

Executive Summary

Established in 1867 as one of the original land-grant institutions, *the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ranks third among institutions in the country for the number of Ph.D. degrees awarded over the past century* (National Science Foundation, U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century, June 2006), with a current average of 670 annually. The Graduate College supports over 9300 students seeking advanced degrees in more than 300 graduate programs across campus - many of them ranked among the best in the nation.

However, despite this strong tradition of excellence in graduate education, we know that many students who enter Illinois doctoral programs leave without a doctorate - some of them after several years in their program. Some of this attrition is likely unavoidable, whereas some is highly desirable. But clearly some could – and should – be prevented.

We also know that graduate attrition and completion issues may be of higher concern for women and under-represented minorities who seek their doctoral degree at Illinois. Data from the National Science Foundation's report on U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century cites Illinois as third in the nation for Ph.D.s awarded between 1920-1999; however Illinois' ranking falls to eleventh when these data are stratified for women only. When these data are examined regarding under-represented minorities, our ranking falls to 14th, 26th and 33rd for African Americans, Hispanics and American Indians/Alaskan natives, respectively. These data point to areas of concern regarding recruitment of women and under-represented minorities into our doctoral programs, *however we must also examine our capacity to provide an environment that maximizes their retention and ultimate success.*

We have been committed participants in the Ph.D. Completion Project led by the Council of Graduate Schools over the previous funding cycle. Beyond contributing to the national pool of data, participation in this project has allowed us to forge key collaborations with committed units on our campus, furthered our data collection practices and prompted significant strides towards our understanding of attrition and completion issues at Illinois. Leveraging this information from Phase I of this project, we have begun to implement many successful and targeted interventions to provide appropriate support to our students and faculty that now serve as the basis for the current proposal. *We are well positioned to continue our participation in Phase II of this important CGS initiative and will focus our efforts around the following two strategic initiatives:*

1. the Graduate College will provide each of the 14 participating units with a *Guided Program Self-Assessment that will allow for review of their program's completion and attrition patterns* and;
2. the Graduate College will provide a *Continuum of Targeted Intervention Strategies enabling participating units to effectively tailor their interventions to those areas identified to be "at risk" for graduate attrition* during their Guided Program Self-Assessment.

At the conclusion of this project, we expect to have identified the critical periods of graduate attrition among doctoral students at Illinois, with a particular emphasis on women and under-represented minorities. This information and subsequent analysis, handled collaboratively by the Graduate College and the participating units, will then allow for more targeted, and therefore effective interventions with students at-risk for graduate attrition. *Ultimately, by understanding the reasons for and timing of graduate attrition, we will be able to construct and implement responsive initiatives that appropriately support strong doctoral students through their program and assure a higher level of success.*

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