

Academic Speed Bumps:
Time to Completion of the Dissertation

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by

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(Abstract)

The purpose of this study was to determine factors impeding rapid completion of the dissertation. The population studied was 1990-95 graduates of the Department of Leadership and Policy Studies (formerly the Division of Administrative and Educational Services) of the College of Education at Virginia Tech. Two hundred ninety-four surveys were mailed. The total of potential eligible responses was 263. The total of returned, usable surveys was 192, for a return rate of 73 percent.

There was one primary research question, with four sub-questions:

Are there any student characteristics that can be used as flags for potential problems with completion of the dissertation?

- a. Are there any personal characteristics associated with time to completion of the dissertation?
- b. Are there any student situational conditions associated with time to completion of the dissertation?
- c. Are there any research capabilities associated with time to completion of the dissertation?
- d. Are there any aspects of committee dynamics associated with time to completion of the dissertation?

Two statistical procedures were followed: linear regression analysis to determine predictors of time to completion of the dissertation, and Chi-square analysis of the independent variables against speed of completion to determine which variables are most closely associated with relative time on the dissertation.

Regression analysis showed four significant predictors of time to complete the dissertation: how dissertation writing time was scheduled, computer skills at the beginning of the dissertation, perceived difficulties caused by job demands, and changes in advisor or committee membership. These predictors had a total r^2 of .189.

Chi-square analysis showed that the following variables were significantly associated with time to completion of the dissertation: perceived difficulties caused by lack of access to resources; whether the subject changed full-time employment or took a new full-time position; whether the subject was a member of the Counselor Education Program; emotional support from

the subject's employer; perceived difficulties caused by job demands; whether subjects were on-campus or off-campus, and relative distance from resources; how writing of the dissertation was scheduled; and whether the subject was employed full-time during the dissertation.

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