

Creating Healthy Work Environments 2019

Empowering Faculty Through Early Engagement in Dissertation Development: A Cultural Evolution

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Doctoral programs have unique cultures through which the doctoral students transform into doctoral scholars. At the University of Phoenix, our culture has been to engage the doctoral committee once the dissertation chairperson and the doctoral student, working closely together, have crafted a research document that is organized, focused, and ready for the type of review and feedback needed to take it to the next level—implementation in the “outside world”.

As with all approaches, there are advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage to this approach is the potential for a strong, supportive bond between the student and chairperson, which can provide a foundation through which the student can craft a solid research document and transform from a student into a doctoral level researcher. The second advantage is that the committee—faculty with the expertise to support the student, who are committed to the student’s success but of the involvement of the document development—are then able to review and provide intensive feedback on the dissertation document drafted by the student and chair with “fresh eyes”. Then as a group, the student, along with the chair, and committee members can come together to exchange ideas and concepts, with the resulting document being very powerful and scientifically rigorous.

Naturally, this desired outcome is predicated on the chair and student having a shared vision of the direction of the dissertation research; the working relationship being effective both in terms of the dyad and then continuing to be functional when the committee members are added to the dynamics.

Despite the best of plans and intentions, sometimes it just doesn’t happen as anticipated. The chair, the student, and the committee members may have different perspectives, working habits or schedules. The student may not be ready to make the leap to scholar, or the chair or committee may not be ready or able to facilitate the student’s movement to that level. And at times, what seemed like a great idea at the onset may just not be working out. So, what do you do?

If you have a Healthy Workplace, you try new strategies and options to help students move forward, maintaining faculty and student engagement in the process. At the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies, we promote enhanced communication throughout the doctoral process and empowering the doctoral committee members by engaging them earlier in the process of dissertation development.

We are currently in the preliminary stages of implementation, which includes gradually increasing committee involvement at an earlier stage of dissertation planning, which we believe will ultimately result in greater insight of the doctoral dissertation development experience from multiple perspectives. The goal for the program is to improve the satisfaction of our doctoral committee members and students, as well as enhance the socialization of our doctoral students through expanded involvement in scholarly exchanges in the academic classroom setting. It is anticipated that this will also strengthen students’ evolution into doctoral scholars. The program will run until it has been determined that enough data has been collected to confirm the efficacy of earlier committee involvement in dissertation development.

Creating change in a long standing environment is never simple—particularly in a virtual environment. However, with a supportive administration, combined with open communication, incremental integration of change, and a realistic evaluation component incorporating debriefing and reconceptualization of the

process as needed, we anticipate a positive impact on the doctoral experience at the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies.

Title:

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References:

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Abstract Summary:

In the Healthy Workplace environment of the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies, we are constantly developing new strategies to enhance the environment for students and faculty. Currently we are exploring enhancing job satisfaction through empowering doctoral committee members by engaging them earlier in the dissertation development process.

Content Outline:

Main Point: Supporting dissertation development

1. Supporting Point #1: Early Faculty Engagement in Dissertation Development
 - encourage faculty involvement early in the student dissertation development process
 - provide structured and unstructured opportunities for faculty-student engagement
2. Supporting Point #2: Student Socialization in Scholarly Activities
 - promote student review of the literature, along with analysis and discussion related to published studies in area of interest
 - initiate faculty-student scholarly discussion regarding research concepts in classroom

Proposed Evaluation:

1. Faculty debriefing for each course
2. Document Active/passive time per week/course working with the student

First Primary Presenting Author

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Professional Experience: 2016-present-Lead Faculty Area Chair in Nursing, University Research Methodologist, University of Phoenix, School of Advanced Studies 2001-present- online facilitator for masters and doctoral programs in nursing University of Phoenix

Author Summary: Susan A. Orshan, PhD, RN is Lead Faculty Area Chair in Nursing at the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies. She has a good balance of academic and administrative responsibilities and works with multidisciplinary students which keeps classes very lively. Dr. Orshan received her BSN from the University of Pennsylvania and her masters and PhD degrees from New York University. Her private practice, Healthy Matters LLC, features Lamaze, Feldenkrais, therapeutic touch, & stress management.

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Professional Experience: I am an associate faculty member at the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies. My current positions are as a dissertation chair and committee member for students in nursing, health care, education and business administration.

Author Summary: I am currently dissertation chairperson at the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies, but through the years have served the University in multiple capacities.

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Professional Experience: Having been in higher education for nursing for over 17 years, I have had the opportunity to work with students and faculty in developing knowledge and skills related to research in traditional to virtual settings. As the Associate Dean of Instruction for Doctoral Health and Nursing programs, I am responsible for supporting faculty and students throughout their program and dissertation courses in an online environment and continuously seek to improve their experiences and learning.

Author Summary: As the Associate Dean of Instruction for the past 8 years in a totally online environment, the challenges for both students and faculty to develop research knowledge and skills while nurturing scholarly dialogue in an primarily online environment has provided provocative opportunities for discovery of best practices in higher education for doctoral nursing.