instance that the digital recorder suddenly stopped working.

Merriam (2009) further stated that after each interview researchers should write down their reflections; this process is known as journaling/memoing. These reflections allow the researcher to gather notes about researcher bias or aspects of the interviews that may have influenced participants’ responses. Therefore, after each interview, I wrote my thoughts,
feelings, and reflections about each interview. An example of a journal entry is provided in Appendix H.

Questionnaire data collection started on March 19, 2014 and immediately after a participant agreed to a follow-up interview, he/she was contacted via email to set up a date for a follow-up interview; therefore, questionnaire data and interview data were collected simultaneously. As previously noted, 11 participants agreed to a follow-up interview; however, only six actually completed a follow-up interview. Of the five who did not complete an interview, four were sent at least two emails during data collection requesting a date/time for an interview but did not respond. One participant set up a date/time for an interview, but did not answer the telephone when I called at our scheduled time to complete the interview and never followed up with the voicemail I left.

**Data Analysis**

Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as total counts, averages, and percentages (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Microsoft Excel was used to sort and analyze data. Using descriptive statistics to analyze how faculty members rated the statements in the questionnaire helped me understand (1) general advising strategies faculty dissertation advisors typically utilize, (2) ways advisors facilitate academic and social integration, (3) characteristics advisors view as important in displaying to their advisees during the dissertation stage, and (4) functions faculty dissertation advisors typically utilize during the dissertation stage. Additionally, using descriptive statistics allowed me to depict “who” participated in this study.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and used for data analysis. Interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality in the final analysis.
Patton (2002) noted that the first step in qualitative data analysis is to code the raw data and to look “for recurring regularities in the data” (p. 465). These regularities help the researcher create codes and categories (Patton, 2002). I used open coding and axial coding to analyze interview data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Through open coding, I looked for themes in responses to each interview question, research question, and themes that emerged throughout the raw interview data to develop codes. Through axial coding, I looked for themes within the codes that were developed and created more succinct categories and codes. From this process, a coding system was developed from the raw transcripts.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested coding the data several times to help narrow the focus to the research questions. As I read through all interview transcripts several times, codes, categories, and subcategories were reorganized, renamed, or eliminated as needed to keep and organize data relevant to the research questions. In addition, all categories were mutually exclusive (Merriam, 2009).

Once I created a coding system, I used NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software, to organize the interview data. I typed each code into NVivo and was able to upload each interview transcript and highlight the text from each interview that was associated with each code. The use of NVivo also provided another format for me to continue to notice themes within the codes I created. A screenshot of my use of NVivo is provided in Appendix I.

While data were being collected and analyzed, I completed an audit trail to allow others to understand how I collected data, coded data and created categories, and made decisions during the data analysis process (Merriam, 2009). The audit trail also helps others understand how I came to my conclusions and findings. Merriam (2009) urged researchers by stating “you write your reflections, your questions, and the decisions you make with regard to problems, issues, or
ideas you encounter in collecting data” (p. 223). To complete the audit trail, I took notes of any problems, issues, ideas, and decision making processes while collecting and analyzing data through journaling/memoing.

**Role of the Researcher**

Since beginning the doctoral program, I have had a research interest in the doctoral student experience. Once I reached the dissertation stage, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the faculty dissertation advisor’s role in students’ persistence.

I was a doctoral candidate (Ed.D.) in the higher education program at the large research institution in the southeastern region where the study was conducted. Within the higher education program, doctoral candidates have completed all coursework, passed the written preliminary examination, and are in the dissertation stage of the program working with one faculty dissertation advisor and three committee members for dissertation completion. I was enrolled in the program part-time during data collection and worked full-time at another university.

While I was a doctoral student in the higher education program, I understood that I had only worked with one faculty dissertation advisor throughout the dissertation process and had what I considered a positive relationship with that one advisor. However, throughout data collection and data analysis, I understood that not all faculty dissertation advisors have positive relationships with their advisees. I attempted to avoid letting my own experiences interfere with my understanding of the participants’ experiences through several techniques discussed in the credibility and validation of findings section below.
Questionnaire Reliability and Validity

Validity ensures that the questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure, and reliability ensures that participants taking the questionnaire will get similar results each time the questionnaire is taken over time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Given that the sample size was small and this was an exploratory study, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire data were not calculated.

However, I received feedback on questionnaire items from all four members of my dissertation committee, and they were representative of participants who took the questionnaire. My committee members helped me revise questions for ease of understanding for participants and helped revise the order of questionnaire statements to allow for the best progression of statements.

Credibility and Validation of Findings

Triangulation includes the use of several data sources to validate research findings and to add to the credibility of the study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). I used two primary sources of data: questionnaires and interviews. The use of two data sources allowed me to compare and cross-check information from all of my data sources (Merriam, 2009).

Additionally, I noticed that interview participants answered interview questions similarly to how they responded on the questionnaire. For example, while discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, Dr. Anderson indicated on the questionnaire that he publishes articles with his advisees. During his interview, he mentioned publishing articles with advisees. He also indicated on the questionnaire that he helps advisees select committee members, which was also stated during the interview. Dr. Hayes, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Miner noted on the questionnaire that they tailor their advising to meet the needs of the advisees and all three discussed how they tailor
their advising to meet the needs of advisees during their individual interviews. Additionally, Dr. Miner, Dr. Anderson, and Dr. Smith indicated on the questionnaire they provide advisees with clear and/or realistic explanations of the dissertation process and each elaborated on this during their interviews.

To ensure credibility and researcher neutrality, member checking was used to confirm that the findings aligned with the participants’ experiences (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Through member checking, I sent the preliminary analysis of the interview to the appropriate interviewee to determine if the findings seemed accurate and consistent with what the participants were trying to convey during the interviews (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, I sent each interviewee any follow-up questions I had from the interview. I only received a response from three of the six interviewees during member checking and none indicated any inaccuracies from my preliminary analysis.

While data were being collected and analyzed, I completed an audit trail, described above, to ensure credibility and researcher neutrality. Audit trails were completed through journaling/memoing. An example of a journal entry is provided in Appendix H.

The analysis and findings of this study included thick rich (detailed) descriptions of participants’ experiences, while taking into account the context of the study, to help ensure transferability (Patton, 2002). The thick rich descriptions provided in the analysis and findings in Chapter 4 allows readers to understand how the context of this study relates to other studies and real world environments, helping to establish transferability.

Limitations

The following study had some limitations. The research participants were not representative of all academic disciplines; therefore, the results of this study are not
representative of all faculty dissertation advisors. Furthermore, the results of this study are only representative of the participants in the study and do not represent all faculty dissertation advisors in all colleges of education across institutions. Additionally, the respondents self-selected to participate in the study, thus it is possible that those who participated are more likely to mentor students and have a hands-on approach to advising. Therefore, results are not generalizable to all advisors.

Additionally, during the first interview my telephone was not working properly and part of the audio recording was not audible. There were sections of other interviews where I could not understand what the participant was saying while listening to the audio recording. To adjust for these limitations, I used member checking and follow up questions with participants.

For the questionnaire portion of the study, respondents were rating general statements. It is possible that they agreed with one part of a statement but not another portion of the statement; therefore, questionnaire results may not be completely accurate.

During interviews participants provided answers based on what they thought of at that moment. It is possible that participants utilized additional strategies that were mentioned by other participants; however, did not think to include those in their own responses. There were also open ended questions in the questionnaire that participants failed to answer; these instances were noted in the findings section in Chapter 4.

Delimitations

This study focused on how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage and not other factors influencing student persistence. The study also only focused on associate and full rank professors who have graduated 3 or more doctoral
students during the fall 2003-fall 2013 semesters in one college of education at one university in
the southeastern region of the United States.

Ethical Considerations

First, a proposal for the study was submitted to the researcher’s university Human
Subjects Committee. Committee approval was needed before data collection. The university’s
Human Subjects Committee exists to protect the well-being of all participants in studies
conducted by university students (Human, n.d.). In addition, the committee ensures that all
elements of a study are in regulation with federal policies and procedures.

Three ethical principles that guide the committee in approving or rejecting a proposed study are respect, beneficence, and justice (Human, n.d.). The principle of respect means that each participant must receive an informed consent form and have the right to decline participation in the study at any time. The principle of beneficence means that researchers must minimize risks in their studies and increase the benefits for participants. The principle of justice requires that researchers fairly select participants and treat them equally. The methodology of this study followed three ethical principles by using the process of informed consent, minimizing risk to participants, and treating all participants fairly through the use of a semi-structured interview guide.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methods that were used to collect and analyze data. A mixed methods research design was utilized and included participants’ completion of a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. Data collected via questionnaire responses was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and interview data were analyzed using open and axial coding. Additionally, I took several measures, including the use of multiple sources of data, member
checking, an audit trail, thick rich descriptions, and committee feedback to help ensure the credibility and validation of the findings. The following chapter provides detailed information to answer overarching research question, “How do faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage?”
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This research sought to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage as the advisor is the person with whom the advisee has the most contact with during the dissertation stage (Tinto, 1993). To answer the overarching research question, How do faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage?, this dissertation had five additional questions of interest:

(1) How do faculty dissertation advisors define their role in the dissertation stage?

(2) What general strategies do faculty dissertation advisors use during the dissertation stage?

(3) How do advising strategies used by faculty dissertation advisors during the dissertation stage differ by doctoral student types?

(4) How do faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic integration during the dissertation stage?

(5) How do faculty dissertation advisors promote social integration during the dissertation stage?

To answer the research questions, I adopted a mixed methods approach using an online questionnaire and individual interviews with faculty who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Presented in this chapter are the questionnaire results, followed by the interview findings. The last section will summarize the questionnaire results and the interview results to answer the overarching research question.
Section I-Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire had six sections with a total of 35 items. The background information portion of the questionnaire included open ended responses to gather demographic information about participants’ age, gender, race, number of advisees who successfully completed dissertations during the Fall 2003-Fall 2013 time period, number of students they currently advise, number of those students at the dissertation stage, the participants’ program, and number of years as a faculty member in the program.

The questionnaire results provide information on how faculty dissertation advisors define their role during the dissertation stage. Results are then presented to understand the general strategies faculty dissertation advisors use to support their advisees during the dissertation stage. The final sections of the questionnaire results deliver information on how dissertation advisors facilitate both academic and social integration, respectively, during the dissertation stage. Where appropriate, percentages in all sections were rounded to one decimal place.

Background Information

Background information about the participants was collected to provide additional context to who participated in this study. The questionnaire was sent to 52 faculty members in the selected college of education, and 21 responded, yielding a 40% response rate.

Demographics. Of the 21 participants, 16 indicated their gender. Five were male and 11 were female; five did not provide gender. Figure 4.1 below shows the gender of the participants.
Fifteen participants provided their age while one participant responded that she was less than 60 years old. Given that this participant did not indicate a specific age or age range, the response was not included in Figure 4.2. Five faculty did not respond. Figure 4.2 below shows the distribution of participant age ranges.

Sixteen respondents provided their race/ethnicity; five provided no response. Fourteen identified as White/Caucasian, one as Asian, and one as American Indian. While the sample is majority White/Caucasian, seemingly lacking in diversity, this is representative of the college of education, the site of this study. Figure 4.3 shows participants’ race/ethnicity.
Figure 4.3. Participants’ Race/Ethnicity

When asked the number of years they have served as a faculty member in the program, 17 participants provided a response, four did not. Of the 17, Figure 4.4 shows the distribution of responses. Three had been teaching in their program 1-5 years, four participants for 6-10 years, 3 for 11-15 years, one for 16-20 years, two for 21-25 years, two for 26-30 years, and two for 31-35 years. The average number of years served as a faculty member in their program was 16 (15.91).

Advising information. Approximately 90.5% (n=19) of faculty dissertation advisors responded that they currently advise anywhere from 0 to 10 students. Two faculty advised 15 or
more students. The average number of advisees faculty members advised during the time of data collection was six (n=21), and 85.7% (n=18) of participants indicated that 5 or less of those advisees were at the dissertation stage during the time of data collection. The average number of advisees an advisor currently had at the dissertation stage was 3 (n=21).

Twenty participants indicated how many students they graduated during the Fall 2003-Fall 2013 time period; one participant did not answer. Only five respondents indicated they graduated an Ed.D. student during the Fall 2003-Fall 2013 semesters. Three respondents graduated two Ed.D. students, one respondent graduated three, and one faculty member graduated seven. The average number of Ed.D. students graduated during this time period was three (n=5). Nineteen participants graduated Ph.D. students. One participant graduated two, three graduated three, three graduated five, three graduated six, one graduated seven, two graduated eight, one graduated nine, two graduated 10, two graduated 16 and one graduated 27. The average number of Ph.D. students graduated was eight.

Role of the Dissertation Advisor

Participants were asked to rate how four separate functions, identified by Barnes and Austin (2009), characterized how they perform their role as faculty dissertation advisors. All participants identified with the mentor function, followed by collaborator, advocate, and chastiser. Table 4.1 below shows the percentages of the results.

Table 4.1. Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Very Similar</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Somewhat Similar</th>
<th>Not Similar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Very Similar</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Somewhat Similar</th>
<th>Not Similar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=10</td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chastiser</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 21 participants, 85.7% indicated that collaborating with students on research projects and valuing advisees’ opinions and ideas throughout the process was very similar or similar to how they perform their role as a faculty dissertation advisor. Projects included: dissertations, conference presentations, publications, and experiments. Only three participants (14.3%) described collaborating as somewhat similar to how they perform their role during the dissertation stage.

All participants specified they use mentoring when working with advisees at the dissertation stage. For the purposes of this study, Barnes and Austin’s (2009) description of mentoring was expanded upon to include aspects (psychosocial support, career development, and role modeling) of a comprehensive definition provided by Jacobi (1991). Mentoring involves making sure all required paperwork is completed, as well as serving as a support system and role model to help advisees with psychosocial support, career support, and professional development. Fifteen respondents (71.4%) indicated that mentoring is very similar to how they perform their
role as a faculty dissertation advisor, and six respondents (28.6%) described mentoring as similar.

Additionally, the majority of participants (n=18; 85.7%) served as advocates for students during the dissertation stage. By advocating, advisors protect advisees from bureaucracy in the department or university they may encounter during the dissertation stage. The majority (n=15; 71.4%) also use chastising, or correcting advisees’ behaviors, actions and/or attitudes, when appropriate.

In performing their roles, participants identified with several characteristics, as described in Barnes and Austin (2009). The majority of respondents indicated that the five characteristics, friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest, are very important or important to how they perform their roles. Table 4.2 below provides the percentages of responses.

Table 4.2. Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly/Professional</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive/Caring</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=19</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty participants (95.2%) indicated that they view being friendly/professional, a relationship characterized as strong and positive but having boundaries the advisor and advisee respect, as very important or important in performing their roles as faculty dissertation advisors. Similarly, 18 participants (85.7%) identified collegial, a relationship where the power structures are dismantled or blurred so the advisee feels the relationship is balanced, as being very important or important. Supportive and caring, showing emotional and psychological support to the advisee on a personal level, was also important to faculty dissertation advisors in performing their roles as indicated by questionnaire responses; nineteen respondents (90.5%) ranked these characteristics as very important or important. The majority (n=20; 95.2%) also ranked being accessible, able to meet with advisees or respond to advisees within a short/reasonable amount of time, as very important or important. Honesty, particularly providing advisees with feedback that is straightforward and candid, is also an important characteristic to faculty dissertation advisors; all ranked honesty as very important or important.

In sum, based on questionnaire results, the role of a faculty dissertation advisor has four aspects: collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising. These duties are performed by being friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest.
General Advising Strategies

Six statements on the questionnaire reflected general advising strategies that advisors potentially use when working with advisees during the dissertation stage. Table 4.3 below shows that the majority of respondents utilized all six strategies to help advisees persist during the dissertation stage.

Table 4.3. General Advising Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tailor my advising during the dissertation stage by assessing the needs of my advisee.</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=14</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by providing clear direction on dissertation completion.</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by providing timely feedback.</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=15</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them find reasonable, affordable, realistic, and manageable dissertation projects.</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them cope with failure (e.g., unexpected results from an experiment, failed defense).</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them select committee members who are supportive, useful, and able to get along with each other.</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on participant responses, only one participant disagreed with the statement about tailoring advising to meet the needs of the advisee during the dissertation stage. All participants strongly agreed or agreed that they provide advisees with clear feedback on dissertation completion. However, only one participant (4.8%) indicated she does not provide this feedback in a timely manner; all others provide timely feedback to advisees during the dissertation stage. Additionally, the majority of respondents (95.2%) indicated they help advisees find reasonable, affordable, realistic, and manageable dissertation projects. Eighteen participants (85.7%) help advisees cope with failure during the dissertation stage; three (14.3%) were neutral on the statement. Eighteen participants (85.7%) responded they help advisees choose committee members during the dissertation stage.

**Academic Integration**

Academic integration is defined as educating students, helping students gain skills for the workforce and research, gaining the knowledge of the field, publishing articles, presenting at conferences, etc. (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993). For the purposes of this section, I considered educating students to include helping students gain skills for the workforce and research, gaining knowledge of the field, publishing articles, and presenting at conferences, which were all mentioned in Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings and reflected in the questionnaire statements.

To expand upon and provide clarification to Tinto’s (1993) theory of doctoral student persistence, participants were asked to rate the following statements in Table 4.4 that reflect aspects of the definition of academic integration.
Table 4.4. Academic Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I help my advisees become independent in their ability to plan, conduct, and execute research during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=10</td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help ensure that my advisees develop the knowledge and skills for their disciplines during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to become engaged in/actively participate in professional organizations and associations during the dissertation stage (e.g., presenting at conferences, attending conferences).</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=10</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I co-publish articles with my advisees during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to publish articles during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the dissertation stage, I help ensure that my advisees develop the knowledge and skills for the workforce based on their career goals (i.e., connecting advisees to internships, graduate assistantships, professional development conferences/workshops, resume/vita/interview assistance).</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td>n=0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, based on responses, the majority of participants facilitate advisees’ academic integration during the dissertation stage. Eighteen participants (85.7%) help advisees gain research skills by assisting them with their abilities to plan, conduct, and execute research during the dissertation stage. Furthermore, results show that the majority of participants help advisees with their professional development during the dissertation stage. For instance, 90.5% (n=19) of
respondents help advisees develop knowledge and skills for their disciplines. Additionally, 81% (n=17) encourage advisees to engage in professional organizations to aid in their professional development during the dissertation stage. To further professional development, the majority of respondents (n=16; 76.2%) also co-publish articles with advisees and fifteen respondents (71.4%) encourage advisees to publish their own articles during the dissertation stage. To aid in workforce development, 20 participants (95.2%) help advisees gain skills and knowledge for the workforce based on advisees’ career goals and do so by connecting advisees to internships, graduate assistantships, professional development conferences and workshops, and resume/vita/interview assistance.

**Social Integration**

Social integration refers to doctoral students forming friendships/connections in the academic department and possibly in the campus-wide community (Golde, 2000; Tinto, 1993). The statements representing social integration were based on Tinto’s (1993) definition of social integration; these statements were not identified in Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings. See Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5. Social Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with their peers/classmates during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=10</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=9</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with faculty in the department during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with faculty outside the program during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the majority of participants encourage advisees to maintain social connections during the dissertation stage, the percentages are not as high as with academic integration. Fifteen participants (71.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that they encourage their advisees to connect with peers/classmates during the dissertation stage. Five respondents (23.8%) were neutral on the statement. However, responses were not as strong in favor of encouraging advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community during the dissertation stage. Only one participant (4.8%) strongly agreed to the statement, nine faculty (42.9%) agreed, while six (28.6%) remained neutral to the statement and five (23.8%) disagreed.

Overall, the majority of respondents indicated they encourage advisees to connect with faculty during the dissertation stage. Nineteen participants (90.5%) encouraged advisees to connect with faculty within the department and 13 (61.9%) encourage advisees to connect with faculty outside the home department.

**Questionnaire Results Summary**

Twenty-one participants completed the questionnaire portion of the study. Results showed that these faculty dissertation advisors utilized a series of functions and characteristics in performing their roles as advisors during the dissertation stage to aid in students’ persistence.
Functions used to perform their roles as faculty dissertation advisors included collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising. While performing their roles, advisors described their behavior as friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest.

Results further indicated that faculty dissertation advisors provide advisees at the dissertation stage with general support, academic integration, and social integration to promote students’ persistence at the dissertation stage. General support included tailoring advising to the needs of the advisee, providing advisees with clear direction on dissertation completion and timely feedback, helping advisees develop realistic dissertation projects, helping advisees cope with failure, and aiding advisees in committee member selection.

To facilitate academic integration, respondents assisted advisees in becoming independent in planning and conducting research and developing the knowledge and skills of their disciplines and the workforce based on their career goals. Furthermore, participants indicated they encourage advisees to become engaged in professional organizations and to publish articles during the dissertation stage. The majority of respondents also published articles with their advisees.

To aid in advisees’ social integration during the dissertation stage, participants encouraged advisees to connect with peers/classmates, as well as faculty inside and outside the academic department. However, less than half of participants encourage advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community during the dissertation stage.

**Section II-Interview Findings**

The second section of this chapter details interview findings. First, I asked participants about general advising strategies they use to advise all advisees during the dissertation stage. Then I probed for information about characteristics and functions that participants
used/displayed during the dissertation stage while performing their roles as faculty dissertation advisors, to expand upon and/or provide additional detail to the list provided in Barnes and Austin (2009). Interview findings that were also supported by interviewees’ questionnaire results, also noted in the interview findings section. I then asked about strategies participants use to help their advisees persist through the issues identified as threats to students’ persistence at the dissertation stage; this topic was only covered in the individual interviews.

Next, I asked participants about strategies they used to advise specific types of students during the dissertation stage. The sub question, How do advising strategies used by faculty dissertation advisors during the dissertation stage differ by doctoral student types?, was only answered by interview data; therefore, there are no results for this sub question presented in the questionnaire results section of this chapter.

The final sections of the interview findings detail how faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic and social integration, respectively. Although these were not specific questions asked during the interviews, findings were coded to help answer these two sub research questions. Once again, for interview findings that were also supported by questionnaire results from the interviewees, those instances are noted in the interview findings section.

Six faculty members agreed to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss their advising strategies. I interviewed three male full professors and three female associate professors who all serve as dissertation advisors. Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality but reflect the gender of the participants. Below is a brief summary of background information for each interviewee.
**Dr. Jason Anderson**

Dr. Jason Anderson is a White male in his 60s and is a full professor in the college who has taught in his department for more than 15 years. During the Fall 2003-Fall 2013 semesters, Dr. Anderson graduated 7 Ed.D. students and 16 Ph.D. students. He currently advises 15 students, 10 of whom are in the dissertation stage.

**Dr. Stanley Smith**

Dr. Stanley Smith is a White male in his 60s. He has taught in his department for less than five years and is a full professor. During the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 time period, three of his advisees graduated with Ph.D.’s. Dr. Smith currently has one student who is in the dissertation stage.

**Dr. Sally Jones**

Dr. Sally Jones is an Asian female in her 30s. She is an associate professor in her department and has served as a faculty member in the department for less than five years. From the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013, Dr. Jones graduated two Ed.D. students and seven Ph.D. students. She currently advises seven students, none of whom are in the dissertation stage.

**Dr. Tim Jackson**

Dr. Tim Jackson has served as a faculty member in his department for less than 15 years and is a full professor. During the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 time frame, Dr. Jackson graduated 27 Ph.D. students. He currently advises seven doctoral students, and five are in the dissertation stage. He is a Caucasian male in his 40s.

**Dr. Elaine Hayes**

Dr. Elaine Hayes graduated three Ph.D. students during the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 time period. She is an associate professor and has served as a faculty member in the department for
less than 10 years. She currently advises eight students, three of whom are in the dissertation stage. She is an American Indian female in her 40s.

**Dr. Julie Miner**

Dr. Julie Miner is a White female in her 40s. She is an associate professor and has taught for less than 10 years. Dr. Miner graduated two Ed.D. students and two Ph.D. students during the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 time period. She currently serves as a faculty dissertation advisor to eight students, four of whom are in the dissertation stage.

**Role of the Dissertation Advisor**

Participants were asked to provide examples of functions and characteristics, as identified by Barnes and Austin (2009), that they used and displayed when working with advisees at the dissertation stage, as well as any additional functions and characteristics not on the list. Functions identified by Barnes and Austin included collaborator, mentor, advocate, and chastiser. The characteristics were friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest. Interview findings did not present any new/emerging characteristics or functions. During interviews, participants mainly agreed that they identified with the characteristics and functions they rated as very similar/similar and very important/important on the questionnaire. In general, responses for this section were lacking; however, details that were provided are explained below.

**Functions**

All interview participants but one, Dr. Hayes, rated advocate as very similar or similar to themselves on the questionnaire. However, only Dr. Anderson and Dr. Hayes provided additional explanation during the interview. Dr. Anderson stated:
When you’re the major professor, you’re the head of that student’s committee, which in some cases means advocating for them with other faculty, on the committee or in the program, sometimes even with the dean or dean’s office. It’s advocating on behalf of students that may get in a jam or who have deadlines to meet. You become the first person that student can go to for help.

Although Dr. Hayes ranked advocate as somewhat similar on the questionnaire, she provided a comparable response as Dr. Anderson, but also expanded her response to include that she sometimes has to advocate for the university and the rigidity of a doctoral degree instead of the student. She explained:

I think as faculty advisors we kind of straddle a sense of who we’re advocating for and what we’re advocating for. Most of the time while we try to advocate for the student and want the student to be successful and do well, on the other side we also have to consider the degree and what the degree stands for and what the university stands for. There’s a set of standards that we would hope faculty would hold valuable, so we have to try to balance that to make sure that the students are performing in a way that is in the same vision that you have for what the degree means and the level of rigidity and research that one would expect from a research one institution.

**Collaborator.** All interview participants ranked collaborator as very similar or similar to how they perform their role. Additionally, two participants, Dr. Jackson and Dr. Anderson mentioned the collaborator function in their interview responses. Dr. Jackson stated that he “works with students on research projects and some they drive and I defer to their leadership on a project.” He also added that he serves as a sounding board in which students can come to him and talk about research ideas and “bounce things off, write stuff out on the board.” Dr. Anderson
indicated that by advising a student during the dissertation stage he usually expects a presentation or publication with that student. He further stated that “publishing with your student is an expectation I think most of us have to some degree.”

Mentor. All six interviewees indicated on the questionnaire that mentoring is very similar or similar to how they serve as a dissertation advisor, and two participants, Dr. Jackson and Dr. Anderson, indicated that they are both careful of who they decide to work with and mentor during the dissertation stage. Dr. Jackson explained that when it comes to mentoring an advisee during the dissertation stage, he looks for a specific type of student. He stated:

There’s a particular type of student I look for, characteristics I look for, in students I’m going to mentor. I look for students and ultimately candidates that fit me in terms of my ability to mentor. I’ve learned that I won’t change. I’m not a hand holder. If there’s someone that needs constant reassurance, that’s not going to work. I don’t have time to meet with the same person every single day. I work best with self-motivators, people who are disciplined. I like to work with doctoral students coming in that have done a thesis and have already done some research, they’ve been involved in research projects somewhere else. I’m going to help them learn new tools and improve the tools they already know how to use and build those ideas. I’m not going to teach them from the ground, they have to come in with some experience. I’m ultimately going to sponsor doctoral students I think are going to fit well with my mode of operation.

Dr. Anderson had a similar response and added that he also wants to have an interest in what the student is studying before he agrees to serve as a dissertation advisor for a student:

I think most of us are pretty careful about who we agree to take on as a doc student and whether or not we have an affinity for not only what they want to study but are willing to
work with them in a mentoring relationship and see potential in that student and ability to
do the work. So you really do become more of a mentor than just a major professor.

Dissertation chair is sort of another word for mentor I think.

**Chastiser.** Dr. Anderson described a time when he had to correct an advisee’s behavior.

A student was taking a long time to complete the dissertation, mainly because the student was
“doing so many other things,” and, in the process, wasting Dr. Anderson’s time. As the summer
semester approached, the advisee asked Dr. Anderson when they would meet that summer. Dr.
Anderson had to tell the student “we’re done, I don’t want to talk to you until next August.” Dr.
Anderson elaborated:

> That person was really stunned and said, ‘Well what if I get some stuff together?’ I said
> fine, I’ll talk to you in August, but until then we’re done. So just saying, ‘I don’t want to
> talk to you for three months’…I don’t think anybody said no to him very often. I just
> said it’s a waste of my time because you don’t follow up or pursue steps so when August
> comes around give me a buzz, and it worked.

Dr. Hayes was the only interviewee who did not rank chastiser as very similar or similar.

She explained why she ranked chastiser as neutral on the questionnaire by stating, “It’s just not a
function that I use. I haven’t had to yet. Maybe I’ll have someone at some point in time that
responds well to that but it’s not a function that I use.”

**Characteristics**

Although all interviewees rated friendly/professional as very important or important in
their role as a dissertation advisor, Dr. Jackson was the only participant to provide an explanation
of friendly/professional. He elaborated:
I am certainly friendly and my students are friends, but I don’t spend a lot of time after
the work day socializing partly because I’ve got my family and I go home to my family.
I do maintain and get the idea of professional distance because, back to the idea of the
disciplinarian, I’ve got to be honest with them [advisees] and tell them this is not getting
done [the dissertation].

**Collegial.** In reference to a collegial relationship with advisees at the dissertation stage,
Dr. Anderson stated:

If you’re [the advisee] having problems or you’re not understanding something let me
know so that it develops the idea that a student at the dissertation stage is one step away
from being not necessarily equal, but having the same level of degree as the faculty
member. So in that regard it is a collegial process. It’s teaching somebody the basics of
how to be that mentor that faculty member is.

Dr. Jackson was the only interviewee who did not rank collegial as very important or
important. He ranked collegial as not important on the questionnaire and explained:

I know that it’s important to be supportive and professional, but I’m not their best friend.
I’m in an administrative role so I’ve got to maintain some professional distance.
Collegial is I treat you like an equal and they’re not. I’ve got to be the advisor. I’m not a
co student and they’re not a co advisor. There is a hierarchical relationship that we have
to maintain.

**Supportive/caring.** All six interviewees indicated on the questionnaire that being
supportive/caring is important. Furthermore, in describing support during his interview, Dr.
Anderson mentioned that:
I figure it’s a process of reinforcement and encouragement, as well as patience. Encouraging them along the way that this is something you can do and responding to concerns they may have. I rarely give up on a student. I think when I get into this kind of relationship, my demeanor shows that I care, I’m concerned, and I think that may be part of why some people have asked me to be their major professor.

**Accessible.** In reference to accessibility, Dr. Anderson explained that “I think especially by email students who have worked with me can usually expect a pretty timely response.” Dr. Jackson added that, “We are here to talk. I tell all of them [advisees]. Some take advantage of it, some don’t.” All interviewees indicated that accessibility is very important or important in their roles as a dissertation advisor.

**Honest.** All six participants ranked honest as very important or important on the questionnaire, and three participants elaborated on how they are honest with advisees. Dr. Jackson indicated it is important to be honest with advisees regarding progress on their writing. He stated, “I think it’s important also to be able to tell someone where they’re at [in terms of progress on the dissertation] and if they’re not getting the work done they need to know.” Dr. Hayes also noted the importance of being honest with advisees about their progress by stating:

I’ve had one or two instances where the dissertation was not going well and while trying to be supportive and caring with them, sometimes the brutal honesty has to come out.

You’re not making progress on your work and we need to reevaluate.

Additionally, Dr. Anderson has had instances where he has had to talk to advisees about their lack of progress on the dissertation. He stated:

If you’re not willing to really invest in the process then that’s fine. I think sometimes it’s important to just be realistic with students that maybe this isn’t necessary or worth the
effort. I’ve told several students over the years where I’ve said let’s be honest with each other. This isn’t necessary for your career.

General Advising Strategies

For this section, I asked participants to describe general advising strategies they use to support all advisees during the dissertation stage. A total of three general strategies were mentioned/described during the interviews: adapting to the needs of the advisee, providing clear and realistic explanations of the dissertation process, and assisting with committee member selection.

Adapt Advising to Needs of Advisee

Participants mentioned adapting to the needs of their advisees in a variety of ways as explained below. Three faculty members, Dr. Hayes, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Miner, specifically mentioned tailoring their overall advising to meet the needs of their advisees. While Dr. Smith and Dr. Anderson did not mention this strategy in their interviews, they both responded on the questionnaire that “strongly agreed” that they tailor their advising based on the needs of the advisee. Dr. Tim Jackson “disagreed” to the questionnaire statement and stated during the interview that he looks for a specific type of student to advise and mentor, one who works independently and does not need constant reassurance.

Dr. Hayes explained, “I think it’s very differentiated depending on the student. Some students I think need different things than others might. I think as a faculty advisor we have to really differentiate our approaches with them.” Dr. Jones had a similar response. She stated, “I think that my strategy is really different depending on the student characteristics. Some students need more guidance and pressure while other students are self-motivated, and I don’t really need to give clear or specific guidance.” Dr. Miner detailed her response by stating:
What’s interesting to me about being an advisor to someone writing a dissertation is how every person is different and every person needs something different. I’ll have the super independent student who doesn’t really want me to be very caring to them. I guess I kind of feel like I go in with this attitude of saying show me how you work, show me what your product is, and then I will respond in kind in order to help you finish. I feel like every student comes with strengths and weaknesses and as their advisor it takes me a while to figure out what they are. I’ll have somebody who’s overly ambitious and I’ll have to rein it in. I’ll have somebody who’s not ambitious enough and I’ll have to push them. So the point is you kind of have to be receptive to the individual needs of the student and respond in kind.

Five of the six advisors mentioned adapting their schedules to ensure they are available and accessible to their advisees whenever the advisees may have questions as they work through the dissertation stage. Dr. Hayes elaborated that she attempts:

To be available to them whenever they have questions. As you’re working through the process you can have questions at various times of the day and night, so I try to be available by text message, or email, or phone call to help students though their questions. I think that’s pretty important to be willing to help students think through their ideas, or think through their concerns, or try to help them stay focused. So, just availability is one of the things that I think is important.

Dr. Jones also commented, “I would say in general I will just keep close contact with each student, checking up on how they’re doing and then make myself available.” Dr. Miner was the only faculty member who did not specifically mention accessible/available during the
interview; however, she did indicate in her questionnaire response that it is very important to her in her role as a dissertation advisor to make herself available to meet with students.

Furthermore, two participants indicated that they allow their advisees to turn in any amount of work for feedback. Dr. Miner stated:

I’ll say to them, ‘ok go and write these up and then come back to me.’ I leave it like that, but sometimes each person is different. Some people will need more structure and they’ll send me chapter 1 first, and I’ll read that and then we’ll go with each chapter. Sometimes people will send me the full prospectus.

Similarly, Dr. Hayes explained that she is flexible in accepting advisees’ work. She stated that some of her advisees want to provide her with portions of the dissertation at a time and some “don’t want to show anything till it’s polished and ready to show.”

Provide Clear and Realistic Explanation of Dissertation Process

Three faculty members, Dr. Miner, Dr. Anderson, and Dr. Smith, specifically mentioned during interviews that they provide advisees with clear and/or realistic explanations of the dissertation process. However, when responding to the questionnaire statement, “I help advisees during the dissertation stage by providing clear direction on dissertation completion,” all six faculty members strongly agreed or agreed with the statement.

Dr. Smith stated that he constantly reminds advisees of the university timelines for graduation and provides advisees with a realistic expectation of the amount of work involved to graduate within a specific semester. Dr. Anderson provided a great deal of information on how he assists advisees with dissertation completion. He stated:

I think a large part of it is outlining what’s going to happen, what’s coming next, what stage, what phases you go through. As students write, each chapter can be broken up of a
A traditional five-chapter dissertation, or even six, can be broken out and talked about separately so they have a clear sense of what they’re supposed to do and how it should be done. Then a lot of it is critiquing back and forth between the faculty member and the student. As they progress, it’s putting all those pieces together. I think what’s most daunting is to break down the dissertation into manageable pieces. Everybody wants to know, “Well how long do you think it’s going to take me to finish?” Well, let’s be realistic. How much time and commitment can you bring to the process and that will tell. It’s just sort of giving people a much more realistic sense of time and the level of work and commitment that’s required.

Dr. Anderson later added that he provided handouts to advisees that include outlines of what goes in each chapter and the steps involved in developing a prospectus to help clearly explain prospectus/proposal development.

Dr. Miner has a similar process of explaining the components of the dissertation:

What I’ll do is I’ll sit down with my students and I’ll say ok, this is independent work. Often the prospectus is the hardest part of the process. I’ll tell them that typically chapter one is where they lay out the study, here’s what I plan to do in my study, and here’s the general organization of the dissertation. Then I’ll say that chapter two is what other people have said about the field of work that they’re going to be exploring. Then chapter three is their methodology. So there’s kind of an element to the process where you are trying to help people make choices, and make good choices, about what literature they’re going to review, make choices about what theories they’re going to use, make choices about the methodology. There are tradeoffs with every single one of these things.
Committee Member Selection

When asked on the questionnaire, “I help my advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them select committee members who are supportive, useful, and able to get along with each other,” all six of the interviewees strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. However, Dr. Anderson was the only interviewee to elaborate.

Dr. Anderson mentioned that he will help advisees select dissertation committee members. Dr. Anderson elaborated that if advisees say, “Well what about so and so?,” then he can “tell them who’s available, who already has a lot of students and may not be willing or interested.” He can also tell advisees if faculty members meet certain university criteria to serve as a dissertation committee member. According to university rules, a committee member who is outside the student’s department has to be tenured.

Threats to Persistence and Related Strategies

The following section explains issues that interviewees identified as impeding advisees’ progression and/or threats to advisees’ persistence during the dissertation stage, as well as strategies they have used to help their advisees persist through these issues. The predominant issues/threats identified included advisees’ personal responsibilities, career impediments, psychological concerns, time, dissertation completion hurdles, and isolation. Representation of the threats and related strategies are provided in table format in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6. Threats and Related Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Advisors’ Strategies/Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life/Outside Distractors</td>
<td>• Offer/Suggest Taking a Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consoling/Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop Time System for Completion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.6 continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Advisors’ Strategies/Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Full-Time</td>
<td>• Keep in Touch with Advisees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop Time System for Completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consoling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible Appointment Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Piecemeal Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enroll Full-Time in Degree Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking Too Far Ahead at the Job Search</td>
<td>• Do Not Engage in Advisees’ Job Search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack Career Goals During Dissertation Stage</td>
<td>• Career Guidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dissertation Completion Hurdles**

| General Proposal Development               | • Thorough Explanation of Each Section/Chapter                  |
|                                             | • Documents Outlining Each Chapter                              |
| Commitment to One Proposal Topic           | • Keep List of Ideas for Future Research Projects               |
|                                             | • Discuss Focus with Advisees                                   |
| Entering Dissertation Stage with No Proposal Topic | • Brainstorming Sessions                                      |
| Advisee’s Questionable Capacity to Complete a Dissertation | • Establish Structure Throughout Dissertation Process |
|                                             | • Set Deadlines for Advisee                                    |
| Accessibility to Data                       | • Redesign the Dissertation                                    |

**Time**

| University Timelines for Graduation        | • Continual Reminders of University Timelines for Graduation   |
| Amount of Time Required to Complete a Dissertation | • Conversations to Give Students a Realistic Sense of Time/Amount of Work Required for Completion |
| General Time Management                     | • Daily/Weekly/Monthly Writing Milestones                      |

**Psychological Concerns**

| Self-Confidence/Doubt                        | • Don’t Take Dissertation Feedback Personally                  |
|                                             | • Counseling                                                  |
Table 4.6 continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Advisors’ Strategies/Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Motivation/Inconsistent Progress      | • Motivational Speeches  
                                         • Discover New Motivation  
                                         • Self-Help Books  
                                         • New Approach to Dissertation  
                                         • Dissertation Support Groups  
                                         • Make Advisees Aware of Policies for Termination |
| Isolation                             |                                                                                           |
| Leaving Confines of Campus            | • Piecemeal Strategy                                                                        |
| Isolation of Dissertation Stage       | • No Strategies Offered                                                                     |

Advisees’ Personal Responsibilities

Interviewees discussed how advisees’ personal responsibilities impede students’ progression at the dissertation stage. Personal responsibilities include life/outside distractions and career impediments.

Life/outside distractions. All six interviewees mentioned life/outside distractions as impeding students’ progress at the dissertation stage. Dr. Jones noted family issues as distractors but did not elaborate on what she considers family issues. Dr. Jackson also referenced family issues, such as a death in the family or illness. Dr. Jackson and Dr. Anderson mentioned having a baby as a distraction to dissertation completion. Additionally, Dr. Anderson cited moving as a distraction. Dr. Miner stated “they’re juggling kids, divorces, illnesses, financial constraints, some of them had health issues and have had major life crises so that’s why they’re not doing it [the dissertation].” Family obligations were also mentioned as a distraction by Dr. Stanley Smith, but he did not elaborate on what he considers family obligations. To help students work through balancing their personal lives and completing the dissertation, advisors offered several strategies to help students.
**Offer/suggest taking a break.** Dr. Miner and Dr. Jackson allowed students to take time off from working on the dissertation if they are going through “life issues,” especially if these life issues caused the students to make inconsistent progress during the dissertation stage. Dr. Jackson had two students, one with a major medical issue and another who had a baby, who both took time off but have been productive since returning to the dissertation process. Dr. Miner explained that she tends “to at this point in my career say ‘ok well get back to me when you’re ready to get back on this.’”

**Consoling/counseling.** When students are experiencing life issues, Dr. Smith made an effort to reach out to students, find out what the problems were, and console them. When advisees were demonstrating extreme anxieties due to life stressors, Dr. Jones advised them to seek a counselor because “they’re the professional, they can help them reconcile with the challenges they’re facing so that they can stay focused on finishing up their dissertations.”

**Time system for completion.** Drs. Smith and Hayes mentioned helping students create a time system for completing the dissertation to help them work around the issues advisees may be experiencing. Dr. Hayes elaborated that she had a student who was experiencing personal issues so she created incremental deadlines/benchmarks for the student so he had specific writing goals to work towards to help him finish the degree.

**Career Impediments**

Working full-time while completing the dissertation, job searching too soon, and a lack of career goals were all mentioned as impeding students’ progress during the dissertation stage. Five interviewees discussed how working full-time while completing the dissertation slows students’ progress. Dr. Anderson advised:
Don’t take a new job. Things like that are an immediate threat to the dissertation. I still have students now who are working full-time, going to school part-time, and they find it very difficult at times during the year to really re-motivate to do the dissertation. The longer it goes, the less realistic it becomes.

Dr. Hayes mentioned that she has a student who was working full-time and the student has trouble finding time to work on the dissertation due to the student’s work schedule. Dr. Miner elaborated that she has a few students working full-time right now, and they have to set aside weekend and night hours to work on the dissertation. Dr. Smith acknowledged that “if you take a job before you finish your dissertation it just seems to slow it down. The job becomes important, the money, and when you’re on campus and the only distraction is getting the thing done it’s sort of a different deal. Work is an issue you have to deal with.” Dr. Jackson had a student take a full-time job during the dissertation stage, and the student was so busy working that he did not have time to complete a dissertation proposal.

The strategies identified that are used to help students who are working full-time make progress on the dissertation are explained in the Full-Time vs. Part-Time section below. The specific strategies identified to help students progress who are working full-time are: creating a time system for completion, keeping in touch, consoling, flexible appointment times, piecemeal strategy, and enroll full-time.

Dr. Tim Jackson mentioned that students he has worked with tend to look too far ahead at the job search before they have even completed a dissertation proposal. He explained:

We had too many students invest too much time in searching for jobs instead of writing proposals. Once they finish prelims they’re starting to check out. That’s ok if they’re looking at their proposal and they’re looking at the dissertation, but invariably they’re all
looking at their job or their prospective job and that impedes them. We advise all of them
do not leave. We tell everyone across the board leaving is a bad idea. Once you leave
the percentage of you not ever finishing rises dramatically.
To remedy this situation, Dr. Jackson and his department will not help students with the
job search until their dissertation proposal is written. He stated:
I tell them until their proposal is done I won’t even talk to them about jobs. I’m not going
to write you a letter of recommendation. A lot of them don’t realize until they get into
this process of starting to interview for jobs, if the faculty in your home program are not
writing you letters of recommendation that’s a huge red flag for any prospective
employer. I won’t even talk to them if they call me on the phone. They’re not going to
get a job. They’re not going to get an interview.

While Dr. Jackson has worked with students who are eager to start their careers, Dr.
Jones has had experience with advisees who lack career goals and are unable to determine how
their dissertation work connects with their future career goals. She explained that she “would
suggest at the proposal stage that if they’re not sure about what their career goals are then I will
guide them. I guess case by case I will meet with individual students and then guide them about
the possible career paths. I may also suggest they seek career guidance.”

Dissertation Completion Hurdles

Two main issues surrounding dissertation completion were discussed: proposal
development concerns and accessibility to data.

Proposal development concerns. Interviewees cited three main issues surrounding
students’ proposal development, specifically, advisees’ general proposal development,
commitment to one proposal topic, developing a proposal topic, and advisees’ questionable
capacity to complete a dissertation. Dr. Anderson described advisees’ complications with
general proposal/dissertation development. He stressed, “All of these are big challenges to
students-What is my research question? How am I going to approach it? What’s the question
I’m going to ask? Am I going to use qualitative or quantitative methodologies or a mixed
methods approach? Who is going to be on my committee?-All are points where students really, I
think, get tied up in knots for a while.” To assist advisees, Dr. Anderson thoroughly explains
each section/chapter, as described in the general advising strategies-clear and realistic
explanation of dissertation process-section above, and provides them with documents outlining
what goes in each chapter.

Dr. Hayes has worked with advisees who have difficulties committing to one dissertation
topic and continue to “chase” different ideas, hence the reason why one of her general strategies
is having a conversation with advisees about keeping their focus on one dissertation topic. To
help students commit to a topic, she has them “continue to write down these research ideas that
they have and they can take those up later. We write down ideas for later and they keep a list of
those.” Additionally, to help advisees stay focused on one dissertation topic, she has
conversations with advisees about their focus. She stated:

Often as we’re working on our dissertation, our research question, other questions and
other ideas will come up either through the research that you’re looking at or from work
you’re doing in the class in preparation to work on your dissertation. Sometimes those
ideas are very different from what students have decided to work on. So I help them
think through the ideas and that chasing these other ideas, while they may be interesting,
may not be the best course of action for them especially if they’ve already made a lot of
progress with one idea.
Dr. Jackson mentioned advisees who enter the dissertation stage with no proposal topic. He’s worked with students who “spent so much time in classes, they haven’t been strategic and maybe they’re doing at times too much for other faculty with other projects and they don’t stop to think about what their own work is going to be.” He said he struggles with helping students who have no topic because he has several ideas but those are his own and he cannot write students’ dissertations. His solution is to have brainstorming sessions with students.

Dr. Miner has worked with advisees who have a questionable capacity to complete a dissertation due to the complexity of the project. To help advisees lacking this ability she will establish structure for these students. For example, she will give them dates to turn in chapters for review. She gave an example of an advisee she has worked with:

The way I’m working with this student is I said ‘ok, you’re going to get me chapter 1 by this day.’ He did end up giving it to me a week later, but it’s now in my inbox and it’s on my list of things to do. So now he’s working on chapter 2, and I’m going to read chapter 1. If I see that students need a little more accountability then I will come in and say ‘ok give me a timeline.’

**Accessibility to data.** Drs. Jackson and Hayes mentioned accessibility to data as slowing students’ progress during the dissertation stage. Dr. Jackson had an advisee who was doing a dissertation study in which the study was based out of the Caribbean nation. The student:

Has to go back and interview people and come back and forth. There’s time issues, there’s travel, there’s accessibility to people, there’s unwillingness to help or one where you make an interview, you fly down there for six or seven days and they keep putting you off, they keep canceling, rescheduling. You run into those kinds of problems for
people who are not able to make progress because they’re not able to get access or information they need.

Likewise, Dr. Hayes cited similar issues of advisees having issues with gaining access into the schools to collect data.

Both advisors recommended redesigning the nature of the dissertation when students cannot gain access to their data sources. Dr. Jackson stated, “If that continues on, and I don’t have a set period but you know 6 months, a year, this person’s still struggling to collect information then it’s going to be time to change the nature of the project.” Dr. Hayes worked with advisees to change studies from “student or teacher focused into more of a textual study where access to schools wasn’t necessarily critical to the dissertation being successful.”

Redesigning the dissertation was also mentioned by Dr. Anderson and Dr. Jackson when asked about strategies they use to help students who are not making consistent progress during the dissertation stage but had progressed in prior stages.

**Time**

Several issues with time were mentioned as threats to persistence, including the university timelines for graduation, the amount of time involved in completing a dissertation, and advisees’ personal time management.

**Timelines.** University timelines for graduation and the amount of time required to complete a dissertation were identified as impeding students’ progress during the dissertation stage. Dr. Smith mentioned several times during the interview that he continuously reminds advisees of the university timelines for graduation to keep them on track for timely graduation. He asserted that his advisees:
Seem to think they’re going to graduate at a given time and usually they don’t make that because the timelines back them up that you have to file with the university. They don’t match so they usually wind up about a semester late in terms of graduation. A lot of students want to finish in the spring but the deadlines to walk are usually in early March so they have to put off defense until summer.

He stated later in the interview:

I think the real thing I’ve found all of them have trouble with are the timelines. You keep trying to tell them because a lot of them are job hunting and that kind of thing and they need to tell somebody do you or don’t you have the degree? Well, they’ll probably have a degree, but it may not be by the time they think they’re going to have it. So I keep harping on the timelines.

Additionally, Dr. Anderson stated that advisees have difficulties with the reality of the length of time it takes to complete a dissertation. In reference to this concern he explained that advisees have difficulties grasping “how long it’s going to take and how long it really takes. I think they don’t allow themselves the time, or recognize how much time it will take and then it drags on.” To remedy this situation, Dr. Anderson has conversations with students to give them “a much more realistic sense of time.”

**General time management.** Dr. Hayes mentioned general time management as impeding students’ progression at the dissertation stage. To help with advisees’ time management, she establishes benchmarks for students to reach. For example:

If a student is just coming up with his/her dissertation idea I require him/her to write it in an abstract, like three pager form, so they can see the overview of what they’re doing and what the research questions are, what they’re measuring, and what their methodology’s
going to be. When they get to the part where it’s actually collecting data and writing about their data I just have some writing benchmarks for them.

**Psychological Concerns**

Psychological concerns identified by interviewees included advisees’ self-confidence and doubt, as well as motivation during the dissertation stage.

**Self-confidence/doubt.** Three interviewees made reference to self-confidence/doubt issues advisees may experience during the dissertation stage that can impede their progress. Dr. Miner has worked with advisees who sometimes experience self-doubt and question their ability to actually complete the dissertation. In reference to an advisee’s dissertation committee, Dr. Anderson explained that advisees are often:

Overly optimistic or underprepared for the process of people asking questions about their intended research and sometimes that results in students feeling like it’s been a personal attack on them or it’s everybody thought my stuff was bad or not done right.

Dr. Jones had similar experiences when providing advisees with feedback and comments on dissertation drafts. She noted that:

Some students somehow lack their self-confidence. They feel like when they get so many comments or a different direction from what they’re thinking, they become very anxious or they worry too much and that prevents them from staying focused on this learning process.

Two advisors, Dr. Anderson and Dr. Miner, provided strategies they have used when working with students demonstrating self-confidence/doubt concerns.

**Don’t take it personally.** Dr. Anderson has a general conversation with advisees and tells them not to take feedback from committee members personally. He explained:
This is the process. The job of the committee is to keep the student from making a big mistake or proposing a study that isn’t going to be successful, or that they can’t get data on. Finding the flaws and correcting them at that point is really critical. I try to prepare students that’s what this experience is all about-to keep you from making a fatal mistake or setting you on a path that you can’t complete.

Similarly, Dr. Jones explains to advisees not to take feedback personally. She elaborated:

I just try to explain to them that all the comments that I’m giving students is really for their own benefit. I want them to improve their dissertations. I tell them that every student at the dissertation stage gets tons of comments and have to go through, for example, 10 different versions of the dissertation. I would just assure them that getting tons of comments from advisors and committee members is a normal part of it so they don’t need to take it as something that judges their abilities and it’s all about the development process and we have their best interest at heart.

Counseling. Furthermore, if the advisee doesn’t seem to be able to handle his/her stress and anxiety stemming from self-confidence issues revolving around dissertation completion, Dr. Jones advises that student to seek counseling from a professional.

Motivation. Dr. Anderson indicated that motivation is a general issue for students during the dissertation stage and what motivated students to enter a doctoral program may not be the same motivation that carries them through the program. He stated that sometimes students have to find new motivation or re-channel their original motivation. Dr. Miner stated, “You’re constantly telling students you can do this, just keep going, the light’s at the end of the tunnel, you’re almost there.”
Several strategies were mentioned to help with motivation. Dr. Miner and Dr. Anderson talk with advisees about motivation. Dr. Miner gives her advisees “motivational speeches on how and why they should continue.” Dr. Anderson talks with students to help them tap their original motivation or help them find new motivation to complete the dissertation. Dr. Anderson also mentioned self-help books about writing the dissertation that serve as a motivational tool to help students start writing again and take a new approach to the study to help advisees get excited about the project.

Dr. Miner and Dr. Anderson mentioned and/or established dissertation support groups to help motivate students through interactions with their peers. Dr. Anderson explained the benefit of students creating dissertation support groups. He said, “Sometimes just talking to other students and setting up dissertation support groups or talking to each other can be a very motivational process.” Dr. Miner tried organizing a dissertation support group to get students reintegrated into the dissertation process; however, this particular group did not work out. Dr. Miner explained that she had a group of four students and wanted to give them a community where they could read each other’s dissertations. However, “that didn’t really work. One got sick and dropped out, one moved and just wasn’t in email contact. For this group the moment it came to ok you’re going to share a chapter only one person was able to come up with a chapter.” She did state that dissertation support groups have worked for other groups of students in the department.

More specifically, motivation was cited as an issue for students who are making inconsistent progress during the dissertation stage but who made consistent progress during prior stages. When referencing students who make inconsistent progress during the dissertation stage but made consistent progress during prior stages, Dr. Anderson and Dr. Miner also mentioned
dissertation support groups to help these students become motivated again. These two participants also had conversations with advisees who were making inconsistent progress to help them renew their motivation to continue the dissertation process.

Furthermore, to aid in motivation for advisees who are making inconsistent progress, Dr. Jackson makes these students aware of policies for termination to serve as a motivational tool. He explained, “It’s a little bit harsh but we’ve put policies in place. The university requires continuous enrollment. Well if you’re not enrolled you get dumped. If you’re not getting satisfactory reports in consecutive semesters we have the option to terminate. So we have some motivational tools in place for people to be working.”

Isolation

Isolation during the dissertation stage was discussed in two ways. Drs. Jackson and Anderson explained advisees’ isolation from resources due to relocating during the dissertation stage. Dr. Anderson mentioned the structural isolation of the dissertation stage.

Leaving the confines of campus. Dr. Anderson and Dr. Jackson mentioned leaving the vicinity of the physical location of the campus, and therefore becoming long distance from resources for dissertation completion, as an impediment to students’ progress during the dissertation stage. Dr. Anderson asserted, “I think if you move away from the campus then access to other students, your major professor, and people on the committee - they all become long distance instead of, you know, either walk to the office or drive very easily. That’s a threat.” Dr. Jackson provided similar feedback:

I’ve had students who’ve left so I know it can be done. It is harder, no question about it. There’s a lot of difference between my third year student down the hall who comes and says ‘Hey, I’ve been looking at the data, let me ask you about this’ versus someone that’s
1000 miles away, had scheduled time they had to send me stuff to look at, requires more coordination. It’s just so much more difficult on both the individual and on the advisor.

The only strategy mentioned for the issue of leaving the confines of the campus was Dr. Jackson’s piecemeal strategy, which involves providing him with portions of the dissertation in smaller chunks to receive more substantial and timely feedback. He explained:

I want them to work on their proposal in chunks. I don’t want them to try to do one big document and then try to get their advisor to have to swim through this thing. If they work in each section, I want to review it, and I give them feedback in a more timely manner that way so we can see how the ideas are flowing. Are they coming together? Do all these pieces make sense? Then trying to get that cohesive document in place for the proposal meeting. So in trying to that way stay in contact with them more frequently by using smaller chunks, working on smaller chunks of this document. That way I’d like to think a student doesn’t feel overwhelmed at times. I can read through more quickly and provide them with I think more substantive feedback on a document that’s 15 or 20 pages long as opposed to something that’s 75 or 100 pages long. So that’s worked out really well for me.

**Isolation of dissertation stage.** Dr. Anderson described the isolation of the dissertation stage:

If you’re not going to be successful, it’s at the stage of dissertation because otherwise, doctoral programs are a very social experience. You go to class, you sit in there, you listen to somebody, you engage in discussion with other students, and the bell rings and you go home. It’s what you have been doing since you were in kindergarten. It’s not that hard. What’s a challenge to people is to sit there all by themselves, or go to the library,
and nobody really cares what your dissertation is about except you and your major professo, and a couple times a semester or a year, your committee. It’s a very lonely process. So people usually find it a very isolating experience, and I think that’s where it becomes a real deterrent to completion. It’s that isolation, that reading, and it takes a long time and it’s a lot of work.

Unfortunately, no strategies were described to remedy the isolation of the dissertation stage.

**Strategies When Advising Types of Students**

Participants were asked about differences in strategies they use when working with different types of students (i.e., Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., Full-time vs. Part-time, and International).

**Ed.D. vs. Ph.D.**

Four faculty members agreed the only difference when working with an Ed.D. student is their instructions on the content of the dissertation with an Ed.D. dissertation being more practice based and a Ph.D. dissertation being more theoretical and research based. Dr. Anderson stated:

I don’t think that I make a huge distinction between the two. I mean the type of dissertation they’re writing is somewhat different. The Ed.D. the way we’re crafting it more and more these days is that it’s intended to solve a problem or address a specific issue in policy or in practice, but I don’t really make a distinction in advising ‘this is Ed.D. versus PhD.’ That doesn’t really fit into the scheme for me.

When explaining the differences in orientations for the dissertations of the two types of degrees, Dr. Jones stated:

I think there’s no really major difference between Ed.D. and Ph.D. students except maybe that the orientations for Ed.D. dissertations are different, it’s more practice based. Ph.D.
dissertations require the advancement of knowledge…enhancing the knowledge base in the field. Because of the different orientations the nature of what I tell them will be different but then my approach will be the same.

When asked if the only difference in her approach is instructing advisees on the content of the dissertations for the two types of degrees, Dr. Miner stated, “Exactly, my actual advising isn’t different.” When asked the same question, Dr. Smith agreed and elaborated, “An Ed.D. student is usually working on a project that’s practical in nature whereas a Ph.D. student is more research/theoretical oriented. I mean the basic dissertation is the same but the premise is much different to start with.”

Two of the six faculty members, Dr. Jackson and Dr. Hayes, have advised only Ph.D. students, therefore, were unable to provide a response to the question, “What are the differences in your advising approach/strategies when working with Ed.D. vs. Ph.D. students at the dissertation stage?”

Full-Time vs. Part-Time

To provide context, five of the six faculty members specifically stated that they consider students who are enrolled in the program part-time during the dissertation stage to be employed full-time; Dr. Miner was the only faculty member who did not make this distinction. Dr. Jones was the only faculty member to address how she works with students enrolled in the program full-time during the dissertation stage. She stated:

Many of them rely on their research assistantship or teaching assistantship, and the funding is a main issue for these full-time students so they have to think about what is the reasonable timeline for finishing up dissertations considering the available funding and how soon they want to start their new positions after getting a degree. I think I really try
to work with them individually and each of them has a completely different career path and timeline so based on their timeline I try to guide them on what they need to finish by the certain time and be as specific as possible.

Below are descriptions of strategies faculty members identified they use when working with part-time students at the dissertation stage.

**Time management.** Four faculty dissertation advisors mentioned helping part-time students create a time system for completing the dissertation. Dr. Anderson explained that he thinks:

You have to be mindful that the person who’s working full-time has in their mind much less free time to commit to writing and they have to look for strategies and examples of pockets of time when they can focus on that work. For some people it’s early in the morning before their kids or their spouse or when their spouse goes to work…or use the weekends.

Dr. Jones stated:

I may suggest these students take at least two or three days, maybe a block of time like two or three hours for writing, and when they really get to the final stage, like one week before or even two weeks before their dissertation draft is due, I suggest they take paid leave so they have at least two or three days that they can focus on writing without worrying about their jobs.

Similarly, Dr. Smith advised students to:

Set aside some time in the mornings, in the afternoon…take a weekend and just try and create a system for them to work in. You have to encourage a part timer to set aside a certain amount of time within their schedule that they’re going to do this thing. That’s
more important I think with them whereas the full timer is pretty much working on it [the dissertation] full-time.

While Dr. Miner did not make a distinction between full-time versus part-time, she did state that if students are having issues of completion then she has a conversation with them about how they are allocating their time and ways they can devote time to writing the dissertation. She had one advisee in particular who “would give strategies like wake up at 5 o’clock in the morning and write” and another student who devoted every weekend for 2 years to writing the dissertation. Dr. Miner concluded that “being full-time or part-time doesn’t really matter; it differs in how you talk to them about how they’re organizing their time.”

**Keeping in touch.** Three faculty members mentioned how they keep in touch with students enrolled part-time during the dissertation stage. Dr. Smith stated that when working with part-time students at the dissertation stage, he makes an effort to reach out to those students. Dr. Anderson also stated that he will sometimes send students an email saying, “I haven’t seen anything for a while.”

However, Dr. Jackson said that he leaves it up to the advisee to reach out to him if the student is enrolled part-time and employed full-time. He stated, “It’s up to them to take ownership of their time and their communication to me. I don’t chase them down. You choose to leave [to take a job] then you’ve got to take the lead and stay in touch with me. It’s not my job to keep you moving along, this is your dissertation.” However, Dr. Jackson did elaborate that he uses the annual doctoral student evaluation as a means of reaching out to students. He mentioned:

This may sound like far too little for some but we do at least in the annual…we check with you at the start of every semester - are you enrolled, what are you doing? We do our
annual evaluations and as long as folks are active then we are in touch with them but again we expect more of their initiation/initiating contact with us.

**Consoling.** One faculty member, Dr. Smith, mentioned personal consoling/counseling for part-time students. He explained that part-time students have external pressures due to work and possibly balancing family life at the same time. He stated:

Full timers are trying to get it done and get off campus and get a job. The other guy [part timer] got a job and he’s trying to protect it and do that and maybe it’s a family, I don’t know what the reason is, but they have other pressure whereas the pressure from a full timer is more from themselves than the external pressures.

When asked about strategies he uses to help part-time students persist, Dr. Smith noted that he makes the effort to “find out what the problems are, you know, the kids are sick, things like that. You have to do a lot more consoling/personal counseling. You can do this, you’ll get it done.” Similarly, Dr. Anderson added that he talks through what is preventing these students from being successful to help them progress through the dissertation while working full-time.

**Flexible appointment times.** Dr. Jones explained that she is flexible with appointment times for students who are working full-time. She stated, “I try to meet with them in the evening so they can make an appointment with me between 4 to 6 or even 7 to give them flexibility to meet with me to work on their dissertation.”

**Piecemeal strategy.** As explained earlier in the section discussing isolation during the dissertation stage, Dr. Jackson uses the same piecemeal strategy with part-time students in the dissertation stage. He indicated:

I use the same piecemeal strategy of recommending how they do the work that they send me. For someone ABD [all but dissertation], I can give them better feedback in a more
timely manner when I get those smaller chunks of work. Here’s chapter five and six altogether, it will take me a month to go through that versus here’s the first section of chapter five or the first two sections of chapter five. I can get you back that in 48 hours.

**Enroll full-time.** Dr. Anderson encourages part-time students to consider enrolling in school full-time for at least one semester so their main focus would hopefully be on writing the dissertation instead of working full-time and trying to balance school work. He explained, “I often encourage them if they’ve been here for a while to think about going to school full-time at some point in that process just because it’s so different and if they can take a semester off [work] or part of it, it’s a huge opportunity to be successful.”

**Easier access to research site.** Dr. Hayes appeared to have an easier time advising students enrolled part-time; however, her response is unique to her program. Dr. Hayes explained that:

> When students are teaching full-time they have a foot in the door to collect data so that’s a positive thing if they can get the right permissions for IRB. Sometimes knowing the right people and knowing who to ask for permissions beforehand really makes that process easier. In almost all cases when someone is teaching full-time, we try to use the school district that they’re in to collect data. Maybe not their school but their school district. So my advising with them is really quite different because they have a foot in the door typically.

**International Students**

Dr. Anderson was the only faculty member who had not served as a faculty dissertation advisor for an international student. Three faculty members, Dr. Jackson, Dr. Miner, and Dr.
Smith stated that they do not use any unique advising strategies with international students. Dr. Jones and Dr. Hayes provided strategies for working with international students.

**Developing writing skills.** Dr. Sally Jones stated that there is a lot of diversity within international students but in general she makes sure international students have the writing skills to write a dissertation. She explained, “For those students who struggle with their writing I will guide them to get help from the university and the writing centers or some kind of assistance that can provide help to improve their writing.”

**Interview assistance.** Dr. Jones also helps international students understand cultural differences if they are trying to secure a job in the United States. She elaborated:

Many international students want to secure a position in the United States. They need to understand the different cultures so I’ll try to guide them with the various aspects. For example, if they are getting job interviews in an academic context, university position, then I will spend time to practice and do some mock interviews. I will definitely review their job talk, PowerPoint slides, and give them feedback. Also for non-academic positions I try to share as much knowledge.

Dr. Jones provides the same assistance to domestic students but put an emphasis on making sure international students understand cultural differences between their home countries and the United States.

**Expanding viewpoints.** Dr. Hayes explained that the international students she has advised have been more “tunnel visioned” and “have trouble seeing beyond what their initial idea is” in terms of developing a dissertation topic. As a result, Dr. Hayes works with international students to “try to open them up to seeing things from different points of view” so they can choose the best possible dissertation topic for their interests.
Academic Integration

Interviewees made mention of the various aspects of academic integration. Aspects of academic integration mentioned during the interviews included: helping advisees gain knowledge and skills for research, publishing articles/completing research projects with advisees, and helping advisees gain knowledge and skills for the workforce. Aspects not described included: helping students develop the knowledge and skills for their disciplines and encouraging advisees to participate in professional organizations and associations during the dissertation stage. However, all interviewees indicated on the questionnaire they do aid in facilitating these two aspects of academic integration.

Research

Interviewees assisted advisees during the dissertation stage by helping them understand the research process and gain skills to conduct research. As described previously in the general advising strategies section, three dissertation advisors, Dr. Miner, Dr. Anderson, and Dr. Smith, mentioned providing advisees with clear explanations of the dissertation and dissertation process. All six advisors indicated on questionnaire results they provide advisees with clear direction on dissertation completion. Dr. Miner described that through this process she is trying to “help people make choices and good choices about what literature they’re going to review, make choices about what theories they’re going to use, and make choices about the methodology.” This process of explaining dissertation completion helped advisees understand the intricacies of completing a research project of this type. Additionally, to help students conceptualize this type of complex research project, Dr. Hayes uses the benchmarking strategy, previously described, to help advisees plan out their dissertation projects and understand how the components of a dissertation fit together.
Furthermore, five interviewees noted on the questionnaire that they help students become independent in their ability to plan, conduct, and execute research during the dissertation stage, while Dr. Hayes selected neutral to that statement. Dr. Miner provides advisees with a general disclaimer that the dissertation stage is a time of independent work. Dr. Jackson addressed advisees’ independence during this research process:

I really let them take ownership of their project, as they should. Once you’ve got your proposal, the candidate really is taking the leadership and dealing with their sample. I’m here to help them review. I talk with them about their work, but I don’t obviously do their data analysis that type of thing.

To help students develop skills to execute research, Dr. Jackson described earlier that he likes to work with doctoral students who have already done research projects or a thesis in their master’s program and he helps them “learn new tools, improve the tools they already know how to use.”

Dr. Hayes explained:

I’m not sure that I’m really in control of that. I think one’s independence depends on kind of how they like to work. I think someone emerges to do that independently but at the same time I don’t think that we live in a day and age where you have to do those things independently. There’s so much collaboration in our field and in our work that collaboration’s not necessarily a bad thing. So that’s kind of where I was in the middle of that choice because collaboration can also be viewed as important.

**Publishing/Research Projects**

All interviewees indicated on the survey that they publish articles with their advisees and encourage advisees to publish articles during the dissertation stage. Dr. Anderson specifically
mentioned publishing articles with advisees during the dissertation stage. Additionally, Dr. Jackson noted that he works on research projects with his advisees and some he will let take leadership on the research project.

**Workforce Development**

While all six interviewees affirmed on the questionnaire that they help ensure advisees develop the knowledge and skills for the workforce based on their career goals, Dr. Sally Jones was the only interviewee who mentioned specifically helping advisees with gaining the knowledge and skills for the workforce. As described previously, she helps international students prepare for job interviews and understand cultural differences in the workforce between their home country and the United States. She also provides domestic students with the same assistance but places an emphasis on helping international students understand cultural differences. During the dissertation stage, she also helps advisees who are not sure about their career path seek career guidance or she attempts to guide these students. She also helps students frame their dissertations so they connect to their career goals.

**Social Integration**

Interview results were coded to highlight any instances of social integration that were mentioned. However, there was relatively no mention of social integration throughout interviews. The primary mention of social integration was dissertation support groups, as described by Dr. Jason Anderson and Dr. Julie Miner, in the sections above, in which students connect with other students during the dissertation stage by forming groups for support and guidance during the dissertation stage.

Additionally, Dr. Anderson mentioned the isolation of the dissertation stage, as described in the threats to persistence section above, which describes the overall lack of social integration
that characterizes the dissertation stage. Dr. Anderson acknowledged that students shift from having several interactions during the initial stage and coursework stage of doctoral programs to relatively few interactions during the dissertation stage. However, it appears that those interviewed for this study take some measures to help counter the isolation of the dissertation stage.

Four of the interviewees responded on the questionnaire that they either strongly agree or agree that they encourage their advisees to connect with peers/classmates during the dissertation stage. One interviewee, Dr. Tim Jackson, was neutral on the statement and indicated this is because:

I don’t think about it, that’s really what it comes back to for me. Neutral means that is not something I think to do or that is not something that would cross my mind to do and the context of that question – well, the dissertation is your project. Now they can talk to their peers, sure, but I guess I was interpreting that question as more of a collaborative effort. You work on your dissertation, it’s not a group project.

Dr. Sally Jones indicated that she does not encourage advisees to connect with peers/classmates during the dissertation stage but it was not indicated why.

One emerging aspect of social integration observed in interview results is whether faculty dissertation advisors facilitate social integration by regularly keeping in touch with advisees during the dissertation stage. Interview findings suggest that some advisors may not play an active role themselves in keeping students socially integrated during the dissertation stage. For example, two advisors mentioned that they do not feel it is their job to continually reach out to their advisees. If he has not heard from an advisee in a while, Dr. Jackson said that he will reach
out to the student when he is writing the required annual doctoral student review since he feels it is the advisee’s responsibility to initiate contact.

For students who leave during the dissertation stage to take a job, Dr. Jackson stated, “It’s up to them, they have to take ownership of their time and their communication with me. Dr. Miner responded similarly, “I’ll tell you I don’t feel like it’s my job to be emailing them and pestering them. I am not the person who puts a buzzer on my phone and texts them or emails them.” However, if she has not heard from a student in approximately six months she will sometimes send an email. One advisor, Dr. Anderson, stated that “occasionally if I haven’t heard from somebody for a period of time I’ll just send them an email and say what’s going on.”

However, two advisors seem to keep in touch with students more regularly. Dr. Jones stated that in general she keeps close contact with her advises and checks on how they’re doing. For advisees working full time, Dr. Smith keeps contact with them by calling them.

**Interview Findings Summary**

Six faculty members participated in a follow-up interview. During interviews, participants mainly agreed that they identified with the functions and characteristics identified by Barnes and Austin (2009); findings did not reveal any new functions and characteristics. Additionally, findings identified several general advising strategies utilized to aid in advisees’ persistence during the dissertation stage: adapting to the needs of advisees, providing clear and realistic explanations of the dissertation process, assisting with committee member selection, and helping advisees maintain focus.

A series of threats to persistence and strategies to maneuver those threats were also identified. Threats included advisees’ personal responsibilities, psychological concerns, dissertation completion hurdles, time, and isolation. Findings further showed that, in general,
participants did not differentiate their strategies based on student types (i.e., Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., Full-time vs. Part-time, and International). Lastly, interview findings did not reveal a great deal of information about academic integration but some aspects were mentioned, including helping advisees with research and publishing. Relatively no mention was made about social integration. The following chapter provides an overview of the study and its findings, as well as implications and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Approximately 40-50% of doctoral students do not persist and do not earn their doctoral degrees (Church, 2009; Golde, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Furthermore, approximately 30% of students dropout during the dissertation stage (Gardner, 2009). Current literature notes that faculty dissertation advisors are crucial to students’ success (i.e., Bair, 1999; Barnes et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Tinto, 1993), especially during the dissertation stage when the advisee’s primary point of contact is the dissertation advisor and interactions with peers and other faculty members are relatively scarce (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009). However, there is a lack of research that explains how faculty dissertation advisors help students persist during the dissertation stage, especially from the faculty perspective. Given the critical nature of the faculty dissertation advisor and advisee relationship (i.e., Bair, 1999; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Tinto, 1993), this study sought to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence, specifically during the dissertation stage, from the advisor’s perspective.

Additionally, Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence is the primary model in current literature regarding doctoral student persistence. While Tinto stressed the importance of the faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage, his model does not offer insight on the faculty dissertation advisor and student relationship during the dissertation stage. Rather, his mention of the relationship is brief and mainly states that the faculty dissertation advisor is the individual with whom a student has the most contact with during the dissertation stage, aside from occasional contact with dissertation committee members. His model also suggests that academic and social integration occur prior to the student entering the dissertation stage. However, given the importance of continued academic and social integration for persistence, as
well as the dissertation advisor, this study also sought to provide additional insight into how faculty dissertation advisors aid in facilitating and promoting students’ academic and social integration, and ultimately their persistence during the dissertation stage.

To better understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence, this study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do faculty dissertation advisors define their role in the dissertation stage?
2. What general strategies do faculty dissertation advisors use during the dissertation stage?
3. How do advising strategies used by faculty dissertation advisors during the dissertation stage differ by doctoral student types?
4. How do faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic integration during the dissertation stage?
5. How do faculty dissertation advisors promote social integration during the dissertation stage?

A mixed-methods research design was employed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Specifically, this study involved faculty dissertation advisors in the education field. Faculty dissertation advisors from one college of education in the Southeastern region completed a questionnaire, and those who agreed completed a follow-up interview. The following chapter provides a discussion of the major findings from the study regarding the advisor’s role, students’ persistence, academic integration, and social integration. These findings are also discussed in relation to current literature. Lastly, this chapter provides recommendations for practice and future research.

119
Role of the Advisor

Participants were asked to identify functions and characteristics they use in their role as a faculty dissertation advisor from a list developed using findings from Barnes and Austin (2009). Aligning with the results of Barnes and Austin (2009), the majority of participants identified with each of the four functions in Barnes and Austin’s study; however, these results were specific to the dissertation stage whereas Barnes and Austin did not distinguish between the stages of doctoral programs in their study. Results showed that the majority of participants collaborate with students on research projects. All participants indicated they serve as mentors to advisees during the dissertation stage. Additionally, the majority served as advocates for students when hurdles arise and also utilized chastising to correct advisees behaviors when needed.

It is not surprising that all participants indicated they utilized the mentoring function. Zhao et al. (2007) suggested that the ideal advisor/advisee relationships in doctoral education are those in which the advisor also serves as a mentor. While the advisor’s standard role is to help students navigate degree completion and the institution, as well as university and departmental policies (i.e., Lyons et al., 1990), mentors provide students’ with psychosocial/psychological support, career guidance, and role modeling (Jacobi, 1991). Additionally, Lunsford (2012) found that those advisors who incorporate mentoring into their advisor/advisee relationship had advisees who were more satisfied with their advisor and more likely to produce scholarly work (i.e., publish articles, present at conferences) and, most importantly, remain on track to degree completion.

Questionnaire results also suggested that the majority of participants identified with each of the five characteristics listed in Barnes and Austin (2009). All participants highly ranked
being honest, friendly/professional, accessible, supportive/caring, and collegial as important in their relationships with advisees during the dissertation stage. These results indicate that participants of this study view their role as a faculty dissertation advisor as encompassing what Barnes and Austin (2009) described as including “both an intellectual dimension and an affective dimension focused on caring, support, and friendliness” (p. 311). Furthermore, results suggest that these five characteristics have nurturing qualities that help students feel as though they can reach out to their dissertation advisor and ask for assistance during the dissertation stage. The advisors embody characteristics that make them approachable to their advisees. These characteristics help to facilitate academic and social integration, as discussed below, regardless of whether advisors reach out to students during the dissertation stage.

**Persistence**

Relatively absent from the literature on the doctoral student experience is “how” faculty dissertation advisors aid in their advisees’ persistence, especially during the dissertation stage, and from the faculty perspective. To fill this void, participants were asked to identify specific strategies they used when working with all advisees and with specific types of students (i.e., full time vs. part time, Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., international). Participants also identified several threats to students’ persistence during the dissertation stage and strategies they have used to help their advisees maneuver these threats to maintain their persistence. Major findings are reviewed below.

**General Advising Strategies**

Barnes and Austin (2009) questioned faculty dissertation advisors about their responsibilities as advisors and findings presented a general series of responsibilities to help advisees be successful. All but one participant indicated on the questionnaire they adapt
advising to meet the needs of the advisee. Interview findings provided further explanation of what the advisors meant by adapting to the needs of the advisee. Three participants mentioned adapting to the characteristics of the advisee (i.e., does the advisee need more guidance and pressure or is the advisee self-motivated). Two participants cited allowing advisees to determine their method for providing drafts of dissertation work (i.e., does the advisee want to turn in a full draft or smaller sections of the document). Additionally, to help meet the needs of advisees, questionnaire results and interview findings suggested that advisors are accessible and available to their advisees for consultation when their advisees need this assistance. Adapting to the needs of advisees is especially important given that during the dissertation stage advisees can endure several threats to persistence, discussed below. When external pressures arise, advisees may need the advisor to adjust and be more supportive and hands-on during these times.

Furthermore, questionnaire results specified that all participants provide advisees with clear feedback on dissertation completion. Additionally, interview findings showed that some advisors also offer a clear and realistic explanation of the overall dissertation process (i.e., what information goes in each chapter and how much time is involved in completing portions of the dissertation).

To aid in persistence, the majority of participants provided advisees with timely feedback and also helped advisees develop doable dissertation projects. Also important to participants was helping advisees cope with failure (i.e., unexpected results from an experiment, failed defense) during the dissertation stage. Additionally, participants indicated they assist advisees in selecting committee members.

Gardner (2009) discussed the typical elements of the dissertation stage (i.e., developing a research topic and research questions, develop a dissertation proposal, proposal defense with
dissertation advisor and committee members, collecting and analyzing data, drafting the final
document, dissertation defense), although these elements vary among doctoral programs.
Findings indicate that faculty dissertation advisors utilize a series of general strategies to help
students maneuver the basic elements of the dissertation stage, as successful completion of these
programmatic milestones is needed for advisees’ persistence through the dissertation stage.

**Advising Based on Student Types**

There is also an overall void in the literature discussing how faculty dissertation advisors’
advising strategies differ based on student types. During interviews, participants were asked
how their strategies differ when working with full-time/part-time students, Ed. D./Ph.D., and
international students. Overall, there were no substantial differences in strategies utilized based
on student types.

**Full time vs. part time.** Rather than focusing on the advisees’ enrollment status, five of
the six interview participants indicated that they considered students who are enrolled in the
doctoral program part-time to be employed full-time. Thus, strategies discussed focused on
helping advisees find time to work on the dissertation based around their work schedules.
Finding time to work on the dissertation was generally a strategy used whenever students
encountered “life” distractions, discussed below as a threat to persistence, and adapting to their
“life” situations. Furthermore, working full-time while trying to complete the dissertation was
also identified by participants as a threat to students’ persistence, also discussed below.

**Ed.D. vs. Ph.D.** Of those participants who have advised an Ed.D. student, all agreed they do not make any changes to their advising based on degree type. The only difference when
working with an Ed.D. student is the instructions on the content of the dissertation, with an Ed.D.
dissertation being more practice based and a Ph.D. dissertation being more theoretical and

123
research based. Despite the differences in the focus of the dissertation, Ed.D. and Ph.D. students go through the same general structure of the dissertation stage: research topic/question development, prospectus/proposal development and defense, data collection and analysis, dissertation document development, and the dissertation defense (Gardner, 2009).

**International students.** Overall, there were no substantive differences when working with international versus domestic students during the dissertation stage. However, during interviews, advisors mentioned three aspects they are mindful of when working with international students. These included helping to develop international students’ writing skills and helping international students understand the cultural differences between the advisee’s home country and the United States during their job search preparation. Additionally, one participant mentioned trying to help international students see “things from different points of view” so they can choose the best possible dissertation topic for their interests since they tend to be more “tunnel visioned” when selecting a dissertation topic.

**Threats to Persistence**

The majority of the literature on threats to persistence/completion is presented from the doctoral student perspective (i.e., Golde, 2000; Maher et al., 2004; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Relatively absent from the literature is the faculty perspective, as well as strategies faculty dissertation advisors utilize to help their advisees work through threats to persistence. Interview findings filled this void in the literature and highlighted five major themes of threats to persistence during interviews, as well as strategies implemented when threats arise. These themes included advisees’ personal responsibilities, psychological concerns, time, dissertation project hurdles, and isolation.
Advisees’ personal responsibilities. Consistent with literature on the doctoral student experience, participants mentioned a variety of personal responsibilities that could distract students’ attention during the dissertation stage: children, divorce, illnesses, financial constraints, and full-time employment/job searching too soon/lack of career goals. Recent research also identifies several of these factors as threats to students’ persistence. For example, Maher et al. (2004) found that child-care responsibilities, marital issues, and family obligations affected women’s persistence towards degree completion as these responsibilities took attention away from the degree. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) also identified deaths in the family, job promotions and layoffs, children, and family responsibilities as affecting persistence. Tinto (1993) indicated that during the dissertation stage students may have “external commitments” that also influence persistence and ultimately degree completion. Fortunately, this study expanded the literature by offering strategies, explained in Chapter Four, identified by faculty dissertation advisors that they have used to help remedy the effects of outside/life distractions and career impediments to further students’ persistence during the dissertation stage. Strategies included, but were not limited to, recommending students take off from school and/or work depending on the situation, reaching out to students, recommending they seek counseling, and helping advisees develop a time system for completion. These strategies aid in students’ persistence by helping them gain or regain stability in their lives so they are able to persist through the dissertation stage.

Psychological concerns. Psychological concerns included advisees’ motivation and advisees’ self-confidence/anxiety surrounding dissertation completion. Research highlights that students who are motivated to persist through a doctoral program are more likely to complete the degree (Grover, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Grover
(2007) elaborated that “students must embody a minimum threshold of motivation…for success.” (p. 9). However, two participants mentioned that students’ motivation may subside during the dissertation stage. Additionally, motivation was mentioned as an issue for students making inconsistent progress during the dissertation stage. Participants offered several strategies to help with students’ motivation, including self-help books, motivational speeches, finding new motivation, and revisiting original motivation, and dissertation support groups. Furthermore, three participants made reference to advisees’ self-confidence/anxiety about their abilities to actually complete a dissertation and/or the dissertation process. One participant recommended counseling for those who exhibit extreme anxiety about their abilities. For students with anxiety about the dissertation process, advisors had general conversations with advisees to advise them not to take dissertation feedback personally.

**Time.** Three main issues surrounding the theme of time were mentioned: university timelines for graduation, timeline of how long it actually takes to complete a dissertation, and advisees’ personal time management. Dr. Smith stressed the importance of explaining the university timelines for graduation to advisees since they technically have to defend their dissertation closer to the beginning of the semester in order to graduate during a given semester. This aligns with Barnes and Austin’s (2009) recommendation that departments have doctoral student handbooks to make students aware of guidelines and policies for degree completion. The more information students are provided through these handbooks, the more they can govern themselves accordingly throughout the dissertation completion process and meet all required guidelines. Furthermore, dissertation advisors can use these handbooks to make advisees’ aware of guidelines for completion.
Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw’s (2012) found that students in the dissertation stage cited difficulties managing their own deadlines for finishing the dissertation and putting in the time necessary to complete the dissertation. Aligning with their finding, two participants in this study mentioned advisees having difficulties understanding the reality of the length of time needed to complete a dissertation. Dr. Anderson summed it up best when he stated, “I think they don’t allow themselves the time, or recognize how much time it will take and then it [the dissertation] drags on.” Participants mentioned they have conversations with advisees to help give them a more realistic sense of the time involved in dissertation completion. Additionally, advisees’ general time management was mentioned as a threat to persistence. Advisors suggested advisees turn in smaller portions of the dissertation to complete to help them make more consistent progress.

Dissertation project hurdles. Gardner (2009) stated that the first steps of the dissertation stage are to identify a dissertation topic and to soon after develop the proposal/prospectus. However, findings showed that participants have had issues with advisees’ sticking to one dissertation topic, entering the dissertation stage with no topic idea, and/or struggling with their overall proposal development (i.e., methodology, research questions). For advisees struggling to stick to one topic, Dr. Hayes mentioned jotting down ideas and saving them for future research. For students with no dissertation topic, Dr. Jackson had brainstorming sessions with advisees. For those struggling with overall proposal development, Dr. Anderson thoroughly explained each section/chapter and provides advisees with documents outlining what goes in each chapter.

Additionally, one participant mentioned having worked with advisees who had a questionable capacity to even complete a dissertation. Perhaps this ability to assess the students’
capacity and actual needs for completing the dissertation comes from Barnes and Austin’s (2009) concept of assessing the needs of the advisee. For those students with a questionable capacity, the advisor made the dissertation process as structured and manageable as possible.

**Isolation.** The dissertation stage is characterized as isolating due to the overall lack of interactions with faculty and peers that are usually present in the prior stages of doctoral programs (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). During interviews, Dr. Anderson discussed the isolation of the dissertation stage and how there is a shift in interactions between the advisee and his/her peers and faculty. While the prior stages of doctoral programs are very social, the dissertation stage is a time of independent work (Gardner, 2008b). Dr. Anderson pinpointed the challenge of the isolation of the dissertation stage:

> If you’re not going to be successful, it’s at the stage of dissertation because otherwise, doctoral programs are a very social experience. What’s a challenge to people is to sit there all by themselves, or go to the library, and nobody really cares what your dissertation is about except you and your major professor, and a couple times a semester or a year, your committee. So people usually find it a very isolating experience, and I think that’s where it becomes a real deterrent to completion.

Consistent with Dr. Anderson’s statement, Ali and Kohun (2006) noted that students’ feelings of isolation are a primary reason why students leave their doctoral programs. During the dissertation stage, these feelings stem from a lack of interactions with faculty and peers due to the independent nature of the dissertation stage. Ali and Kohun further stated that:
The feeling of isolation among doctoral students is a major factor that contributes to the high attrition rate at doctoral programs. Yet despite its recognition, the feeling of isolation has yet to be addressed fully in the design of some doctoral programs. (p.21)

Isolation is especially problematic if the student attempts to complete his/her dissertation from a distance or primarily off-campus (Gardner, 2008b). Two participants mentioned advisees moving away from the physical location of the campus as an impediment to students’ progress during the dissertation stage and, therefore, lacking direct and more convenient access to their resources-classmates, the dissertation advisor, and committee members. Upon relocating, the student becomes long distance from these individuals rather than a shorter walk or drive to campus.

Unfortunately, no strategies were offered to counter the threat of isolation and only one, the piecemeal strategy, for those who have left the confines of campus. However, in reviewing the strategies mentioned throughout the threats to persistence section, Dr. Anderson and Dr. Miner discussed dissertation support groups for students struggling with motivation during the dissertation stage. Within the context of isolation, dissertation support groups would give students the opportunity to interact with their peers more regularly, to become reintegrated into the dissertation process, and to counteract the effects of the isolation of the dissertation stage. Additionally, dissertation advisors could make an effort to reach out to advisees during the dissertation stage to help maintain contact and interaction (Gardner, 2008b), especially since the advisor is the advisee’s main point of contact during this stage (Ali & Kohun, 2006). While maintaining contact, advisors could help students create and establish a time system for completion and regular deadlines to help advisees stay on track with degree completion during the dissertation stage (Gardner, 2008b).
Regardless of the threat identified, findings showed several overlapping strategies that could be used to aid advisees in their persistence throughout the dissertation stage. For example, consoling was mentioned for students dealing with life/outside distractors and self-confidence/doubt. The piecemeal strategy was cited for advisees struggling with working full-time and completing the degree, as well as for those who have left the confines of campus. Additionally, for students handling life/outside distractors and for those working full-time, helping students develop a time system for completion was suggested. For students lacking motivation and for students experiencing difficulties accessing their data sources for data collection, advisors suggested redesigning/taking a new approach to the dissertation. These overlaps in strategies utilized suggest that the strategies identified in the threats to persistence section could be used in several different situations advisees may encounter during the dissertation stage.

**Academic Integration**

Tinto (1993) noted that the faculty dissertation advisor is the individual with whom the advisee has the most contact with during the dissertation stage, aside from occasional contact with dissertation committee members. Tinto also indicated that the dissertation advisor is the individual who has the greatest impact on students’ degree completion during the dissertation stage.

However, as previously stated in Chapter One, Tinto’s model of doctoral student persistence does not offer a great deal of insight on the faculty dissertation advisor and advisee relationship during the dissertation stage and failed to elaborate on how the dissertation advisor facilitates academic integration during the dissertation stage. Additionally, his model seems to suggest that academic integration occurs prior to the student entering the dissertation stage.
Though, with the importance Tinto placed on academic integration for persistence, this study sought to understand how faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic integration during the dissertation stage.

Not surprisingly, results align with the elements of the dissertation stage: students undergo independent research, with the guidance of their dissertation advisor (i.e., Gardner, 2009), as well as prepare for the eventual shift into the workforce/professional field (i.e., Gardner, 2009; Grover, 2007). Additionally, results provide explanation for how advisors prepare advisees for the workforce: by helping advisees gain the knowledge and skills for their disciplines, by encouraging advisees to engage in professional organizations, by encouraging advisees to publish articles and/or publishing articles with advisees, and aiding in advisees workforce development. Furthermore, these results add insight on the nature of the faculty dissertation advisor and advisee relationship, currently lacking from Tinto’s (1993) model.

Questionnaire results provided additional support and clarification for Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence. Participants indicated they employed several tactics to aid in advisees’ academic integration during the dissertation stage, including:

- Helping advisees gain research skills by assisting them with their abilities to plan, conduct, and execute research during the dissertation stage
- Aiding advisees in their professional development during the dissertation stage by helping them develop knowledge and skills for their disciplines
- Encouraging advisees to engage in professional organizations during the dissertation stage
- Co-publishing articles with advisees
- Encouraging advisees to publish their own articles during the dissertation stage
• Helping advisees gain skills and knowledge for the workforce based on their career goals.

Additionally, interview findings reinforced that academic integration occurs during the dissertation stage with some participants mentioning helping advisees gain knowledge and skills for research and the workforce, as well as publishing articles and completing research projects with advisees.

By helping to facilitate academic integration during the dissertation stage, faculty dissertation advisors reinforce the purpose of doctoral education as the process of preparing advisees for research, for a professional field, and for the workforce helps develop each advisee into a “steward of the discipline” who “will creatively generate new knowledge, critically converse valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application” (Golde, 2006, p. 5).

**Social Integration**

Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence also failed to elaborate on how faculty dissertation advisors facilitate social integration during the dissertation stage. Especially daunting is the notion that the dissertation stage is characterized as a time of isolation for students as they no longer have the routine interactions with faculty and students that are typically present in the earlier stages of doctoral programs (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009), suggesting an overall lack of social integration during the dissertation stage.

This portrayal of the dissertation stage as a time of isolation was further reinforced by interview findings. In general, participants made relatively no mention during interviews of assisting with social integration throughout the dissertation stage. Furthermore, one participant discussed the isolation of the dissertation stage but made no mention of any strategies to
specifically counter the effects of this threat to persistence. Additionally, an emerging finding from interviews, not included on the questionnaire, revealed that some faculty dissertation advisors may not facilitate social integration by actively and regularly reaching out to advisees to keep in touch with them during the dissertation stage; these advisors felt that advisees should reach out to them.

However, questionnaire results indicated that faculty dissertation advisors take some measures to aid in advisees’ social integration during the dissertation stage, although responses did not receive as strong support as with academic integration, possibly because academic integration supports persistence more so than social integration (i.e., Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 1996). The majority of participants encouraged advisees to connect with peers/classmates during the dissertation stage; this result was further supported by interview findings in which two participants mentioned dissertation support groups to help students form a support system. Yet, less than half of participants indicated they encourage advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community during the dissertation stage. Advisors did not explain why they did not suggest connecting with administrators; however, one explanation could be that staff and administrators do not typically play a direct role in dissertation completion as they do not serve on dissertation committees. Therefore, students at the dissertation stage may have no reason to continuously connect with these individuals. However, campus staff and administrators can certainly aid in students’ social integration by personally reaching out to students to invite them to departmental activities, professional development workshops, and social events so students in the dissertation stage maintain contact with those in the university community and, more importantly, the academic department.
The majority of participants designated on the questionnaire that they encourage advisees to connect with faculty within and outside the academic department. These results align with the process of dissertation completion. Faculty within the academic department serve on dissertation committees and play a direct role with dissertation completion. Additionally, these faculty members may have similar research interests which would allow the advisee to consult with them. Dissertation committees are also comprised of at least one faculty member who is outside the home department; therefore, faculty dissertation advisors may have more of a reason to encourage advisees to connect with a faculty member outside the department rather than a staff member or administrator at the university.

Since results provided stronger support for academic integration, faculty members can use academic integration to strengthen social integration. For example, to encourage social integration during the dissertation stage, faculty members could post volunteer and/or paid research opportunities, graduate assistantships, and conference presentation opportunities through student listservs, especially since results of this study indicate that faculty members encourage research, publishing, and professional development during the dissertation stage. Students interested in these opportunities could be paired together and work with faculty members on research projects and presentations. If feasible, regular meetings could be held on campus to also decrease the threat of isolation. Through these collaborations, students would strengthen their academic integration while receiving more frequent interactions with faculty members and peers who join research projects, thus enhancing their social integration. Tinto (1993) stressed the importance of academic and social integration for persistence as the more students are integrated into their academic and social systems, the more likely they are to persist since integration promotes and increases commitment to degree completion.
Implications for Practice

Results and findings of this study suggest several implications for doctoral students, dissertation advisors, and universities.

Doctoral Students

Given that nearly all participants in this study indicated they are accessible and available to students, advisees should make use of this time to aid in their persistence during dissertation completion. Research clearly shows that the dissertation stage is an isolating time (i.e., Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2008b, 2009); however, if faculty dissertation advisors are willing to make themselves available and accessible, the dissertation stage does not have to be so isolating. Though findings did reveal that not all advisors make the effort to keep in touch with their advisees. Advisees need to make a cognizant effort to reach out to their advisors for guidance and assistance. Furthermore, in terms of social integration, results merely showed that advisors “encourage” advisees to connect with various individuals on campus. Advisors did not explain what this encouragement entails; therefore, advisees should make a conscious effort to form connections and support groups during the dissertation stage to counter the effects of isolation.

While the dissertation advisor’s standard role is to assist advisees with navigating degree completion and the institution, as well as university and departmental policies (i.e., Lyons et al., 1990), advisees should also take advantage of the opportunity to develop a mentoring relationship with their dissertation advisor for professional development, career development, and psychosocial/psychological support (i.e., Jacobi, 1991; Lunsford, 2012; Zhao et al., 2007). Additionally, results showed that, in general, advisors are also willing to serve as advocates and willing to adapt to advisees’ needs, implying that dissertation advisors care about their advisees’
success. Advisees should have conversations with their advisors regarding their needs so advisors can best understand how to help them persist through the dissertation stage.

**Dissertation Advisors**

Lacking in the literature were specific strategies faculty dissertation advisors utilize to help advisees persist through the dissertation stage, especially from the faculty perspective. This study provided descriptions of general strategies to use when advisees encounter certain threats to persistence during the dissertation stage. While each advisee is unique, findings create a general “go-to” guide to help advisors assist their advisees, especially for newer faculty members just beginning to work with advisees and not sure how to navigate this new role. Additionally, beyond the general responsibilities of a faculty dissertation advisor, findings indicate that all participants understood the importance of serving as an advisor, as well as a mentor to students, during the dissertation stage. Literature underscores the importance of mentoring relationships for doctoral students (i.e., Lunsford, 2012; Zhao et al., 2007); therefore, advisors should strive to develop mentoring relationships with advisees to aid in their overall professional development and persistence.

This study can be used to spark conversations among colleagues in academic departments to develop best practices, trainings/professional development workshops, and departmental policies. For example, while not directly addressed in this study, workshops could focus on assessing the departmental climate and methods/policies to enhance students’ academic and social integration. Grover (2007) defined departmental climate as “the sense of community within the department…attitudes towards students, students’ participation in departmental activities, and peer support” (p. 351). Grover found that departments with low completion rates were found to have more negative attitudes towards students and a lack of departmental
activities. Faculty members could gather a baseline assessment of the departmental climate and assess the degree to which faculty members provide advisees’ with the above strategies and aspects of academic and social integration to enhance persistence. These trainings and workshops could also serve as a forum for faculty dissertation advisors to discuss advisees who are experiencing difficulties during the dissertation stage, as well as previous stages, to share ideas for aiding in these students’ persistence.

Findings also suggest that faculty dissertation advisors should focus less on student types (i.e., full-time vs. part-time, Ed.D. vs. Ph.D., international) and more so on the individual advisee and his/her needs and concerns throughout the dissertation stage. Additionally, for those who do not do so, findings indicate that dissertation advisors should consider reaching out to their advisees more regularly, especially with the threat of isolation and the risk for dropout from the program.

Universities

As mentioned in Barnes and Austin (2009), deans and department chairs can establish “standards of excellence” for advisors to follow to aid in advisees’ persistence. Barnes and Austin described these standards as yearly evaluations of advisees’ progress, guidelines for advising and mentoring doctoral students, and the implementation of graduate student handbooks to help advisees understand the university requirements for degree completion and graduation. Moreover, departments can develop workshops on effective advising techniques and strategies to give dissertation advisors a set time where they reflect on their own advising experiences and practices (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Workshops can also be used to train new faculty members on their role as a faculty dissertation advisor (e.g., basic advisor responsibilities, methods to approach threats to advisees’ persistence, building mentoring relationships).
Departments could also offer several social and educational activities (e.g., dinners, monthly research roundtable discussions, speakers) for doctoral students to enhance academic and social integration. Departments may also personally reach out to those who are in the dissertation stage to invite those students to departmental activities to keep doctoral students academically and socially integrated in the degree completion process.

**Future Research**

Results of this study lend several suggestions for future research. Future studies should include a larger sample size, as well as advisors from other disciplines, to determine commonalities, as well as disciplinary differences, among the role of a faculty dissertation advisor. These findings would help demystify and standardize the role of the advisor, especially during the dissertation stage where the advisor is the advisee’s main point of contact, and help to train and provide professional development opportunities for faculty dissertation advisors. However, advisors should take into consideration the individual needs of the advisee and what will help the advisee persist through the dissertation stage.

Future studies should also include interviews with advisors and their advisees who have already graduated to understand the full range of the advisor/advisee relationship and what the advisor did, from the advisor and advisee perspective, to help the advisee persist through the dissertation stage. This type of study would provide a complete understanding of advisor/advisee relationships versus having separate literature on the student perspective and the faculty perspective that come from various disciplines, departments, and programs.

Future longitudinal studies could focus on an advisor/advisee relationship from the beginning of the program through graduation to understand an advisor’s overall role in students’ persistence throughout doctoral programs (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Additionally, future studies
could give attention to advising at different types of institutions. For example, do advisors at smaller institutions where there may be less of an emphasis on research and publishing utilize the same strategies or focus more of their attention on certain aspects of advising? Perhaps those advisors who give more attention to advisees and less to research and publications have developed different types of strategies that are more student persistence focused.

Additional studies on the doctoral student experience should seek to understand systematic ways to counter the isolation of the dissertation stage, as this study did not offer solutions to this continual problem. Furthermore, given that academic and social integration keep students connected to/involved in a program, additional research should be done to understand exactly “how” faculty dissertation advisors facilitate academic and social integration, through interviews and observation periods, since results showed they at least do encourage aspects of academic and social integration. For example, in reference to academic integration, how do advisors help advisees gain the knowledge and skills for their disciplines and aid in workforce development? In reference to social integration, what are ways advisors encourage advisees to connect with others in the campus community? How often do advisors provide this encouragement? These studies could provide additional strategies to strengthen students’ academic and social integration during the dissertation stage and add additional substance to Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence.

Furthermore, one limitation of this study was that during interviews participants were giving answers based on what they thought of at that moment. It is possible that participants utilized additional strategies that were mentioned by other participants during their own interviews, however, did not think to include those in their own responses. Therefore, it is suggested for future studies that interview results be used to generate additional questionnaire
items and focus group topics to determine whether results of this study are common among other faculty dissertation advisors.

**Conclusion**

Given that students have the most frequent interactions with the dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage, this study aimed to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage, from the advisors’ perspective. Specifically, participants were faculty dissertation advisors in the education field. This study answered (1) how faculty dissertation advisors define their role during the dissertation stage, (2) general strategies advisors use during the dissertation stage to help students persist, (3) strategies used by advisors to assist different types of students during the dissertation stage and students experiencing various threats to persistence, and (4) how advisors facilitate academic and social integration at the dissertation stage.

Consistent with Barnes and Austin’s (2009) findings, results showed that advisors utilized several functions, including collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising when working with advisees during the dissertation stage. They also value several characteristics, friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest, when performing their role as a dissertation advisor. Additionally, participants indicated they use a series of general strategies, which Barnes and Austin termed as “helping advisees be successful”.

Findings also identified five themes of threats to students’ persistence during the dissertation stage, as well as corresponding strategies participants used to help advisees maneuver these threats to persistence. The themes included advisees’ personal responsibilities, psychological concerns, time, dissertation project hurdles, and isolation. While Tinto’s (1993) model of doctoral student persistence failed to elaborate on how the dissertation advisor
facilitates academic and social integration during the dissertation stage, results indicated that, in general, faculty dissertation advisors do at least encourage advisees’ academic and social integration during this stage.

Results of this study can be used to further research on the doctoral student experience and the advisor’s role in that experience. Additionally, findings from this study can be used in policy and practice to help ensure students’ persistence during doctoral programs, especially during the dissertation stage.
EMAIL TO FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVISORS FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello <Insert Potential Participant’s Name>,

My name is Brantley Willett, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Florida State University. You are receiving this email based on your role as a faculty dissertation advisor in the College of Education. I write to you today to ask for your participation in my dissertation research entitled “Doctoral Advisors and Students’ Persistence at the Dissertation Stage.” The overarching purpose of this study is to understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage.

Participation is voluntary and involves the completion of a brief questionnaire, which will take approximately 15 minutes. All data will be kept confidential (to the extent allowed by law). You may skip questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty. If you are an associate or full professor who has graduated at least three students during the Fall 2003 to Fall 2013 semesters and are willing to participate in my research study, please click the link at the end of this questionnaire.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please feel free to contact me at [Contact Information]. Should you wish to speak to my major professor, Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones, feel free to contact her at (850) 645-9558 or tbertrand@admin.fsu.edu. This study involves minimal risk to participants; however, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at 850-644-7900, humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu.

You can access the questionnaire here: <INSERT SURVEY LINK>

Thank you for your time,

Brantley Willett
APPENDIX B

FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVISOR QUESTIONNAIRE

INFORMED CONSENT-QUESTIONNAIRE

I freely and voluntarily, and without force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled “Doctoral Advisors and Students’ Persistence at the Dissertation Stage.” This research is being conducted by Brantley Willett, who is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. I understand the purpose of her research project is to better understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage.

I understand that I will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. The total time commitment will be approximately 15 minutes. I understand there is possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study. I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. All my answers to questions will be kept confidential (to the extent allowed by law). Only the researcher will have access to my answers. My name will not appear in any of the results.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study.

I understand that I may contact Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones, Faculty Advisor, (850) 645-9558, tbertrand@admin.fsu.edu, or Brantley Willett at [redacted], [redacted], for answers to questions about this research. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, though the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-7900, humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. By clicking “I Agree” below, I understand that I am giving my consent to participate in the research project.

“I Agree”
The following questionnaire is for associate or full rank professors who have graduated at least 3 doctoral students during the fall 2003-fall 2013 semesters. The purpose of the questionnaire is to understand more about the role of the faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage and his/her role in helping students persist during the dissertation stage.

**Section 1: Advisor’s Perceived Responsibilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate the following statements:</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tailor my advising during the dissertation stage by assessing the needs of my advisee.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by providing clear direction on dissertation completion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by providing timely feedback.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them find reasonable, affordable, realistic, and manageable dissertation projects.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them cope with failure (e.g., unexpected results from an experiment, failed defense).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them select committee members who are supportive, useful, and able to get along with each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with their</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with faculty in the department during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with faculty outside the department during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help my advisees become independent in their ability to plan, conduct, and execute research during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I help ensure that my advisees develop the knowledge and skills for their disciplines during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to become engaged in/actively participate in professional organizations and associations during the dissertation stage (e.g., presenting at conferences, attending conferences).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I co-publish articles with my advisees during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage my advisees to publish articles during the dissertation stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the dissertation stage, I help ensure that my advisees develop the knowledge and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

145
skills for the workforce based on their career goals (i.e., connecting advisees to internships, graduate assistantships, professional development conferences/workshops, resume/vita/interview assistance).

---

**Section 2: Advisor’s Functions**

Please rate how much each function characterizes how you perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Very Similar</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Somewhat Similar</th>
<th>Not Similar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborator:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work together with my advisees on research projects during the dissertation stage. Collaboration involves dissertations, conference presentations, publications, and experiments. In doing so, I value my advisee’s ideas and opinions and treat them as a colleague.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentor:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In addition to my role as a faculty dissertation advisor and making sure all required paperwork is completed during the dissertation stage, I also take on the role of a mentor. As a mentor I serve as a support system and as a role model to help my advisees with psychosocial support, career assistance, and professional development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocate:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to protect my advisees from any bureaucracy within the department or at the university they may encounter during the dissertation stage. If necessary and appropriate, I’ll rally colleagues in support of an advisee.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chastiser:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help my advisees in their professional development during the dissertation stage, I correct their behavior when their actions, attitudes, and behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 3: Characteristics and Behaviors of the Advisor/Advisee Relationship

The following section provides several characteristics and behaviors of the advisor/advisee relationship. Please rate how important each characteristic is in your role as a faculty dissertation advisor during the dissertation stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly/Professional: A relationship that is strong and positive but has boundaries that both the advisor and advisee respect. This relationship is friendly but not a friendship (ex: Advisors do not engage in social activities not offered through the department with their advisees or get deeply involved in their advisees’ personal/social lives).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial: A relationship where the power structures are dismantled or at least blurred so that the advisee feels that the relationship is balanced. The advisor respects and appreciates the advisee’s contributions to the “team” the advisor and advisee have formed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive/Caring: Providing advisees with the emotional and psychological encouragement that the advisee needs to complete the dissertation stage (i.e., showing care and concern for the advisee on a personal level).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible: Being available to meet with advisees or respond to advisees within a short/reasonable amount of time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest: Providing advisees with feedback (particularly around their writing) that is candid and straightforward.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic Questions:

How many of your students have successfully completed their dissertations during the **fall 2003 to fall 2013 semesters**?  Ed.D. ______  Ph.D. ______

How many students do you currently advise? ____________________________

How many are at the dissertation stage? ______________________________

Your Department:  A   B   C   D

Your Program: __________________________

How many years have you served as a faculty member in the program? ________

Your Current Faculty Rank: ____________________________

Age: __________________________

Gender: _______________________

Race/Ethnicity: _______________________

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview with me to discuss your experiences with advising students in the dissertation stage? Yes  No

If yes, please type your name, telephone number, and email in the space below
### APPENDIX C

**CODING FOR GENERAL ADVISING, ACADEMIC INTEGRATION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

**Section 1: Advisor’s Perceived Responsibilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>I tailor my advising during the dissertation stage by assessing the needs of my advisee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by providing clear direction on dissertation completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by providing timely feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them find reasonable, affordable, realistic, and manageable dissertation projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>I help advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them cope with failure (e.g., unexpected results from an experiment, failed defense).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>I help my advisees progress during the dissertation stage by helping them select committee members who are supportive, useful, and able to get along with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with their peers/classmates during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with staff and administrators in the campus-wide community during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with faculty in the department during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>I encourage my advisees to connect with faculty outside the department during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>I help my advisees become independent in their ability to plan, conduct, and execute research during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>I help ensure that my advisees develop the knowledge and skills for their disciplines during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>I encourage my advisees to become engaged in/actively participate in professional organizations and associations during the dissertation stage (e.g., presenting at conferences, attending conferences).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>I co-publish articles with my advisees during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>I encourage my advisees to publish articles during the dissertation stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>During the dissertation stage, I help ensure that my advisees develop the knowledge and skills for the workforce based on their career goals (i.e., connecting advisees to internships, graduate assistantships, professional development conferences/workshops, resume/vita/interview assistance).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVISORS

Interviewee Name: __________________________________

Pseudonym: _______________________________________

Professor Rank: ____________________________________

Department: _______________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________

Time: ______________________________________________

Description of Interview Setting:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Interview Questions:

(1) Describe for me general advising strategies that you use to support your doctoral advisees during the dissertation stage.  
(Probe for specific strategies or explanation of strategies provided as needed)

(2) Based on the questionnaire you took, Friendly, Professional, Collegial, and Accessible are characteristics you used to describe your advisor/advisee relationships.  Are there other characteristics you think you demonstrate to your advisees during the dissertation stage and why? (This question is referencing the Characteristics and Behaviors of the Advisor/Advisee Relationship section of the questionnaire. Based on how I will set up the survey in Qualtrics, I will have access to how each faculty member answered this section. For those faculty members who agree to an interview, before the interview I will see how they answered this section and pull out the characteristics they thought were very important or important). (Probe for Examples)

a. I noticed that you did not rank Supportive/Caring as being Very Important or Important. Please tell me more about that. (I will ask the faculty member about the characteristics they rated as somewhat important or not important based on his/her responses on the Qualtrics survey).
(3) Collaborator and Mentor are two functions you indicated you use to perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor. Are there other functions you think you use to perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor and why? (This question is referencing the Advisor Functions section of the questionnaire. Based on how I will set up the survey in Qualtrics, I will have access to how each faculty member answered this section. For those faculty members who agree to an interview, before the interview I will see how they answered this section and pull out the characteristics they thought were very similar or similar). (Probe for Examples)
   a. I noticed that you did not rate advocate and chastiser as closely describing how you perform your role as a faculty dissertation advisor. Please tell me more about that. (I will ask the faculty member about the functions they rated as somewhat similar or not similar based on his/her responses on the Qualtrics survey).

(4) What do you think are the top 3 issues that impede students’ progression at the dissertation stage? (Probe for why they think these are the top 3 issues)
   a. What examples do you have of students you have advised who experienced all or some of these issues? How did you help them? (Probe as needed)

(5) How would you advise a student who progressed through the coursework stage at a steady pace but failed to make consistent progress during the dissertation stage? Can you describe for me a situation when this occurred? (Probe as needed)

(6) How do your advising strategies differ when working with a full-time vs. part-time doctoral student who is in the dissertation stage? (Probe as needed)

(7) What are the differences in your advising approach/strategies when working with Ed.D. vs. Ph.D. students at the dissertation stage? Can you give me an example(s)? (Probe as needed)

(8) What strategies do you use specifically with international students at the dissertation stage? Do you have specific example(s) of students with whom you’ve worked? (Probe as needed)
Interviewer Comments, Observations, and Reflections on the Interview:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX E

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 • FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 03/11/2014

To: [Name Redacted]

Address: [Address Redacted]

Dept.: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
DOCTORAL ADVISORS AND STUDENTS’ PERSISTENCE AT THE DISSERTATION STAGE

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(h) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 03/10/2015 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Tamara Bertrand Jones <tbertrand@admin.fsu.edu>, Advisor
HSC No. 2014.12408
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM-INTERVIEW

I freely and voluntarily, and without force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled “Doctoral Advisors and Students’ Persistence at the Dissertation Stage.” This research is being conducted by Brantley Willett, who is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. I understand the purpose of her research project is to better understand how faculty dissertation advisors aid in students’ persistence during the dissertation stage.

I understand that I will be asked to complete an audio recorded interview. The total time commitment will be approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I understand there is possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study. I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. Emailing this form back to the researcher, Brantley Willett, will constitute my consent to participate in the research project. All my answers to questions will be kept confidential (to the extent allowed by law) and identified by a pseudonym. Only the researcher will have access to the transcribed interviews and any documents collected. My name will not appear in on any of the results.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study.

I understand that I may contact Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones, Faculty Advisor, (850) 645-9558, bertrand@admin.fsu.edu, or Brantley Willett at [redacted] for answers to questions about this research. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, though the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-7900, humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____________________________  ________________________________
Signature                                            Date

_____________________________  ________________________________
Signature of Investigator                                    Date

APPENDIX G

EMAIL TO FACULTY DISSERTATION ADVISORS FOR INTERVIEW

Hello <Insert Potential Participant’s Name>,

You recently participated in the questionnaire portion of my study, “Doctoral Advisors and Students’ Persistence at the Dissertation Stage.” At the end of the questionnaire, you indicated that you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Participation involves the completion of an audio recorded interview which will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. Participation is voluntary and all data will be kept confidential (to the extent allowed by law) and identified by a pseudonym. You may skip interview questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty.

If you are willing to participate in the interview, please let me know your availability on:

Monday, INSERT DATE
Tuesday, INSERT DATE
Wednesday, INSERT DATE
Thursday, INSERT DATE
Friday, INSERT DATE

Would you prefer to complete the interview by:

_____ Telephone
_____ Skype

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please feel free to contact me at [insert phone number] or [insert email address]. Should you wish to speak to my major professor, Dr. Tamara Bertrand Jones, feel free to contact her at (850) 645-9558 or tbertrand@admin.fsu.edu. This study involves minimal risk to participants; however, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at 850-644-7900, humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and I will be in contact soon with the date and time of the interview,

Brantley Willet
APPENDIX H

JOURNAL ENTRY

6-5-14 - I just read Dr. Smith's interview. Now I can doing coding I am questioning whether to code "support" as a category since it is such a general term and he didn't define support as encouraging but kind of gave an answer like I didn't ask but then answer could be summed up into accessibility/availability.

I also still don't understand how the characteristics function into this into my study so how are I supposed to code that information. Maybe I'll do that last. Maybe fire these any additional terms? What are examples of such terms?

6-7-14 - I'm reading Dr. Jackson's interview to be hung out that it's really important to be honest with students about where they're at since you still don't understand how the section fits into you and maybe in the write up say this is the characteristic/feature (s)
(d) What strategies do you use specifically with international students at the dissertation stage? Do you have specific example(s) of students with whom you’ve worked?

None were international students

- Concern about how they will pay for this

Reflections:
I felt much more relaxed now that I had (lagged) those 2 interviews. I asked 2 more questions to the said she's a qualitative researcher. But felt like I could probe into her answers more because she is used to this type of research. She even seemed like she was her opportunity to give back to support my research since she is a qualitative researcher. I didn’t feel as rushed as we last interview, this one seemed more natural. However, I still feel like I got equal amount of information in both interviews.
APPENDIX I

SCREENSHOT-NVIVO

If I expect them to collect their data and analyze it by the end of the semester some people have moved on to chapter 5 by then.

I realize that they get involved in their research and I really let them take ownership of their project as they should since once you've got your proposal you know the student is managing the leadership or the candidate is managing the leadership and dealing with their own deadlines going wherever they need to as far as if they've got to travel or if it's local to actually manage their project as I am here to help them review and talk with them about their work but I don't obviously do their data analysis that type of thing.
REFERENCES


Herzig, A. H. (2002). Where have all the students gone? Participation of doctoral students in authentic mathematical activity as a necessary condition for the persistence toward the Ph.D. *Educational Studies in Mathematics, 50*, 177-212. doi: 10.1023/A:102112642414


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Brantley P. Willett graduated from Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia in 2008. Her senior year at Longwood, she served as a member of the university’s honor board and discovered her passion for working in student conduct. After graduation, she enrolled in a master’s degree program at Old Dominion University and worked in the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity. After completing her Master of Science in Education in 2010, she began the Higher Education doctoral program at Florida State University.

While at Florida State, she served as a graduate assistant in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department and in the College of Business. She also completed an internship in the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

Dr. Willett is now the Coordinator of Community Standards at Clayton State University where she is responsible for investigating and adjudicating student code of conduct violations, as well as recruiting and training members of the university’s hearing panel. Additionally, she supervises interns and manages a $5,000 grant from the Georgia Governor’s Office of Highway Safety. The grant is used to provide students with programming geared towards understanding the effects of alcohol consumption and the dangers of driving under the influence.