



International Journal of Doctoral Studies

An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute
InformingScience.org

IJDS.org

Volume 15, 2020

CHAIR AGENCY, CHAIR PREPARATION, AND ACADEMIC SUPPORTS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DOCTORAL PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

Jason LaFrance*	Florida Southern College Lakeland, FL, USA	jlafrance@flsouthern.edu
Diane LaFrance	Florida Southern College Lakeland, FL, USA	dlafrance@flsouthern.edu
Teri Denlea Melton	Georgia Southern University Statesboro, GA, USA	tamelton@georgiasouthern.edu

* Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to understand dissertation chair agency, chair preparation, and academic supports provided by experienced Educational Leadership Ed.D. dissertation chairs in the United States.
Background	Previous research has identified attrition rates of 50-60 percent in education doctoral programs. This research helps identify the faculty profiles and academic supports provided by Educational Leadership faculty who have served on successful dissertation committees. Understanding these findings may help to improve retention and completion in other doctoral programs.
Methodology	This was an exploratory qualitative case study. Ten doctoral faculty who have successfully chaired 419 Ed.D. Educational Leadership dissertations at accredited U.S. colleges and universities were interviewed. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method.
Contribution	The findings from this study contribute to the body of knowledge on doctoral retention and dissertation completion by providing information on promising practices from the perspective of dissertation chairs.
Findings	While successful dissertation chairs exhibited expertise as researchers, seven of the ten participants reported that they had limited training for

Accepting Editor Peter John Sandiford | Received: November 5, 2019 | Revised: January 13, February 6, 2020
| Accepted: February 10, 2020.

Cite as: LaFrance, J., LaFrance, D., & Melton, T. D. (2020). Chair agency, chair preparation, and academic supports in educational leadership doctoral programs in the United States. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 15, 111-133. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4507>

(CC BY-NC 4.0) This article is licensed to you under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). When you copy and redistribute this paper in full or in part, you need to provide proper attribution to it to ensure that others can later locate this work (and to ensure that others do not accuse you of plagiarism). You may (and we encourage you to) adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any non-commercial purposes. This license does not permit you to use this material for commercial purposes.

	chairs dissertations. Academic supports included coursework that was organized coherently with a focus on opportunities for substantive feedback, writing support and research methodology.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Dissertation chairs should utilize their agency to ensure that the program has the proper resources to support doctoral education. This includes adequate writing support for graduate students, courses taught by faculty who are engaged in research and understand the requirements for completing a dissertation, and protecting faculty time so that they are able to provide students substantive feedback within coursework and at the dissertation phase.
Recommendation for Researchers	Researchers should continue to explore the causes of attrition in doctoral programs and identify specific actions that can be taken to improve program completion rates.
Impact on Society	Increasingly U.S. institutions of higher learning are being called to validate their success and improve retention rates. Understanding the faculty profiles and academic supports utilized by successful doctoral faculty has the potential to improve retention and thereby increase completion rates and consequentially alleviate the stressors that ABD students experience.
Future Research	Future research could focus on expanding the findings of this study by exploring the perspectives of faculty based on institution type and examining how socio-emotional factors such as student-student and faculty-student relationships are intentionally established in programs with high graduation rates.
Keywords	doctoral dissertations, dissertation chair, doctoral attrition, doctoral retention, graduation rate, educational leadership programs, educational leadership faculty development

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in the United States frequently discuss the quest for excellence (Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin, & Pichler, 2005). However, in the US, education doctoral programs are reporting attrition rates of 50-60 percent for the past six decades with 20-30 percent opting out at the dissertation phase (Rigler, Bowlin, Sweat, Watts, & Throne, 2017; Terrell, Snyder, Dringus, & Maddrey, 2012). In addition to high attrition rates, students who do complete often take an extended period to do so. For example, the median number of years required to complete a doctoral program for students in education was 6.3 years based on data collected in 2017 by the National Science Foundation (NSF, 2018). While data are unavailable specifically for educational leadership and Ed.D. programs, it is likely that attrition rates and completion timelines are similar to reported rates for education programs. This is particularly concerning when considering the financial and emotional capital that doctoral candidates invest in programs. These high attrition rates and extended time to completion have led to research being conducted on possible causes of this phenomenon.

Frequently research on doctoral attrition has focused on factors that lead to attrition, such as characteristics of students and programmatic variables rather than best practices for improving program completion rates (Bair & Hayworth, 2004; Di Pierro, 2007). What is known, however, is that supervision plays a crucial role in the quality of a student's doctoral experience (McCulloch, Kumar, van Schalkwyk, & Wisker, 2016). If doctoral faculty and dissertation chairs do not have the knowledge, skills, or dispositions to advise students effectively, it is unlikely that students' experiences will be high quality or that they will complete their doctoral program in a timely fashion if at all. The quality of the educational leadership program is directly related to the characteristics of the faculty members

who deliver the curriculum and work closely with students (Hackmann, Bauer, Cambron-McCabe, & Quinn, 2009). In addition, the reputation of a program and institution is contingent on the quality of the product and the graduates of the program. This is especially true when considering that educational leaders are leaders with a high degree of visibility in the community. Successful completion rates may encourage greater numbers of applicants and the quality of applicants, which contributes to continuous program improvement (Taylor, Vitale, Tapoler, & Whaley, 2018).

Researchers have examined student factors and the design of doctoral programs; however, little research has explored the dissertation chair perspective and what can be done to improve retention and completion rates (Di Pierro, 2011; McBrayer, Melton, Calhoun, Dunbar, & Tolman, 2018; Taylor et al., 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to understand dissertation chair agency, chair preparation, and academic supports provided by experienced Educational Leadership Ed.D. dissertation chairs in the US.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a review of the literature exploring doctoral attrition and persistence, Rigler et al. (2017) identified five constructs associated with improved outcomes for doctoral candidates. These constructs included: (1) chair agency, (2) chair candidate relationships, (3) candidate socialization and support systems, (4) candidate preparedness, and (5) financial considerations. For the conceptual framework of this study, we focused on two of these constructs: chair agency and candidate preparedness, and one additional construct, chair preparation as the level of preparation of a faculty member is associated with agency. In a separate study utilizing this data set, additional constructs were explored, including chair-candidate relationships, candidate socialization, and support systems. Financial considerations were not included in either study as they are outside the control of faculty.

CHAIR AGENCY AND PREPARATION

Social cognitive theory on personal agency suggests that individuals are producers of experiences and shapers of events (Bandura, 2000). This agency is influenced by a person's belief that he or she can accomplish tasks (self-efficacy) and the skill level they possess to accomplish the task. Vallacher and Wegner (1989) noted that people vary in their degree of knowledge, experience, and competence in specific domains. These factors influence actions and their level of personal agency. A low-level agent who lacks competence attends to mechanical aspects of a task. Conversely, a high-level agent considers action "in terms of causal effects, social meanings, and self-descriptive implications" (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989, p. 661). High-level agents work at higher cognitive levels, have a deeper understanding of tasks, and recognize their ability to shape environments. As Taylor et al. (2018) suggested, critical domains for successful dissertation chairs include research expertise, writing expertise, and quality of instruction in the research process. Therefore, in the context of chairing dissertations, a low-level agent might be limited by his or her own competence as a researcher, writer, or mentor and, therefore, merely attend to mechanical aspects of dissertation advising. Conversely, a dissertation chair with well-developed expertise in research, writing, and mentoring may exhibit a high level of agency and create experiences that enhance learning. It should also be noted that personal agency is affected by socio-structural influences (Bandura, 1999). Therefore, the competence of dissertation chairs and their ability to influence programmatic decisions within their institution are key components of student success.

What is concerning is that many Educational Leadership professors may be inadequately trained to conduct research and spend little, if any, time conducting research (Hackmann, Malin, & McCarthy, 2017; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004). One possible cause for this phenomenon in the United States is the expansion of doctoral degree programs beyond research and doctoral institutions to comprehensive institutions that:

May lack the faculty capacity and institutional resources to offer rigorous programs, may be unprepared to support the development of students' research skills, and may not have sufficiently high admissions standards. These concerns have also extended to the quality of preparation of educational leadership faculty members. (Hackmann et al., 2017, p. 21)

As of 2000, the percentage of faculty members that were hired from non-research and research institutions was nearly equal (Baker, Wolf-Wendel, & Twombly, 2007). As graduates from non-research institutions enter faculty ranks, they may lack sufficient research skills to develop their own personal research agendas and may be unprepared to supervise research and chair dissertations (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007; Orr, 2007). Noting that there may be a gap between the ability of faculty to conduct research and teach research and the needs of students for qualified faculty, professional development should be conducted to “curate the tools, attitudes, and practices for advisors (both new and veteran) and candidates” (Taylor et al., 2018, p. 11).

Furthermore, it is unlikely that faculty receive training in how to chair dissertations. As Amundsen and McAlpine (2011) stated:

Perhaps in no other role do the three areas of academic work (teaching, research, and service) come together as they do in the role of doctoral supervisor. Yet as vital as supervision is to the individual academic and student, to the discipline and to the institution, most academics receive no formal or systematic preparation for this complex role. (p. 37)

Dissertation chairs are fundamental to the success of doctoral students. Having high-quality faculty who are sufficiently prepared to do this work is essential to improving retention and completion rates for doctoral students. This is particularly true because dissertation chairs have a major influence over academic supports that are provided for doctoral candidates.

ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

It seems self-evident that students will be unable to complete a dissertation if they are unprepared academically. This lack of preparation can be examined as it relates to the initial knowledge and skills that a student brings into the program or from the perspective of what occurs within programs (Gittings, Bergman, Shuck, & Rose, 2018; Lovitts, 1996; Young, 2008). Frequently students are admitted to doctoral programs because they were good course takers in previous programs but find the transition to independent research difficult (Lovitts, 2005). Therefore, academic supports are necessary during doctoral programs.

Writing and research skills are frequently considered key skills students need to complete a dissertation. Kamler and Thomson (2008) noted, “practices of doctoral writing produce not only a dissertation but also a doctoral scholar” (p. 508). They also noted that the process of writing a dissertation helps scholarly identity be formed and reconfigured. Dissertation advisors and committee members should not assume that students possess requisite skills to complete a dissertation. Rather, faculty should create productive partnerships that facilitate the dissertation process and support a candidate's development as a scholar (Di Pierro, 2011; Kamler & Thompson, 2008). Taylor et al. (2018) suggested that high expectations for writing, research methodology, statistical expertise, and a commitment to a quality research project are necessary throughout doctoral programs so that students can develop these skills. These expectations are operationalized vis-à-vis faculty providing a vast amount of feedback regarding academic writing, faculty consistency in feedback by using a standardized rubric, and faculty requiring resubmission of student work until expectations for doctoral-level quality is sufficiently demonstrated during coursework.

While students should have systematic instruction at a high level of academic writing, this rarely occurs (Rose & McClafferty, 2001). To help students understand expectations and develop these skills, de Kleijn, Meijer, Brekelmans, and Pilot (2015) recommended that adaptive support strategies may be

of value. Adaptive strategies require dissertation chairs to determine students' needs and adapt support accordingly. These strategies include being explicit to students about standards, the quality of their work, and consequences for their behavior. In addition, providing critical feedback and sympathizing with students were found to be important (de Kleijn et al., 2015). Deuchar (2008) also proposed that supervisors need to be flexible and responsive to the needs of individual students while at the same time ensuring that students were active participants in the learning process.

One of the challenges of supervising dissertation students is balancing the need for support and student autonomy (Overall, Deane, & Peterson, 2011). Faculty should provide enough guidance for students to learn research skills while giving students autonomy to become confident, independent researchers. Through an effective mentoring process, students can develop research self-efficacy (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006). This is important because self-efficacy beliefs are associated with academic achievement and higher interest in research (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). While leaving aspiring scholars in isolation has frequently been utilized, it is important to note that students should not be left on their own to develop research skills (Lovitts, 2001). Instead, it is important for the academic advisor to be accessible and actively demonstrate an ethic of care while socializing students into the dissertation process (Barnes, Williams, & Archer, 2010). During regular meetings, supervisors need to provide task-related support while also encouraging students to think and act autonomously (Overall et al., 2011). By scaffolding learning opportunities, a doctoral student can transition to an independent researcher with guidance from a knowledgeable dissertation chair.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This exploratory qualitative case study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What level of personal agency and qualifications do successful U.S. Educational Leadership Ed.D. dissertation chairs exhibit?
2. How are successful U.S. Educational Leadership faculty being prepared to chair Ed.D. dissertations?
3. What promising practices do Educational Leadership faculty in the United States recommend for ensuring Ed.D. dissertation students are supported academically?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

The population of this study included tenure-track faculty members in the United States who successfully chaired doctoral dissertations in Educational Leadership Ed.D. programs. Criterion-based sampling and snowball sampling were utilized to recruit participants. Criteria included position (experience as a tenure-track faculty member), context (worked in accredited Educational Leadership Ed.D. program in the U.S.), and evidence of successfully serving on dissertation committees as chair. Participants were selected for this study because they were viewed as key informants (as described by Patton, 1990), as evidenced by meeting specific criteria.

This sample included 10 faculty at accredited colleges and universities across the United States that offer Educational Leadership Ed.D. programs. As a group, these faculty members have worked at institutions in thirteen states (see Figure A1 in Appendix). Nine of the faculty are currently employed in educational leadership programs, and one faculty member had recently retired. Combined, these faculty have successfully served on 714 dissertation committees (419 as chair) and have 160 years of combined experience as full-time educational leadership faculty (see Table A1 in Appendix). The range for the number of dissertations served on was from 18 to 152 (\bar{x} =71.4); of those, the range of dissertations chaired was from 3 to 101 (\bar{x} =41.9). Years of experience ranged from 6 to 40 years, with a mean of 16. While it was noted that the context from each of these programs varied due to a multitude of factors including institutional type (public or private), Carnegie classification, delivery

method (online, blended, or face-to-face), and number of full-time faculty, all programs offered an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership or Educational Administration. In essence, the graduates from these programs earned the same degree regardless of unique program factors.

Graduation rates for eight programs the participants currently teach in ranged from 50-90 percent with one new program reporting 100 percent of the students earning their doctoral degree in the first three years, with one student finishing during the summer term. As evidence of the success of these programs, it should be noted that only one faculty member reported a rate of 50 percent, four reported rates of 70-85 percent, and three reported 90-100 percent. One program did not have data, and one faculty member was recently retired, so rates were unavailable for those participants.

DATA COLLECTION

The researchers chose a qualitative approach as they sought to investigate the meaning that a group of individuals brought to the experiences of chairing dissertations in Educational Leadership Ed.D. programs in the US. Of all the qualitative approaches appearing in the literature, case study was the approach that best fit this study, as a case study approach is appropriate when dealing with “a bounded system, such as a process, an activity, an event, a program, or multiple individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 120). Undoubtedly, the topic under investigation dealt with a system bounded by all of the aforementioned as the researchers sought to investigate best practices for chairing dissertations vis-à-vis faculty who had engaged in what could be considered a process, an activity, an event, as well as a program that involved multiple individuals. As is common in case study, data collection consisted of interviews and document compilation (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). However, the primary data for this study were obtained from the interviews. While there are numerous and varied sources of evidence used in case studies and six sources of evidence used most commonly, “interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs” (Yin, 2003, p. 92). Interviews are considered the means believed to help investigate people’s views in greater depth (Dörnyei, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Yin, 2003, 2014).

Sixty to ninety-minute interviews were conducted utilizing a twenty-one question structured interview protocol on practices employed by successful educational leadership faculty in doctoral programs. Interview questions were synthesized from topics explored in the literature review. As is the case with structured interviews, the same questions were asked to all participants in the same order; however, probing for additional details where necessary was conducted as is recommended by Yin (2014). Probes included prompts such as, “Could you explain that in more detail?” and/or “Is there anything else you would recommend in addition to what you are doing?” Phone interviews were recorded using Google Voice. During and immediately following interviews, the interviewer documented initial thoughts as field notes. Recordings of interviews were then transcribed using a professional transcription service and reviewed for accuracy. These transcripts were then used for data analysis.

Throughout data collection, the researchers attended to the three principles of data collection used “to ensure *quality control*” in case studies as recommended by Yin (2003, p.106): the researchers used multiple sources of evidence (CV and other archival documents to substantiate statements of participants); creating a case study database, which researchers did using *dedoose*TM qualitative data analysis software; and maintaining a chain of evidence, which had been done through field notes, the aforementioned database, and the use of direct quotes from participants.

INSTRUMENTATION

As previously stated under data collection, a twenty-one question structured interview protocol on practices employed by successful Educational Leadership Ed.D. faculty in U.S. doctoral programs was utilized as the primary data collection instrument. Interview questions were synthesized from the literature on chair agency, chair preparation, and academic supports in doctoral education.

Once the protocol was completed, two pilot interviews were conducted to test interview questions for feasibility and validity. When an appropriate instrument for data collection does not exist, and a researcher-created interview protocol is used, experts (e.g., Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Yin, 2014) recommend conducting a pilot study to determine the utility of the instrument. After the pilot interviews, it was noted that many of the items focused on current practices rather than promising practices; therefore, additions, deletions, and emendations were made to the protocol to better differentiate between current practice and recommendations for promising practices for chairing dissertations.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview transcripts were analyzed based on the constant comparative method common to grounded theory and often utilized in case study, as detailed by Lincoln and Guba (1986), Patton (2015), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). In this method of analysis, researchers make comparisons across data sets as they seek to uncover similarities and differences in order to explain how a social phenomenon works. The researchers used three phases of coding common to grounded theory analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the initial coding phase, known as open coding, analysis began using an initial coding list that was developed by the researchers based on the literature. The initial coding list was entered into the analysis software and was refined with additions, subtractions, and refinements of codes as analysis progressed. During this phase, data were grouped into broad categories or “chunks.” Field notes and data gathered from documents provided by participants were used to substantiate or further refine categories. Additional data included participant CVs, admission criteria, programs of study, program handbooks, recommended texts, dissertation rubrics, course syllabi, and additional materials shared by participants. Once open coding was completed, a second coding phase, axial coding, was used to make connections and determine relationships between categories identified in open coding. In this phase, data were compiled in a new way in order to identify a central phenomenon. After categories were identified in the axial coding phase, the researchers moved to the third and final phase of analysis, selective coding. In this phase, categories were integrated and further refined until variables shared by specific categories could be determined. As Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested, the researchers’ goal was to achieve categorical saturation. The coding scheme was refined through three rounds until all three coders reached consensus. Once analysis was complete, the researchers identified direct quotes to substantiate their findings and establish the trustworthiness of those findings. In the final phase of analysis, the researchers used themes to develop “lessons learned” from the case, which are presented as recommendations and conclusions (Creswell, 2007).

FINDINGS

Findings are arranged by the three research questions.

CHAIR AGENCY AND QUALIFICATIONS

The first research question that this study sought to answer was, What level of personal agency and qualifications do successful U.S. Educational Leadership Ed.D. dissertation chairs exhibit? For chair agency, all faculty noted that they had the ability to influence the academic program and the educational outcomes of students. Evidence of this could be seen in the fact that faculty were engaged in or believed that faculty should be engaged in all aspects of the program and felt responsible for programmatic outcomes (n=10). The involvement occurred at three specific phases of the doctoral process: admissions, during coursework, and as chair. Faculty suggested that this was a key component to facilitate student progression successfully. For example, Faculty D stated:

I think it should be the role of faculty who are going to teach this student and who are going to be on their committees. It should be solely their decision as to who to admit and who not to admit because they are the ones who are going to work with them. You can easily give up

on a student because you say, 'Hey, I didn't admit this person, the dean did. If you are the people admitting these people, then you are responsible.'... I think we really need to be mindful of the number of faculty that we have and the quality of students when we admit. We are right now caught between a rock and a hard place with administration screaming about enrollment numbers that they would be very happy if we admitted 30 students, which would create a workload that is unmanageable. I now have a situation coming up where I'm going to have 16 students going to dissertation stage in May, and I have no one to chair them.

This was supported by other faculty such as Faculty A who stated, "I think faculty should be involved [in student admission]." Faculty F suggested, "Faculty have a heavy hand in the screening and scoring" and Faculty G stated:

it is important to have faculty involved because they have a stake in the success of students to the end of the process. If it is disconnected, what happens is you have admissions wanting to increase the number of students that are admitted. They are just worried about that number, and don't worry about the backend of how many dissertations have to be chaired.

This involvement also was evident throughout coursework and the dissertation process. As Faculty C stated, "We are firm about doctoral courses. They need to be taught by full-time faculty unless there is some special reason." Faculty H noted:

Our faculty split is 50/50 with tenure track and clinical. We did have some faculty who teach some courses on and off. I don't think we've ever had adjunct faculty teach in this program. Clinical faculty also serve as chairs. I think that's important because if you are just teaching courses, you don't have to worry about being proud of the work they are doing; it's easier to pass them.

This involvement throughout the program was seen as essential to helping students progress.

For qualifications, all participants (n=10) provided evidence of significant experience as researchers and writers. Evidence of qualifications included graduating from research-intensive institutions (n=10), demonstrated ability as researchers through publications (n=9), attending additional training and conferences (n=10), and serving and reviewing and editors for professional journals (n=10). Evidence of active engagement in research includes 486 publications as a group, including 27 books, 61 book chapters, 219 peer-reviewed publications, and 179 editorially reviewed publications (see Table A2 in Appendix).

It should be noted that faculty member E is the one participant who did not have an active research agenda. This participant indicated that a dissertation load of 102 dissertations (44 chaired) in his first six years in higher education adversely affected his ability to publish as a new faculty member. This number did not include additional unsuccessful dissertation committees. This was in sharp contrast to faculty member G who had 67 publications with 18 successful dissertations (3 as chair). This participant indicated his institution did not have him begin serving as a dissertation chair until he had been promoted to associate professor.

FACULTY PREPARATION

Research questions two sought to determine: How are successful U.S. Educational Leadership faculty being prepared to chair Ed.D. dissertations? Faculty preparation included categories for preparation for mentoring and preparation for dissertation chairing. For mentoring, participants (n=10) suggested that they were effective as mentors. However, their training and preparation to mentor students and their preparation to chair dissertations varied widely. Seven participants described mentoring as a naturally developed skill and personal disposition, while three had mentoring training. Interestingly, the seven participants who did not have training did not feel training was needed while the three that did believed it was beneficial.

In support of not having structured training, Faculty J suggested that mentoring was most effective when the candidate and professor formed an organic, authentic bond:

I think of mentoring relationship as a product of serendipity. Mentoring programs are very popular now in the academy. Mostly those programs are nominal at best because mentoring is a relationship, and relationships are not arbitrary. They are an interior process in that both the mentor and the mentee find themselves sometimes approaching without even realizing that the process is occurring ... At the institution I served prior to my retirement, we were going to have a full mentoring program and it just never got off the ground because some of the people who were going to be mentors didn't want to mentor and some of the people who were going to be mentored didn't want to be mentored.

Conversely, each participant who engaged in mentorship training suggested it provided a concrete framework for them as they worked with their dissertation candidates. For example, Faculty A stated, "I went through mentoring training as part of an initiative we were doing." When asked if he felt he benefitted from this training, he stated, "Yes, without a doubt." and suggested all faculty should have a similar experience. The positive support for mentoring training was also supported by two other faculty members with training. As well as sharing their thoughts about mentoring, respondents also discussed their preparation to become a dissertation chair.

Preparation experiences of faculty for chairing dissertations varied. Five started chairing dissertations in their first year in higher education with no training, and one had a year to assimilate into higher education and sit on committees. Four participants identified explicit training for faculty for chairing dissertations using a co-chairing model, although one of the participants who served as a co-chair said the experience did not add value since he did not have support from a co-chair who was assigned to work with him.

For six faculty, formal training for chairing dissertations was limited, and they *figured it out* as they went along. Faculty I suggested:

Everything you do when you walk into the situation is based on three things, your knowledge, your past experience, and your interests, and I think that trilogy of things really steers what you do until you can figure it out.

Faculty C noted, "Seriously, I just think I've taught myself and learned from observing, and I just try to figure it out." And Faculty E stated, "Honestly, it was trial and error." This concept of "figuring it out" by trial and error was common among faculty who did not have formal training and the one who had a poor co-chairing experience. There was also discussion about a need for specific dissertation chair training. For example, Faculty D stated, "I really think there should be formal training." Faculty H also articulated the need for training:

I think it would be helpful for faculty to have some clarity about what it means to chair dissertations, right? Like what kind of time [commitment] is generally involved? What kind of commitment are we looking for from faculty members? What kind of resources do we expect faculty members to provide to students? Are we editors or not editors? Just like all kinds of components of being a dissertation chair that I don't think we talk about very often. I think it just sort of an assumption that everybody knows what it means, and we'll do a good job with it.

The need for training is also evident in the statement from Faculty J about what is required of a dissertation chair. Faculty J noted there is an important set of knowledge and skills that are required to be a successful dissertations chair. "I like to refer to three Cs of chairing a committee: competence, communication, and cooperation." His description of three C's included competence to support students as a content expert, methodologist, and for developing "habits of a scholar." They also included communicating with students and committee members and being able to work collaboratively

with the committee to assist student's growth as an autonomous researcher. In his opinion, faculty should not be chairing dissertations until they have demonstrated their ability in the three C's.

The importance of training was also reiterated by three faculty who had a positive co-chairing experience and by the faculty member who had a poor co-chairing experience. Faculty G asserted, "I think that co-chairing is beneficial when handled correctly, especially for junior folks to maybe do a year or two co-chairing." Beyond suggesting that it could be valuable, Faculty C provided evidence that a faculty co-chairing program was beneficial. Along with other factors, she attributed this to improving "from a 74 percent graduation rate in six years to a 92 percent graduation rate in three years." This program is "an experiential mentoring process that's required" for new faculty and experienced faculty that chair dissertations. It is "also kind of enculturation for a faculty member that has been at different universities." This co-chairing model allows for faculty to develop a shared understanding of expectations of quality, institutional procedures, and available resources. In addition, by co-chairing the dissertation process becomes a learning process for the doctoral candidate and the new faculty member.

When students submit a draft of a chapter or proposal, we ask them to send it to both of us. Then, for instance, she might take the first read and put in her track changes and comments and send it to me, and I added mine. Then, I send the combined feedback to the student copying her. So she saw what I wrote, I thought about what she wrote, and she saw how I responded, maybe differently. She caught things I didn't catch, and so forth. So students got double feedback, which in some cases was almost overwhelming, but it was for her to learn and me to see what she was seeing or not seeing.

This dialogue between faculty about the dissertation process was seen as beneficial and especially helped faculty who had not previously chaired dissertations. "She knows that from a student perspective, she doesn't know it from our perspective. She thought everybody was as excellent a student as she was, but often they are not, and she's shocked." While completing a dissertation was seen as insufficient to understanding the role of a faculty member as a chair, it did influence how dissertation chairs saw their role.

Personal dissertation experiences of chairs had an impact on how they were prepared to chair. All ten participants suggested that their personal dissertation experience had a large impact on the way that they chair dissertations. Eight participants indicated that they had a positive dissertation experience, which they have modeled for their students. The other two indicated that they had a negative experience, which informed them about practices that they would never replicate. By going through the dissertation process, it helped them understand challenges doctoral students face managing time while raising a family, working full-time, and completing doctoral coursework. In addition, it helped them develop empathy for students since they had gone through the same experience. From this group, six participants were working full-time while they were students, while four were full-time students.

ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

The third research question was: What promising practices do Educational Leadership faculty in the United States recommend for ensuring Ed.D. dissertation students are supported academically? Four themes emerged from the data; however, it became apparent that the first two were intrinsically linked: need for support and high expectations, structure, and feedback.

Need for support and high expectations

It was apparent that students who enrolled in doctoral programs who worked with faculty in this study needed to receive academic supports to develop as scholars while being held to high expectations for academic productivity.

Faculty J highlighted the need for academic supports:

That's kind of what we're facing right now in the academy. We find ourselves having to help the student learn skills that they should already have when they come to that process, whether they have skills in data analysis or, as often the case, just skills in the written language, writing, abstract thought, and academic form.

Faculty F stated, "We have a lot of leaders who were not readers. I think they begin and get a little frustrated with the reading that they have to do." All of the other faculty also expressed a need for developing students' skills to various degrees.

As initial support, the faculty expressed the importance of making sure that students understood expectations for the program. This understanding set the stage for students' efforts and supported their progress throughout the program. These expectations were related to commitment and the time necessary to complete the program. The primary methods for conveying these clear expectations were through handbooks and early verbal communication. Faculty F proposed:

I think in any program where there is a terminal degree, especially with a dissertation involved, one of the first things you do with faculty is you sit down, and you decide what your faculty norms are going to be as far as expectations for the dissertation. The culture of the dissertation is determined by those norms, and I think they can be written into a handbook. But I think that you really protect the integrity of that dissertation culture with full-time faculty being really front and center with all of the students as far as what the expectations of the dissertation are.

The importance of the handbook for communicating expectations was also expressed by Faculty G, as he explained,

We kind of do a really good job with the handbook. We have been working and making sure the handbook is really clear as far as what milestones look like? How do you pick a chair? I think to make that handbook super-duper clear, making sure students read it is quite important.

And Faculty C stated, "that your handbook states very clearly the expectations ... we have it in writing ... we're not wandering in." In addition to written expectations, verbal expectations were discussed.

Verbal communication was described as explicitly sharing expectations for the quality of student work, timelines, and the role faculty members would play in supporting the student during the dissertation process. Faculty E declared:

I try to communicate with people in terms of expectations. Effective communication is being explicit with them very early on. When they ask me to chair, the first thing I say is, 'I will be your mentor, but here are my expectations. Here is how I operate; here is how I work. If it doesn't meet your needs, then you need to find someone else.'

Faculty J explained:

You just have to have those candid conversations, and that's the only way to get them to realize the time commitment and the commitment to approaching the process with the disposition of the mind of the scholar. That's what separates the dissertation as a product of scholarship rather than being just another really big homework assignment. I say, 'you've got to sit your back in a chair and do the work, even if you just sit there and chew on your pencil end. You know, you've got to devote yourself' ... and this is a habit of the mind that goes with scholarship.

Other examples include Faculty A's statement: "I'll say, all right this semester, we're going to be working on a 40-page lit review that you're going to be working on. And people are like, "What the ... !" This is a marathon, not a sprint." Faculty I added, "I have these *coming to Jesus* moments with

them and talk to them.” The foundation of expectations for the program and required time and commitment for the dissertation provided the foundation that helped students’ progress academically during coursework and the dissertation phase. The dissertation chairs also discussed the importance of structure during coursework and the dissertation phase.

STRUCTURE

In addition to support and expectations, structure during coursework and during the dissertation phase emerged as important considerations for faculty.

All faculty described the importance of a series of courses specifically designed so students could write chapters of their dissertation within coursework. Faculty F noted:

The dissertation is not something that comes at the end of the program once they finish all course work. It’s actually built into it, and I think that also keeps most people on track. Then you don’t have those large numbers of students who are leftover.

Similarly, Faculty G shared:

Last year, we started a series of three one-credit courses because we realized our students were struggling with how to come up with dissertation components like the theoretical framework. So we offered a course on theoretical and conceptual frameworks. We have another course on how to write a literature review. We have another course in academic writing. We now offer that through summer, and that seems like a good fit.

Having a series of courses where students’ time was explicitly structured reduced the challenge that doctoral students experience with managing time. In addition, this structure created an environment where students could begin the initial phases of the dissertation under the close guidance of a professor.

Other programs described unique program features for successfully supporting students. For example, Faculty H reported a 90 percent completion rate for students and described offering students a three-year or a five-year plan of study to accommodate for the diverse needs of working professionals and Saturday research seminars to provide supplemental research instruction throughout the program. “Rather than courses dedicated to dissertation writing and a dissertation proposal class like some places, we have a set of Saturday seminars that are required for them that kind of do the same thing.” These seminars occurred multiple times throughout each semester, were attended by about a third of the Ed.D. faculty at each seminar, and included having . . . “an entire Saturday morning, for example, dedicated to how you think about your topic, and how do you identify what a couple of solid research questions are” and “help them think through that stuff in small groups.” Faculty H also discussed programs being cautious about “instructor drift” where “writing support can be very arbitrary in the sense of what any given professor does in any given class.” Therefore, he recommended faculty should evaluate the alignment between courses and expected outcomes to avoid drift even when the course sequence might have been created to get people ready to finish the dissertation.

Another innovative program was described by Faculty member C. This three-year program included two years of coursework and one year for the dissertation and reported an improvement in graduation rates from 74 percent in six years to 92 percent in three years since being redesigned in 2009. One unique part of this program is that the dissertation was treated as coursework. While the institution allowed for seven years for degree completion, the educational leadership faculty agreed to hold students accountable for productivity each semester. “It is like a seminar, so they get graded.” Students earn A, B, or F, and faculty hold themselves accountable for providing feedback in one to three days so students can maintain momentum and meet deadlines. Explaining why they decided to maintain structure, she discussed challenges students had when formalized structure ended, “I just thought, well, is this really ethical to take students money semester after semester when they choose

not to do work? We shouldn't allow that." This program also included sequenced writing rubrics that are integrated into each course to provide students feedback on academic writing and writing support for graduate students through a writing center. In addition, students are tracked within courses based on their writing and were referred for support early in the program. "So we're keeping tabs on these students as they go through." If weakness is noted, it is, "instantly brought up to students who were having difficulty writing so [they could be] referred to a graduate student writing support that's in our College. They can get help with their writing ... I do think that expanded writing support is important."

Since structuring the dissertation as part of coursework may be controversial, some dissertation chairs were asked how they would respond to faculty who believed coursework should not be designed specifically toward the dissertation. Faculty member G advised:

I think you can spoon-feed the process because it's new for everyone. You can structure as much as you can to alleviate uncertainty. As faculty, we have a responsibility to teach students, so we teach content and try to teach this as well.

Faculty I also added, "Systems are perfectly designed to get the results that we get. And so if we're getting these poor results, let's look at changing the system." This thought process provided an impetus for redesigning a program to include systematic instruction so that graduates could make a bigger impact in their context and develop research and writing skills. As an additional effect, this program reported retention and completion rates of over ninety percent.

When coursework ended, students worked independently without formal structure in nine programs. However, these nine dissertation chairs discussed taking an active role in creating a schedule for students and proactively monitoring their academic progress. Faculty I suggested:

Students need to be taught how to become researchers. You can't just set them free and then expect that they're going to learn how to be researchers. Some people will – you did, I did, I think other faculty did, but I don't think that's a best practice.

Faculty D explained, "I try to teach them how to manage the dissertation, how to manage their time, and how to manage their paperwork." Faculty E suggested, "I call it chunking. Instead of saying, *go off and write chapter one*, we work on an introduction, context, the problem statement, the purpose, and the research questions individually. Then I ask them, let's now go to the next piece." In each case, it was clear that continuous academic engagement was seen as critical for making sure students completed the dissertation and that the faculty proactively communicated with students throughout the process.

FEEDBACK

The final theme for question three was feedback. Feedback that was timely, focused on a quality product, and supportive of student learning were discussed as essential supports.

Timeliness in providing students with feedback was seen as essential. Faculty C indicated:

Well, we pride ourselves on giving helpful feedback immediately so they can continue to work. I think that's the number one complaint that doctoral students have, a lack of helpful feedback, and lack of feedback in a timely manner. That's the first thing I do every morning. I make that a priority when I get up, walk my dog, get a cup of coffee, and turn on the laptop. So I think that in our program, we give feedback within 24 hours. If I'm busy, then we need three days; we don't mean three weeks.

Faculty F also discussed a 24-hour turnaround, "I generally stop and try to turn it around 24, 48 hours just for my management of all the work, trying to keep up with everybody. It just works for me. Get it done; send it back." Other faculty discussed feedback times of one to two weeks. In addition to timeliness, feedback on quality was discussed.

Quality could be seen in the discussion of rubrics and general comments to students. On rubrics, Faculty C stated, “I sound like I’m really harsh, but the truth is students must have targets.” Faculty J also discussed rubrics and their usefulness in creating a common understanding:

You have to have very clear rubrics to specify for the student how you’re framing your evaluation. The target has to be known, and even before we would start that task, we would confer, we would go over those rubrics item by item and get our heads around what this is saying in terms of the exercise that we were working on at the time.

Other faculty verbally shared expectations for student work and what they would provide for students. For example, Faculty E declared, “I establish the rules of the engagement so to speak” and discussed turnaround times for feedback, his other obligations, the importance of being respectful of his time, and quality:

I try to explain to them too that I’m not going to rubberstamp work if it’s not of quality. You are not moving forward. I want to establish those things very early on with them. If I’m providing you with revisions, don’t hand me another draft that didn’t incorporate those revisions because it shows me that you are trying to cut corners, and this is not important to you. If I’m spending the time doing it, you have to spend time changing it.

Faculty D shared similar sentiments, “I state, ‘I will give them time and attention that is necessary to complete this in the timeliest manner. However, your obligation is never to send me junk. I don’t want to see the first draft of anything of yours. I want you to go through and proofread it ... junk is a waste of both of our time.’” Faculty I explained, “you have those coming to Jesus moments with them and talk to them ... they want to fixate on when they’re going to get done. I get the same question all the time, and I always say quality, not quantity.” Meanwhile, Faculty A discussed the importance of quality by bringing attention to the importance of the work and the audience. “It’s what, so what, now what. I always use the example: your dissertation is going to be available online where people around the world are going to see it. Understanding this is a different type of work than your school accountability report that you send into the district is important.” In each of the cases, the respondents believed they needed to explicitly share what the students’ responsibility was for creating a quality product because many students appeared to assume that the faculty member would edit or significantly revise their work for them.

While faculty discussed providing clear feedback on writing, they also discussed modeling, walking students through feedback together to clarify and help develop skills, and helping them work toward autonomy. Faculty I discussed:

The only people I cannot help are those who are unwilling to give me something, and I don’t care how bad it is ... Modeling writing, I think that’s important. When you tell a student to stop using a passive voice, they don’t know what you’re talking about ... So you have to be willing to model for students, and a lot of people don’t model.

Faculty J indicated that feedback was conducted in writing, and then students were required to meet to discuss what the feedback meant and how the students could improve their writing. This feedback was given so that students learn to use their research and writing skills independently. Faculty E described working with students more frequently early on in the dissertation process and gradually moving them toward autonomy:

Initially, I meet with them either biweekly or weekly. I must say that a lot of that depends on the students. All students are not equal. Other students require a little more support than others in the initial phase of the proposal. I do meet with them either weekly or every two weeks or sometimes every three weeks depending on the students. I provide a lot of my time during the proposal. Once they are through the proposal, the IRB process is approved, and your idea is approved, then they are often on their own to a large extent.

Encouraging autonomy could also be heard from Faculty C and Faculty D. In fact, Faculty C stated, “I’ve cautioned new faculty about this a lot, don’t write it for them. To help them, you give them some examples, but then they need to write.” By doing this, students take ownership of their projects and develop self-efficacy to complete the work.

DISCUSSION

We set out to better understand promising practices for chairing Educational Leadership dissertations in Ed.D. programs in the United States. Specifically, we wanted to understand how successful Educational Leadership faculty were being prepared to chair dissertations in the United States and what skills they saw as necessary for successful chairs. In addition, we sought to discover effective academic supports successful Ed.D. Educational Leadership program faculty utilized for ensuring candidate preparedness. By learning this information, we hoped to identify promising practices that have the potential to improve retention and completion rates in doctoral programs.

Fifty to sixty percent attrition rates, as reported by Terrell et al. (2012), and 6.3 years for education doctoral students’ degree completion as reported for 2017 by the National Science Foundation (NSF) (2018) are less than desirable. Therefore, educational leadership faculty should strive to move beyond competence towards excellence in doctoral dissertation advising. Undoubtedly, the success of doctoral students in the United States is influenced by several critical factors. While faculty do not have control of all these factors, they do work on the frontline where this work is being done. Therefore, they have a unique perspective on what can be done to improve retention and completion rates in doctoral programs.

Programs that seven of the ten faculty worked in reported rates exceeding national averages. Three of these programs discussed graduation rates of 90 percent or greater. In addition, these faculty demonstrated success by serving on 714 dissertations (419 as chair). This evidence of success supports the notion that these findings add to the literature on doctoral program retention and dissertation completion.

The dissertation chairs in this study all exhibited high levels of agency in their programs and as dissertation chairs. This supports research by Vallacher and Wegner (1989), which suggested that high-level agents work at higher cognitive levels, have a deeper understanding of tasks, and recognize their ability to shape the environment. This is an important finding because the heart of any educational institution is its faculty. Unfortunately, there are programs where faculty voices are marginalized to increase enrollments without consideration for educational quality and programmatic outcomes. Participants expressed frustration with the requirement to admit large numbers of Ed.D. students with little to no consideration by administration as to the ability of these students to manage the rigor of completing a dissertation and/or who would chair these students’ dissertations. Therefore, it is crucial that faculty have a voice in all aspects of the educational process from admissions to graduation to ensure program quality.

Taylor et al. (2018) also suggested research expertise and quality of instruction in the research process are desirable attributes for dissertation chairs. Nine of the ten successful dissertation chairs exhibited expertise as researchers, as evidenced by the 486 publications with the one outlier being negatively affected by a high dissertation load (102 successful committees in 6 years in higher education). It is likely that this finding is due to the expectations for research productivity they experience as tenure-track faculty and the type of institutions in which they work. However, it should be noted that seven of the ten reported that they had limited training for chairing dissertations as they became full-time faculty. This supports the assertion by Amundsen and McAlpine (2011) that it is unlikely that faculty receive training in how to chair dissertations. This is particularly important considering the findings from Baker, Wolf-Wendel, and Twombly (2007) that approximately half of the faculty in educational leadership programs were not trained at research-intensive institutions.

Academic supports included clear expectations, structure, and feedback. The programs with 90-100 percent graduation rates included systematic instruction that was focused on developing academic writing skills and research skills. This supports Rose and McClafferty's (2001) recommendation that students should have systematic instruction at a high level of academic writing. In addition, courses in these programs were organized coherently with a focus on opportunities for substantive feedback, writing support, and research methodology.

By sharing clear expectations and by providing timely feedback, focused on a quality product and supportive of student learning, the dissertation chairs were utilizing adaptive support strategies that were individualized to students' needs (de Kleijn et al., 2015). In addition, they assisted students as they developed as a doctoral scholar (Kamler & Thomson, 2008), and balanced the need for support and student autonomy as students became independent researchers (Overall et al., 2011). Furthermore, these successful dissertation chairs were accessible and actively demonstrated an ethic of care while socializing students into the dissertation process (Barnes et al., 2010). This occurred from the moment that they became doctoral students as faculty worked to provide structure formally during coursework and through active engagement with the student during the dissertation phase. The dissertation chairs understood the challenges students face while working in isolation and proactively and routinely contacted their dissertation students to provide advice on time management and writing support. In one case, this sense of urgency for completing the dissertation was structured formally as coursework. This was seen as a key component of this program's success.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACULTY

A well-designed program with faculty who are committed to student success and have the requisite skills to chair dissertations benefits students, faculty, and the institution. Based on the findings of this study, we have the following recommendations.

First and foremost, dissertation chairs should utilize their agency to ensure that the program has the proper resources to support doctoral education. This includes adequate writing support for graduate students, courses taught by faculty who are engaged in research and understand the requirements for completing a dissertation, and protecting faculty time so that they are able to provide students substantive feedback within coursework and at the dissertation phase. In addition, in programs where faculty lack agency, they should actively seek to become involved with the operations of the program. This includes having a voice in admissions decisions so that students that are admitted to a program have a reasonable chance for success.

Another recommendation is that faculty who are chairing dissertations should receive specific training and support through a co-chairing model with a successful dissertation chair who has a solid knowledge of the available institutional resources. This support should be provided for all faculty who are new to an institution, including experienced faculty and those who are entering higher education for the first time. By implementing this, the co-chairing model provides learning opportunities for the doctoral candidate and the new faculty member. Additional benefits include enculturating new doctoral faculty to institutional norms and allowing faculty to develop a shared understanding of expectations of quality, institutional procedures, and available resources.

In addition, dissertation chairs should routinely meet and evaluate program outcomes to examine retention and completion rates and possible causes for deficiencies. This review should include an examination of coursework and expected outcomes for the program to reduce the influence of academic drift. Beyond coursework, dissertation chairs should actively provide academic support to students during the dissertation phase. Traditionally, students struggle when left on their own to manage time and complete the dissertation. Therefore, faculty should provide instruction on how to manage time and develop the habits of scholars. By contacting students weekly or monthly, dissertation chairs kept students engaged in the academic process. These chairs also provided feedback as quickly

as 24 hours in some cases so that students could meet deadlines and so that momentum was maintained. As such, providing timely feedback is the final recommendation for this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory case study examined dissertation chair agency, chair preparation, and the academic supports dissertation students receive in an effort to understand better ways to improve doctoral retention and completion rates from the perspective of Educational Leadership Ed.D. dissertation chairs in the US. Since one of the limitations of this study was a limited sample size, future researchers could expand on the population of this study to build on these findings. In addition, faculty in Ph.D. programs or from other disciplines with Ed.D. programs could be interviewed. Further, researchers may also consider examining how other issues associated with doctoral students such as socio-emotional factors are addressed in doctoral education. For example, faculty could be interviewed to understand better how faculty intentionally build student-student and faculty-student relationships to attend to the socio-emotional needs of doctoral students.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study are limited to the experiences and beliefs of ten dissertations chairs in Ed.D. Educational Leadership programs in the United States. As such, these findings are not generalizable to faculty from Ph.D. programs, from Ed.D. programs in other disciplines, or to faculty in countries outside of the United States. However, generalizability is seldom the intent of qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Instead, sufficient evidence is provided (see Tables A1 and A2 in Appendix) so that transferability to other contexts within and outside the US may be possible. This research focused on the training and credentials of faculty, along with the academic factors associated with program completion. While these are important considerations for successful programs, additional variables that affect retention and completion rates such as candidate preparedness, financial considerations, and socio-emotional factors need to be explored further.

This study is delimited to Ed.D. Educational Leadership faculty in the United States that serve on dissertation committees and their perceptions of their experiences. This population was selected due to their experience as full-time faculty members in Educational Leadership Ed.D. programs across the United States. As such, it does not represent the perceptions of other stakeholders such as doctoral students or faculty who chair dissertations in other disciplines.

CONCLUSION

Dissertation chairs have a unique perspective on the issues associated with doctoral retention and completion. Therefore, they are key informants who have the knowledge and ability to institute change and improve the educational outcomes for students who enroll in U.S. Educational Leadership Ed.D. programs. The findings from this study suggest that faculty need to be proficient in writing and research in order to teach doctoral students the skills that are necessary to complete a dissertation. In addition, faculty in this study had started chairing dissertations with little preparation to do so. This appears to be an opportunity for professional development for faculty. Finally, academic supports are largely built into the coursework of successful programs. However, during the dissertation phase, the most difficult portion of the doctoral process, the frequency and quality of support are largely contingent on the time and efforts of the dissertation chair since the formalized, structured support of coursework rarely exists. Providing strong support at the dissertation phase is essential for increasing the retention and graduation rates of Ed.D. students. In order to do this, it is important for programs to ensure that they manage enrollment while considering the capacity for faculty to dedicate the necessary time to chair dissertations.

REFERENCES

- Amundsen, C., & McAlpine L. (2011). New academics as supervisors: A steep learning curve with challenges, tensions, and pleasures. In L. McAlpine & C. Amundsen (Eds.), *Doctoral education: Research-based strategies for doctoral students, supervisors, and administrators*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0507-4>
- Baker, B. D., Orr, M. T., & Young, M. D. (2007). Academic drift, institutional production, and professional distribution of graduate degrees in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(3), 279-318.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07303320>
- Baker, B. D., Wolf-Wendel, L., & Twombly, S. (2007). Exploring the faculty pipeline in educational administration: Evidence from the survey of earned doctorates, 1999 to 2000. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 189-220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X06293716>
- Bair, C. R., & Haworth, J. G. (2004). Doctoral student attrition and persistence: A meta-synthesis of research. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 481-534). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-2456-8_11
- Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2(1), 21-41.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-839X.00024>
- Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3), 75-78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00064>
- Barnes, B. J., Williams, E. A., & Archer, S. A. (2010). Characteristics that matter most: Doctoral students' perceptions of positive and negative advisor attributes. *NACADA Journal*, 30(1), 34-46.
<https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-30.1.34>
- Bowen, W. G., Kurzweil, M. A., Tobin, E. M., & Pichler, S. C. (2005). *Equity and excellence in American higher education*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- de Kleijn, R. A., Meijer, P. C., Brekelmans, M., & Pilot, A. (2015). Adaptive research supervision: Exploring expert thesis supervisors' practical knowledge. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 34(1), 117-130.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.934331>
- Deuchar, R. (2008). Facilitator, director or critical friend? Contradiction and congruence in doctoral supervision styles. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(4), 489-500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510802193905>
- Di Pierro, M. (2007). Excellence in doctoral education: Defining best practices. *College Student Journal*, 41(2), 368-375.
- Di Pierro, M. (2011). Innovations for navigating the doctoral dissertation. *The Journal of Faculty Development*, 25(1), 12.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Gittings, G., Bergman, M., Shuck, B., & Rose, K. (2018). The impact of student attributes and program characteristics on doctoral degree completion. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 30(3), 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20220>
- Hackmann, D. G., Bauer, S. C., Cambron-McCabe, N., & Quinn, D. M. (2009). Characteristics, preparation, and professional development of educational leadership faculty. In M. D. Young, G. M. Crow, J. Murphy, & R. T. Ogawa (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders* (pp. 225-267). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Hackmann, D. G., Malin, J. R., & McCarthy, M. M. (2017). Characteristics of tenure-line faculty in leadership preparation programs: An analysis of academic preparation and administrative experience. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 12(2), 143-165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775115623524>
- Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2008). The failure of dissertation advice books: Toward alternative pedagogies for doctoral writing. *Educational Researcher*, 37(8), 507-514. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08327390>
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lambie, G. W., & Vaccaro, N. (2011). Doctoral counselor education students' levels of research self-efficacy, perceptions of the research training environment, and interest in research. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 50(4), 243-258. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2011.tb00122.x>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1986). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lovitts, B. E. (1996). *Who is responsible for graduate student attrition – the individual or the institution? Toward an explanation of the high and persistent rate of attrition*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New York, NY.
- Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of departure from doctoral study*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lovitts, B. E. (2005). Being a good course-taker is not enough: A theoretical perspective on the transition to independent research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(2), 137-154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500043093>
- McBrayer, J. S., Melton, T. D., Calhoun, D. W., Dunbar, M., & Tolman, S. (2018). The correlation between self-efficacy and time to degree completion of educational leadership doctoral students. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 13, 413-439. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4138>
- McCulloch, A., Kumar, V., van Schalkwyk, S., & Wisker, G. (2016). Excellence in doctoral supervision: An examination of authoritative sources across four countries in search of performance higher than competence. *Quality in Higher Education*, 22(1), 64-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2016.1144904>
- Murphy, J., & Vriesenga, M. (2004). *Research on preparation programs in educational administration: An analysis*. Columbia, MO: University Council for Educational Administration. Retrieved from http://3f1712qoj4l3y6ep2tqpwra.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/research_on_preparation.pdf
- National Science Foundation. (2018). *Survey of earned doctorates: Table 31: Median Years to doctorate, by broad field of study: Selected Years, 1992-2017*. Retrieved from <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>
- Orr, M. T. (2007). The doctoral debate: Rapid growth in educational leadership programs raises serious questions about selectivity and quality. *School Administrator*, 64, 16-20.
- Overall, N. C., Deane, K. L., & Peterson, E. R. (2011). Promoting doctoral students' research self-efficacy: Combining academic guidance with autonomy support. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 30(6), 791-805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2010.535508>
- Paglis, L. L., Green, S. G., & Bauer, T. N. (2006). Does adviser mentoring add value? A longitudinal study of mentoring and doctoral student outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(4), 451-476. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-9003-2>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rigler, K. L., Bowlin, L. K., Sweat, K., Watts, S., & Throne, R. (2017). *Agency, socialization, and support: A critical review of doctoral student attrition*. Paper presented at the 3rd International Conference on Doctoral Education, University of Central Florida. Orlando, FL.
- Rose, M., & McClafferty, K. A. (2001). A call for the teaching of writing in graduate education. *Educational Researcher*, 30(2), 27-33. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030002027>

Table A1. Demographics of Educational Leadership Faculty

Faculty	Gender	State	Experience as Faculty Member	Type of Institution / Carnegie Classification	Total # of completed dissertations as chair	# of completed dissertations as a committee member
A	Male	Florida	12 years	Doctoral: Professional Universities	7	15
B	Male	Florida	9 years	Master's College & University: Small Program	14	11
C	Female	Florida	19 years	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	101	51
D	Female	Georgia	15 years	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	77	45
E	Male	New York	6 years	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	44	58
F	Female	North Carolina	14 years	Baccalaureate Colleges: Diverse Fields	65	20
G	Male	Kentucky	11 years	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity Supplementary	3	15
H	Male	Colorado	20 years	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	23	40
I	Male	North Carolina	14 years	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	45	20
J	Male	Georgia	40 years	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity	40	20
Total			160 years		419	295

Table A2. Publications of Educational Leadership Faculty

Faculty	Books	Book Chapters	Peer-Reviewed Articles	Editorially Reviewed Articles	Total Publications
A	2	3	11	11	27
B	0	3	12	3	18
C	9	5	31	24	69
D	0	2	11	4	17
E	0	0	2	0	2
F	0	3	20	1	24
G	0	12	48	7	67
H	3	12	26	88	129
I	6	14	38	15	73
J	7	7	20	26	60
Total	27	61	219	179	486

BIOGRAPHIES



Jason LaFrance, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Florida Southern College. Previously he served as Director of the Center for Educational Leadership and Service at Georgia Southern University and was a teacher and administrator in public and private K-8 schools. His research focuses on technology innovation in leadership preparation and practice and improving completion rates in Educational Leadership doctoral programs.



Diane LaFrance, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor of Education at Florida Southern College. Prior to joining the faculty at Florida Southern College, she was an instructor at Georgia Southern University and was a teacher and administrator in both public and private K-8 schools. Her research focuses on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.



Teri Denlea Melton, Ed.D., is Associate Professor Emerita of Educational Leadership. She retired August 2019 after serving as a faculty member at Georgia Southern University, Barry University, and Lehigh University. During her tenure at Georgia Southern, Dr Melton served as Director of Educational Leadership programs. In addition to the many research committees on which she has served as a methodologist and content specialist, Dr Melton has served as committee chair for 66 doctoral dissertation committees and 12 Educational Specialist action research projects. Her current research focuses on strategies for successfully chairing dissertation committees.