What are Doctoral Students’ Perceptions of the PhD Process in the Faculty of Education?

A Pilot Study

by

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Abstract

This article reports on the findings of a study that sought to determine the personal experiences of doctoral students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Our initial research question was: “What are some of the factors that doctoral students in Education perceive to be significant in their PhD experience?” To investigate the question, we gathered data from both an online survey and from six individual interviews. The survey was designed to discover doctoral students’ perceptions of the relative benefits belonging or not belonging to a cohort, and the traits they identified as being important to a PhD student’s success in the Faculty. The findings were grouped into two categories: (1) aspects of the Faculty of Education doctoral program that students identified as working well; and, (2) aspects of the Faculty of Education doctoral program that students identified as working less well and requiring attention. Aspects of the Faculty of Education doctoral program that the students identified as working well, and
thus identified as being positive aspects of the experience included: supportive faculty; recourse to a cohort for both emotional and professional support; bi-monthly doctoral student meetings with the Associate Dean in charge of graduate students; and, the opportunity to become a participant in the scholarly community that was part of the Faculty of Education. Of the aspects of the Faculty of Education doctoral program that students identified as working less well and requiring attention, doctoral students cited: lack of support from some faculty members; cohorts that were not supportive; academic standards that were not as high as expected; and the lack of a scholarly community in the faculty.