

**Annual Assessment Report**  
Academic Year: 2014-2015

**Date of Report Submission:** 7/6/15

**Name of Department:** Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs

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## **I. Abstract**

Graduate Students, a subpopulation of the adult student, face unique needs for support. The level of support provided to graduate students varies greatly by college. The Thesis and Dissertation conference, now its second year, aims to provide common and universal learning across disciplines about a variety of resources and knowledge related to large projects and an opportunity to network with other graduate students across disciplines.

The assessment was done by a pre-test, post-test, and focus group to give a combination of qualitative and quantitative data regarding the learning outcomes. The pre- and post-tests addressed knowledge of resources available, confidence with their projects, and ability to self-advocate. In addition items were asked about relating to the university affinity and networking with other graduate students.

Overall the data supports that across all areas assessed for learning outcomes an increase in the mean responses occurred between the pre- and post-test. The largest increase was in “I feel a part of DePaul community” with a 42% increase between pre and post tests. “Awareness of resources that support me in the thesis, dissertation or other large projects” had a 31% increase. In addition, 81% indicated an intent to follow-up with a resource introduced at the conference; however the focus group which occurred two months following the event showed limited action taken to date.

## **II. Learning Outcome Assessed**

The Learning Outcomes specifically addressed are:

- Students will navigate the specific university resources for graduate students, including those for a thesis/dissertation/large project and those that support them in other co-curricular ways
- Students will network and learn from peers and other graduate students
- Students will have tangible next steps following the conference to assist in their thesis, dissertation, or other large projects.

These map to the following divisional and departmental learning outcomes:

- Persistence and Academic Achievement-Students that participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Programs will utilize appropriate resources when needs arise.
- Knowledge Acquisition, Application, and Integration – Students that participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs programs will gain useful knowledge that applies to their lives.

## **III. Introduction & Context**

A one day conference was held in Winter Quarter 2015. This was the second annual conference. Within a similar structure to the first iteration, breakout sessions and seminars on a variety of topics, the overall focus was on DePaul targeted resources to aid a large academic project and other

resources that contributes to their student experience and persistence. Specific knowledge content was provided on topics like: IRB, library research databases, presenting qualitative or quantitative data, mindfulness, stress, general graduate student tips, a timeline/first steps session, editing, and more.

Through very specific topics, the overall Learning Outcomes of exposure to resources and networking were chief themes. They aim to increase graduate student retention and graduation, which is often not addressed. In an article on graduate retention theory, Jean Girves and Virginia Wemmerus (1988) applied Tinto and Bean retention models commonly used for undergraduates to graduate students. They found similar factors being important to success and retention of students as undergraduates. Specifically, involvement was important at both masters and doctoral levels. This involvement is often more academic centered, but the article specifically mentions university support for thesis and dissertation as vital. This academic and social interaction is both vital. Further, Cheryl Polson (2003) said this support is even more vital for the adult, non-traditional graduate student, especially the student services support.

Girves, J.E. & Wemmerus, V. (1988). "Developing Models of Graduate Student Degree Progress." *Journal of Higher Education*, 59(2), pp. 163-189.

Polson, C. (2003). "Adult Graduate Students Challenge Institutions to Change." *New Directions for Student Services*, 102, pp. 59-68.

#### **IV. Data Collection & Methodology**

##### *Methodology:*

The data was collected via a pre-event survey, post-event survey, and follow-up focus group invite to all attendees. The assessments were constructed as summative pre and post-evaluations, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. In addition to the Likert style scale assessment of the learning outcomes, a focus group was conducted to further evaluate suggested learning outcomes and action since the event occurred.

Consent was obtained via voluntary participation in the survey. It was emailed once a student registered, and not required. Similarly, the paper evaluation was not obtained from all attendees, and the focus group was an optional sign-up.

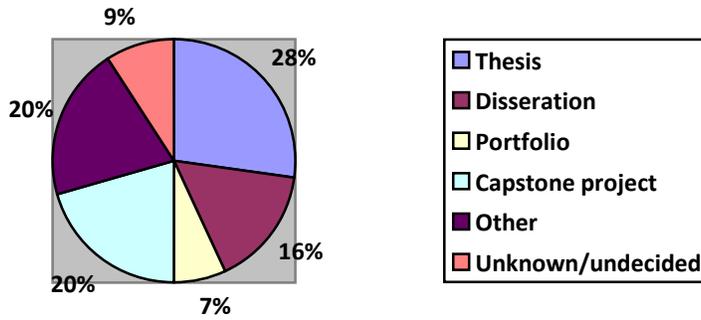
The raw scores of each category of the likert scale is included in the data. It was analyzed for differences in pre- and post-test response.

Acceptable performance was deemed to be a rating of 4 – Agree or 5- Strongly Agree.

#### **V. Data & Results**

8 of the 9 colleges with graduate students were identified as being registered for this event. From the registered students 72 students participated in the pre-event survey and 42 responding to the post event-evaluation. Demographic characteristics trended similar between pre and post test assessments. 6 students participated in the focus group. Of the 66 students attending the conference, 45% reported their status as 2nd year or higher Masters candidates. The most common project the attendees were completing was a Thesis (29%). The majority of attendees, 60%, identify as full time students. 31% indicated they have not started writing their projects, and the remaining 69% at various stages of their writing or planning. Of this 69% in other stages, 13 attendees indicate that they are either well into their writing or nearing completion.

Other demographic data:



**Enrollment Status**

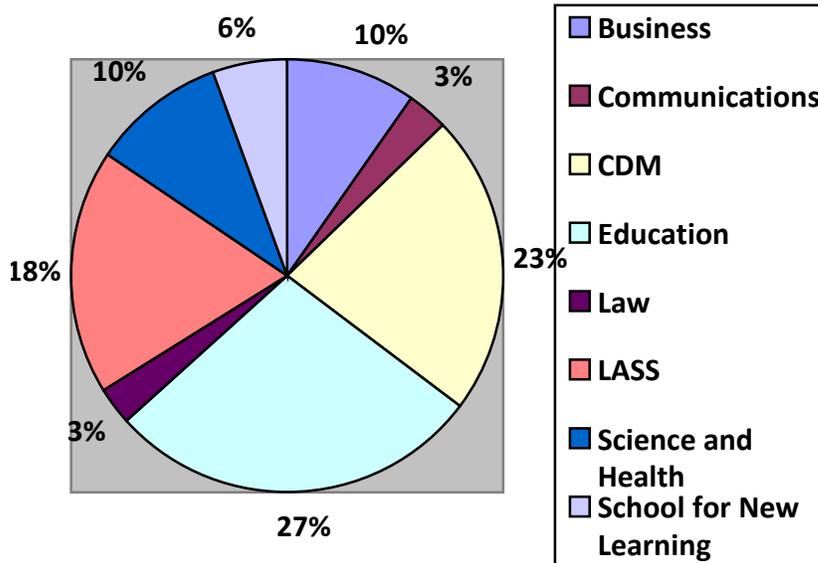
	Totals	Percent of Total
Part-Time	16	38%
Full-Time	25	60%

**How far along in your project are you?**

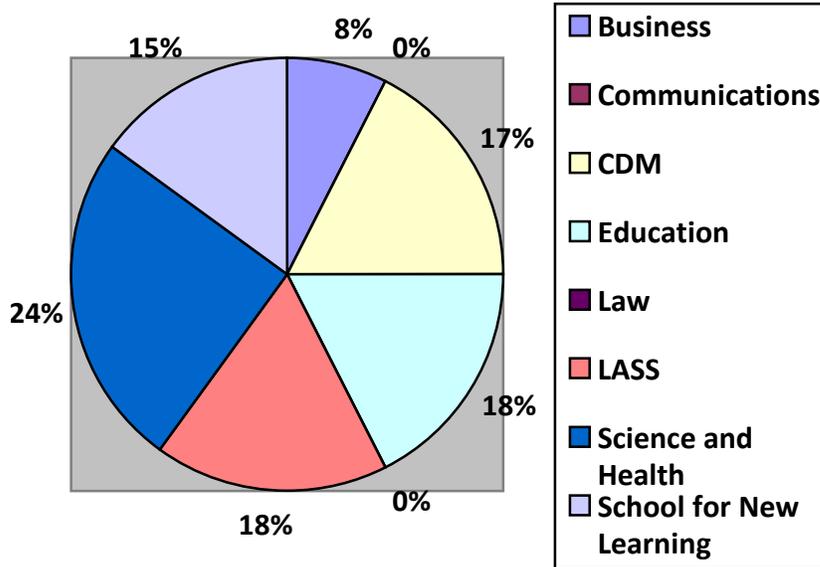
	Totals	Percent of Total
Haven't started	13	31%
In the very beginning	7	17%
have a topic/ still researching	9	21%
I am Writing	11	26%
I am near Completion	2	5%
Other	1	2%

Demographic data collected by both the pre-test and post-test show similar distributions among demographic characteristics and colleges.

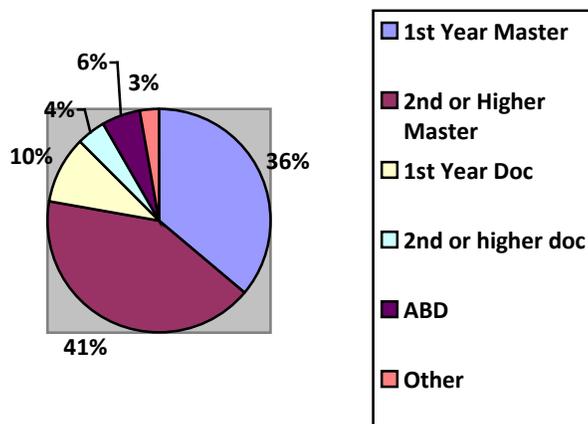
Pre-Test:



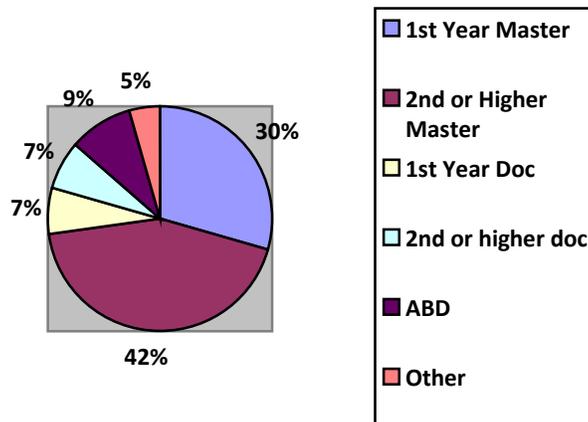
Post-Test:



Status pre-test:



Status post-test:



Addressing Departmental Learning Outcomes, the evaluation asked if the attendees would follow-up with an office/department / presenter as a result of a session. 81% indicated they would indeed follow-up. Attendees were asked if they had an opportunity to network with other graduate students at the event, again the majority of responses were affirmative with only 14% either offer no response or indicated that had no opportunity for networking.

Question Posed		Strongly disagree		Neutra		Strongly Agree	Total Respondent	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	s	
I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me as a student	<b>Post</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3.85</b>
	<i>Pre</i>	5.6%	18%	26.7%	35.2%	14%	71	3.3
I feel I am a part of DePaul Community	<b>Post</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>42.8%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>4.93</b>
	<i>Pre</i>	4.2%	12.6%	32%	33.8%	16.9%	71	3.46
I am aware of resources that support me in Thesis , Dissertation and Large Projects Process	<b>Post</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>9.5%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3.85</b>
	<i>Pre</i>	12.6%	25%	24%	33%	5.4%	5	2.93
I got information from the conference that I plan to use	<b>Post</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>4.63</b>

In a further effort to evaluate the follow-up action and areas for improvement for the conference, a focus group was conducted. Demographics of focus group was diverse (5 Masters, 1 Doctoral; 2 SNL, 1 LASS, 1 Education, 1 CDM, 1 unknown; 4 first-year students in respective programs, 1 second-year, 1 unknown status).

General themes from the focus groups included:

- Despite the high percentage that indicated a plan for follow-up with a resource (81%), the only action by any focus group attendees was one person had setup a Writing Center appointment. All expressed that follow through on planned action had presented a challenge.
- Formation of a support or group to provide accountability, further networking, and on-going resources was discussed (such as Writing Groups).
- Other satisfaction items on session topics, times, and graduate student experience were shared. Students expressed they had met other students at the conference. The lunch table topics were praised as an excellent opportunity to network around a similar topic and explore others research interest.

Pertinent quotes:

*“I made an appointment with the writing center. So that I could explore setting-up writing groups, even people that I had met at the conference; this is a process that I would like to take advantage of once I start my capstone.”*

*“I attended three sessions the qualitative, the quantitative and the IRB process because I am in the process of writing my thesis, and I have actually completed some parts of my thesis. I elected to*

*choose practical topics that were connected to the work I am doing. I also feel that some more general topics like the time management and the writing center along with stress reduction is something basic and helpful for the entire process. I was more focused on the more relevant topics. I think it might be beneficial to present all of the topics so that students could choose what will be presented. Possibly a longitudinal look or timeline would be helpful for the student in determining their particular needs in their individual thesis efforts.”*

When asked to comment on favorite and least favorite session the attendees overwhelmingly indicated that Writing Process and Mindfulness were most useful. Comments highlighting characteristics such as “very thorough, Informative, approachable, providing resources, great presenter and appropriate in a busy world,” were presented as description of a favorite session. Very few least favorite comments were offered, with “more interested in process of topic than history of topic,” being the most revealing comment offered. Going forward the attendees suggested that the sessions could have been “longer, and more interactive.”

When questioned as to how they would change or what they would retain in conference formatting the respondents indicated that generally they would, with a few exceptions, make minor to no changes. It was generally noted that longer sessions or more repeat of sessions would allow for greater participation. Several suggested that a second day be added to allow for more opportunity to attend specific sessions.

*Primary Learning Outcome reporting:*

<b>Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Number of Students Assessed</b>	<b>Number of Students with Acceptable or Better Performance</b>
Students will navigate the specific university resources for graduate students, including those for a thesis/dissertation/large project	38	32

**VI. Discussion & Interpretation of Results**

The pre and post test results, reinforced by the focus groups, show a strong introduction to resources and desire to follow-up with these resources. The average mean of pre-test to post-test increased in the all areas:

- Awareness of DePaul Resources that support me as a student – 16% increase
- I feel I am a part of the DePaul community – 42% increase
- Awareness of resources that support me in the thesis, dissertation or other large projects – 31% increase

The focus group results did find that many students had not yet followed up with resources, despite intention to do so. Ideas were generated like follow-up cohort groups or further streamlining of sign-up to Writing Groups for on-going peer support.

Most students found an ability to network with other graduate students during the day (87%). The format of the conference was slightly changed from previous years to allow informal topical tables during lunch to increase networking opportunities.

## **VII. Recommendations and Plans for Action**

The results indicate the methods of presentation of resources were successful in encouraging self-advocacy, utilization, and awareness of resources. Students also networked with other graduate students.

The office will analyze the learning outcome goals for the conference. It seems students are entering with a solid knowledge of resources prior to the conference. The office's stated goals for the conference may not be in good alignment with the goals of attendees. Perhaps a realignment of outcomes to other goals could increase knowledge in another area in a more direct manner, for example more focus on next steps and an accountable plan for action or more emphasis on networking. Analysis of further opportunities to address the on-going support and action is important. Students often thrive with peer support, and the ideas of streamlining out of the conference entry into peer groups or Writing Groups should be investigated.

Attendees at the conference often expressed desire for very tangible connections to their college. We have many partners in this event, but a more direct relationship with all colleges could allow that immediate individualized follow-up to occur as a part of the program and day.

An opportunity for future study exists to go deeper into analysis of what resources the student has prior knowledge of and of the students specific skills in practicing advocacy. In addition, data on the overall experience of students of graduate students at DePaul and their needs is limited, so interviews or more qualitative data on this population could greatly aid future program development and what macro and micro needs these students have.

## Appendix A – Pre Test

*From an electronic Qualtrics survey sent to RSVP'ed students.*

The short questions below can assist us greatly in evaluating the success and learning from our event. We hope you will take a moment to complete this assessment.

On the next page find the link to download the program book.

This information is anonymous and is collected for population level assessment only. You can proceed to the next page and download the document without responding.

For questions, please contact [adultstudents@depaul.edu](mailto:adultstudents@depaul.edu)

### What is your status?

- First-year master's
- Second-year master's or higher
- First-year doctorate
- Second year doctorate or higher
- All but dissertation doctoral
- Other\_\_

### What are you completing?

- Thesis
- Dissertation
- Capstone
- Portfolio
- Unknown/Haven't decided
- Other\_\_

### What is your college?

- College of Business
- College of Communication
- College of Computing and Digital Media
- College of Education
- College of Law
- College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
- College of Science and Health
- School for New Learning
- School of Music
- The Theatre School

Please rank the following:

	Strongly Disagree - 1	2	Neutral -3	4	Strongly Agree - 5
I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me as a student.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel I am a part of the DePaul community.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me in the thesis, dissertation, or other large project process.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
I feel connected to other graduate students at DePaul.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Appendix B – Post Test



DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

*Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs*



**Graduate Thesis and Dissertation Conference**

**2015**

### Evaluation

*Your feedback below will aid us in planning for future events.*

Select one of the following:

What is your status?

- First-year master's
- Second year or higher master's
- First-year doctoral
- Second year or higher doctoral
- All but dissertation doctoral
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please your current select your status:

- Part-time
- Full-time

Please select your college:

- College of Business
- College of Communication
- College of Computing and Digital Media
- College of Education
- College of Law
- College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
- College of Science and Health
- School for New Learning
- School of Music
- The Theatre School

What are you completing?

- Thesis
- Dissertation
- Portfolio
- Capstone Project
- Other\_\_
- Unknown/ Undecided

How far are you in your thesis, dissertation, or other project?

- Haven't started
- In very beginning
- I have topic/area, but I am still in research/data gathering
- I am writing
- I am near completion
- Other\_\_\_\_

What was your favorite and least favorite session and why?

	Strongly Disagree 1	2	Neutral 3	4	Strongly Agree 5	
I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me as a student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
I feel I am a part of the DePaul community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
I am aware of resources within DePaul that support me in the thesis, dissertation or other large projects process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
I got information from the conference which I plan to utilize.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
<i>If applicable, please share an example:</i>						
					Yes	No
I plan to follow-up with an office/department/presenter as a result of today's Conference.					<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had the opportunity to network with other graduate students at today's Conference.					<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Outside of class, do you participate in programs, events, resources, or services? If so, what do you do most often? If not, why?

What would you change and what would you keep about the conference if held again?