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Invisible Labor in Doctoral Advising:

A National Survey Study of Dissertation Committee Workloads

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this nationwide survey was to study dissertation service workloads for faculty members in the field of higher education. There is a problem with attrition in doctoral education and literature has shown that the advisor-advisee relationship is one of the most significant factors relating to doctoral student success. Researchers have aptly recommended that advisors should only take on students when they feel they can get students through to completion. However, no literature to date documented faculty workload related to dissertations. This study sought to document the time commitment and caring capacity in EdD and PhD programs. The results showed that faculty on average spend 291 hours a semester in their major advisor roles and an additional 89 hours a semester on average in other dissertation committee service roles (e.g., as the content expert or methodologist). A third of faculty are not compensated for these roles, and there were few formal or informal guidelines related to the caring capacity, which the majority of faculty reporting that there were not enough advisors available to support the number of admitted doctoral students. No prior studies have documented the workload related to dissertation committee service, and the findings of this study offer insight for departments and individuals seeking to support doctoral students. It highlights a potential concern in doctoral education of an uncompensated, invisible faculty labor related to dissertation service. Finally, it raises concerns about the potential quality of advising given caseload and care capacity.

KEYWORDS

faculty advising, faculty workload, doctoral dissertations

Doctoral completion rates are rarely gathered at a national level in the United States but have been reported around 50-57% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Taylor & Beasley, 2005). Higher education is consistently focused on ensuring student completion, especially considering the cost of education and therefore unrecouped losses of dropping out of a doctoral program (Devos et al., 2017; Fiore et al., 2019). To that end, there is a long tradition of researching the experiences of doctoral students in higher education that relate to completion and success.

In a review of 163 empirical articles on doctoral student success, Sverdlik et al. (2018, p. 369) found that the advisor-advisee relationships was the "first—and often most influential" factor that influenced student experience. Moreover, a slew of prior research has illustrated the importance of availability of and regular feedback by doctoral advisors in dissertation completions and student satisfaction (Eller et al., 2014; Fiore et al., 2019; Inman et al., 2011; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Pinchot & Cellante, 2022; Reidy & Green, 2005) and sense of belonging (Curtin et al., 2012). In a recent quantitative study, Elliot and Ware (2019) reported statistically significant differences in graduates and ABD (all but dissertation) dropouts related to "perceptions of faculty availability, support from department faculty, and accessibility to their chair [as] predictors of a student's success in a doctoral program" (p. 147). Neale-McFall and Ward (2015) reported from their survey of 122 students in a doctoral counseling program that personality match was a top reason for why students selected their advisors, and that personal connection was a significant predictor of satisfaction. Cook et al. (2023) were particularly concerned with the negative impacts of situations where students withheld relevant information from their advisors, that would otherwise help advisors better support students. Similar to Cook et al., Dericks et al. (2019) found that perceived supportiveness of the dissertation advisor was the greatest predictor of student satisfaction. Recent work from Pinchot and Cellante (2022) found that in addition to timely feedback, digital written feedback that was constructive and encouraging best supported students. Across these studies, the most common conclusion is that the advisor plays a large and significant role in ensuring doctoral student success.

Advisor Workload

In understanding the workload of dissertation advisors, much less research is available. Pinchot and Cellante (2022) summarized the roles of the doctoral advisor as including: "keeping the student to a timeline, guiding the development of the student's research topic,

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providing guidance for the writing process, managing the student's dissertation committee, fostering the student's intellectual development, aiding the student with problems and challenges, and mentoring the student to become a scholar in the academic field" (p. 30). Earlier work by Lee (2008) provided a framework for doctoral supervision after interviewing 12 doctoral advisors with a combined 150 supervised doctoral dissertations. Lee described five overlapping main approaches:

1. Functional: where the issue is one of project management,
2. Enculturation: where the student is encouraged to become a member of the disciplinary community,
3. Critical thinking: where the student is encouraged to question and analyze their work,
4. Emancipation: where the student is encouraged to question and develop themselves, and
5. Developing a quality relationship: where the student is enthused, inspired, and cared for.

While their study did not focus on the amount of time it took to provide supervision to doctoral students, at least one respondent mentioned that during their time as a doctoral student, their advisor would spend hours talking to them about their research (Lee, 2008). This reflects at least to some extent that there is a significant time investment pertaining to doctoral advising relationships. Moreover, Lee noted that there was "the institutional requirement to be a service provider to increasing numbers of doctoral students" (p. 10), which was in contrast to "the desire to provide a truly individual educational opportunity" (p. 10). Similarly, other researchers have noted shortages of faculty availability to supervise dissertations (McCallin & Nayar, 2012; Minnick et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2009).

Some scholars have attempted to expand upon models of advisors to theorize the activity. In a study of 26 Australian doctoral advisors who had a reputation as a "good supervisor" at their university, Halse and Malfroy (2010, p. 81) used grounded theory to explore the nature of doctoral supervision. They argued that the doctoral advisor was a professional role, where there was a "learning alliance" (p. 83), described as a sort of contractual agreement between the advisor and the student. The research presented that good advisors held "a firm commitment to collaborate on the attainment of a doctorate" (Halse & Malfroy, 2010, p. 83). Furthermore, there was a shared goal toward research and scholarship, intellectual development, and personal relationships. Importantly, like prior research noted above, Halse and Malfroy found that advisors faced institutional pressure in their workload that required them to carefully manage their time and therefore interaction with students. One participant specifically mentioned workload of advising in saying that they met for one hour a week with each student, while another mentioned, "some students can be extremely demanding" (Halse & Malfroy, 2010, p. 84). Pinchot and Cellante (2022) cited Esterman's (2020) book on supervising doctoral students as recommending one-hour meetings every week. Factors like the number of students supervised, and the amount of labor needed to review drafts of dissertations, were not mentioned.

The Halse and Malfroy (2010) study also found a theme of what they called 'habits of mind,' which related to the level of engagement and knowledge an advisor holds for each dissertation they supervise. More specifically, as students communicated fears that their studies were becoming confusing, unfocused, or not valuable to the field, advisors could use their knowledge of the students' work to reassure them of the merits and refocus students on their work. Related to this was other facets of advising, including scholarly expertise in the subject, technical expertise of crafting dissertations, and contextual expertise of navigating institutional policy surrounding dissertation completion (Halse & Malfroy, 2010). Together, these areas of expertise reflect a high level of demand on the faculty that supervise doctoral dissertations.

Duke and Denicolo (2017) explained that doctoral supervisors today are more often required to supervise a broad array of dissertations, meaning there is more demand that they extend their expertise to serve students with broad research interests. They recommend that advisors continue to seek professional development to meet these challenges. Importantly, Duke and Denicolo recommended to institutions "that adequate time is allocated for supervision and that high-quality supervision is recognized and valued by the institution" (p. 4). Of course, such efforts take yet more time on the part of doctoral faculty.

Other recent studies have focused on the specific behaviors of advisors. Roberts et al. (2019) interviewed 21 doctoral advisors who had been described as 'excellent' advisors by colleagues. In addition to a focus on quality feedback and the use of the Socratic method to encourage doctoral student exploration, they touched on timing of feedback. Roberts et al. reviewed a study from 1988 that found across 53 studies that quick feedback was valuable, and they mentioned a study from 2011 that suggested a turnaround time of less than three weeks. In their interviews, they found a theme of time management along with timely and regular communication. In their conclusions, they offered the following advice, "Effective mentoring is a time-consuming job and a professor should only say, 'Yes,' to a student if she feels there is a very good chance she can see the student through to completion of the doctorate" (Roberts et al., 2019, p. 154). However, what was lacking was an understanding of the actual time commitment on the part of advisors to deliver quality advising.

The most relevant study relating to the workload of doctoral advising came from Craft et al. (2016) who analyzed written documents from 12 institutional websites. Specifically focused on doctoral programs in the field of higher education and K-12 education, the authors found five themes relating to roles and expectations of doctoral advisors. Like prior research, Craft et al. focused on the selection or assignment of advisors. They found examples of assignment of initial advisors upon entry to a program, with changes to a permanent advisor occurring further along in the program. The documents also contained language relating to changing advisors, and when they looked for presumptive reasons for changing advisors, documents pointed to incongruence in research interests (Craft et al., 2016). None of the documents mentioned changing advisors due to interpersonal conflicts.

Craft et al. (2016) also found a large focus on the instructional components of advising, with few mentions of the interpersonal components, which is a notable discrepancy between the focus of the literature reviewed above and the focus of institutional policies in the Craft study. Moreover, authors focused on the incongruity between the focus of policy on doctoral students maintaining satisfactory progress, but lacking measures or guidance of the "behaviors that reflect effective advising" (Craft et al., 2016, p. 59). They further noted this was interesting considering there is abundant literature describing these behaviors. However, and once again, in terms of workload, Craft et al. stated that there were few institutions with written statements regarding regular meetings with advisees.

However, research by Pinchot and Cellante (2022) found in their study that communication on an as-needed basis, compared to regular communication, had a low level of richness for doctoral students. Craft et al. (2016) did not mention whether guidance was offered on the number of advisees recommended per advisor to maintain quality dissertation preparation.

Advisor Compensation

Faculty compensation for serving as dissertation advisors for doctoral students is a critical aspect of higher education, impacting both faculty members and graduate students. The 2022 American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Faculty Compensation Survey reflected a 5% decrease in (inflation-adjusted) wages for full-time faculty members, the most significant one-year decrease in average wages for full-time faculty since the AAUP began compensation tracking in 1972. With the impact of national inflation throughout the 2022 year, the National Education Association's (NEA) Higher Education Faculty Salary Analysis (2023) found that on average, faculty experienced a $4,837 compensation loss. As compensation sustains as a major area of faculty research, there is shockingly sparse literature of compensation related to supporting doctoral students or dissertation advising.

Numerous studies have explored the complexities and implications of organizational compensation structures (Cheng, 2014; Mehan et al., 2019). Within higher education, research suggests that adequate compensation for faculty is crucial for attracting and retaining experienced educators and mentors (Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016). Insufficient compensation can lead to faculty disengagement and burnout (Padilla & Thompson, 2016), impacting the recruitment and retention of quality faculty (Evans, 2013). Vast discrepancies in faculty compensation remain prevalent between male and female faculty (Baker et al., 2023; Roussille, 2021) and among non-unionized faculty (NEA, 2023). However, further disparities existing in compensation across institutions and disciplines (Freeman & DiRamio, 2016), especially in historically Black colleges and universities (Renzulli et al., 2006; Womble 2018) and the lack of policies governing faculty compensation for advisory roles, impacts the mentorship quality and ultimately the success of doctoral students.

Research Purpose and Questions

Doctoral advisors have described the advisor-advisee relationship as complex, because "within a relatively short space of time, the interaction must foster the development of original understandings and new ideas, or, in other words, the production, dissemination and use of knowledge" (Reidy & Green, 2005, p. 51). As Roberts and Bandlow (2018) described, doctoral students begin the program as dependent and are expected to develop into independent scholars, during the dissertation process. This development would be facilitated, as prior research has shown, by the advisor-advisee relationship. The literature has a long tradition of documenting the experiences of graduate students, with studies having sought to theorize advising, construct effective models, and document behaviors that support student success. In all of this work, very little has been written about the role of doctoral advising from the faculty perspective and experiences. As such, the purpose of this research was to investigate the time commitment, compensation, and hiring support of dissertation advising for faculty. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the typical number of advisees per advisor?
2. How much time do doctoral advisors in the field of higher education commit to various activities in support of their doctoral students?
3. How are doctoral advisors compensated by their institutions for their professional labor?
4. Do doctoral advisors believe there are enough faculty in their institutions to adequately support doctoral student dissertations?

Definition

Advisor: A faculty member who is charged with serving as the primary dissertation chair, also known as major advisor, on a dissertation committee for a doctoral student. Distinct from the other dissertation committee members, the advisor holds the primary responsibility for advising the student toward completion of the dissertation.

METHOD

This quantitative study uses a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for documenting the unstudied phenomenon of interest regarding behaviors and beliefs (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In this study, the undocumented issues relate to the scope of work for doctoral advising. The research design included a survey instrument for data collection, which allowed for a cross-sectional capture of behaviors and beliefs at a single point in time across institutions (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the researchers' home institution.

Instrument

The survey was developed based on the gaps in the available literature, by three faculty who serve as doctoral advisors, establishing face validity for the instrument (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The survey aimed to gather information related to higher education doctoral programs, either EdD or PhD. A total of 30 questions that could be completed in 20 minutes or less was targeted, based on literature regarding survey length (Sharma, 2022) and time to completion (Revilla & Ochoa, 2017). The survey contained two screener questions to ensure faculty were associated with higher education programs and that they served on dissertation committees. A total of 27 questions on dissertation advising and committee service, as well as questions that helped establish context of the nature of the program (e.g., types of dissertations, number of admits) were included. There were also two demographic questions regarding tenure status and faculty rank. To the extent possible, the survey used scrolling to increase survey completion speed and reduce breakoff rates (Mavletova & Couper, 2014). There was one open-ended question that inquired if participants wanted to mention anything about their workload serving as a chair of a doctoral dissertation.

Sampling

This study used a type of purposive non-probability expert sampling (Bhattacherjee, 2012), in which an attempt was made to choose all respondents from the population of interest, namely, faculty associated with doctoral programs in higher education. To

begin, the US News rankings site was used to obtain a list of doctoral programs in higher education for a total of 11 programs. Next, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) directory was used to obtain an additional list of higher education doctoral programs, resulting in an additional 44 programs. Finally, a Google search for PhD and EdD programs in higher education was completed, which added 29 programs. Once the list of 111 institutions was compiled, a Google search for these programs was conducted, of which 101 websites contained information on faculty associated with their doctoral programs. An additional five institutions had general faculty directories, which lacked sufficient information to reasonably determine which faculty were related to the higher education program. The remaining five institutions did not appear to have any faculty directories.

From the identified websites, a list of faculty email addresses from each program was added to the prospective pool of participants. The goal was to select only faculty associated with the higher education doctoral program, although this was at times not always evident, and therefore the aforementioned screener questions were included in the survey. The list resulted in a total of 876 faculty.

The average response rate in web surveys in higher education in recent years has been 44% (Wu et al., 2022), which would correspond to a total of 385 respondents in our study. In recent surveys of faculty at multiple institutions, recent studies yielded response rates of 15% (Gray et al., 2020), 21.4% (Lally et al., 2019), 24% (Doubblestein et al., 2021), and 40.4% (Harrington et al., 2023). Using Yamane's (1973) formula for small or known populations, a total of 274 respondents should be targeted for generalizability of quantitative findings, which would reflect a 31% response rate. Since this study is descriptive, effect sizes were not a concern, though generalizability of the resulting sample was still a concern. Based on recommendations from Gay and Diehl (1992) for descriptive research, 10% of a population is an adequate sample (as cited by Hill, 1998), which would equate to approximately 88 responses in this study. Therefore, we aimed to get at least 88 responses to generalize the findings of this study to the larger population of higher education doctoral faculty. Researchers have found that response rates are not a reflection of nonresponse bias or survey data quality (Hendra & Hill, 2019). Instead, this study used confidential but non-anonymous data, so that representativeness of responses could be evaluated in the results section of this paper.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since this study used an expert sample to respond to a specific problem, it was expected that the survey's salience to the population would ensure an adequate response rate, consistent with prior literature on web surveys (Sammut et al., 2021). Additionally, we focused our subject line so that the topic was clearly stated, "Call for Participants: Dissertation Advising Research Study" as a way to communicate saliency. In terms of incentives, our survey invitation mentioned to participants that they could sign up at the end of the survey to receive copy of the results. It was expected that faculty in doctoral programs may find this information of interest and therefore may be more likely to participate if they could directly receive information on the findings of the study. In a survey of students, the use of the word 'survey' in the email subject line increased the number participants who opened the email message (Moore, 2016). Our subject line used the term "study," since other research found that pleas for help increased response rates in web surveys, we used the keywords 'help inform' in our invitation (Petrovčič et al., 2016). In one study, email length and personalization were not found to be significant indicators of survey response (Trespalacios & Perkins, 2016), although other research has yielded positive results with personalization (Sammut et al., 2021). Thus, this study opted for a generic greeting 'Dear Colleagues' with a shorter email message. Participants were sent an email invitation via Qualtrics to participate in a survey in November 2023, with a reminder email one week after the initial emails. Data was downloaded and once institutional characteristics were matched to the data, identifying information removed. Each variable was summarized using frequencies and averages.

RESULTS

Response Rate and Nonresponse Bias

There were a number of automated replies from participant emails that stated they were on sabbatical, some other type of leave, or had left their institution (*n=38*). Automated responses were not removed from the calculation since it was unclear whether those faculty might reply. Six email addresses were undeliverable. The survey yielded 130 responses out of 870 deliverable emails, for a response rate of 14.94%. A total of 68 institutions were represented in the data, out of 101 invited institutions, for a 67% rate of representation. Across the 68 institutions, between one and four faculty responded.

Overall, 98% of respondents indicated that they worked with doctoral students in a program related to higher education. Of those who worked with doctoral students, 98% of respondents indicated that they had served on a doctoral dissertation committee. After these screening questions, the final sample included 125 respondents.

In terms of nonresponse bias, the representativeness of the sample was examined to determine whether the respondent characteristics are representative of the larger population (Table 1). Comparing data on faculty rank from U.S. at public four-year institutions in 2019-20 (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2021) and a national report on tenure status from the American Association of University Professors (2023) to the distributions of the respondents, there were no significant differences found in the chi-square tests. The faculty in this sample were reflective of rank and tenure status of faculty distributions reported in national sources.

Table 1. Nonresponse Bias Analysis

	Rank	Respondents (n=118)	U.S.
Rank	Full Professor	42.37	29.3
	Associate Professor	33.9	25.1
	Assistant Professor	16.95	25
	Other Rank	6.78	20.6
Tenure	Tenured	63.56	38
Status	Tenure Track	23.73	17
	Non-Tenure Track	12.71	45

Program Characteristics

We asked respondents to offer some details about their program's characteristics. An important reminder on these distributions is that this data is duplicated – there may be up to four faculty from the same institution responding to this question. These distributions are provided to help contextualize the findings in this study. Overall, 30.51% of respondents indicated their program awarded a PhD, 22.88% awarded an EdD, and 46.61% offered both PhD and EdD. On average, respondents indicated that their program admitted 10.5 doctoral students per year to PhD programs, ranging from 2 to 60. For EdD programs, the average number of admitted students each year was 19.98, ranging from 2 to 100.

When asked about the types of dissertations students were allowed to complete for PhD programs, of the 90 responses, 96.66% indicated the traditional five-chapter dissertation is an option, 62.22% indicated that a manuscript-style dissertation is an option, and five respondents indicated that practicum/capstone projects is an option. One respondent said that the options depend on the topic and methodology. Two respondents provided details about other types of dissertation options including: 1) "Philosophical inquiry (not specific chapter format); empirical studies not using traditional five-chapter format" and 2) "Publication Portfolios."

For the 82 responses regarding dissertation options for EdD programs, 85.37% offered the traditional five-chapter dissertation, 28.05% manuscript-style dissertation, and 15.85% practicum/capstone projects. Eight respondents also indicated that they accept "Dissertation in Practice," of which one described this as "three manuscripts," another as "four chapters," and a third as "Program Evaluation or Policy Analysis." One respondent reported an option of "Multiple-product (manuscript plus additional product - e.g., presentation, curriculum, program evaluation)." Four of the respondents that said their programs offered a practicum option and did not offer a five-chapter dissertation option, though one of these also offered a manuscript option. Two of those who said they offered the manuscript option did not offer a five-chapter dissertation option.

In terms of time to completion, for respondents reporting PhD only programs averaged 5.17 years and EdD programs averaged 3.87 years. For respondents reporting PhD only programs, 60% offered funding, compared to 26% of EdD only programs, and 77% of PhD and EdD programs.

In terms of the number of full-time faculty dedicated to their higher education doctoral program(s), 110 respondents provided a value with an average response of 6.42, a minimum of zero, and maximum estimate of 50. One respondent noted that the dynamics in the institution created a difficulty in answering this question, mentioning that while there are technically seven full-time faculty, four of them are unable to chair dissertations because they have other responsibilities that take up too much of their time (such as center affiliations). They noted that these factors are not considered, and that this "leaves us continually understaffed."

Chair/Major Advisor Commitments

A set of key questions focused on faculty service as chair/major advisor on doctoral dissertation committees in a typical year. A total of 95% of 123 respondents indicated that they served on at least one or more, with an average of 7.58 dissertations chaired and a range of one to 30. Of these, 5.17% reported they served on 20 to 30 dissertations in a typical year, 28.44% reported 10 to 15, 32.75% reported 5 to 9, and 33.62% reported one to four dissertations chaired in a typical year.

Meetings and Time Commitment for Chairs

When asked about meeting frequency, 30.09% hold regularly scheduled meetings, 27.43% meet as needed, and 42.48% indicated it depended on the student. When asked how often the meetings are held, 15.04% hold meetings as often as weekly, 31.86% bi-weekly, 42.48% monthly, and 1.77% once a semester. Overall, 39.39% of respondents reported meetings vary by student, and 60.61% reported meeting vary by stage in the dissertation process. Four faculty noted they hold regular group or lab meetings with students. In describing the variance by stage in process, as one respondent noted in the open-ended question, "Depends on what part of the process they are in. Early stages, maybe 1-2 per semester. Advancing to candidacy bi-weekly. Active dissertation writing bi-weekly. Each meeting lasts between 1-2 hours."

In terms of time commitment in a typical semester for meeting with each student, respondents reported an average of 13.86 hours per student, ranging from one to 120 hours. Overall, 20.91% met one to four hours, 30% five to nine hours, 20.91% met 10 to 14 hours, 8.18% met 15 to 19 hours, 8.18% met 20 to 29 hours, 7.27% met 30 to 49 hours, and 4.55% met 50 or more hours. Ten respondents reported that these meeting times vary based on stage of dissertation preparation or based on the student. As one respondent explained, "This varies greatly depending on where students are and their needs. On the low end - for someone pre-proposal - 5 or 6. On the high end for someone who has needed more hands on work - about 40."

Related to providing written feedback to each student each semester, respondents reported an average of 22.51 hours, ranging from one to 150 hours. Overall, 6.25% indicated as many as one to four hours, 19.64% five to nine hours, 22.32% 10 to 14 hours, 8.63% 15 to 19 hours, 19.64% 20 to 29 hours, 12.50% 30 to 49 hours, and 10.71% 50 or more hours. Nine reported meeting times vary based on stage or student. One respondent explained they provide 20 hours of feedback for each EdD student and 10 hours of feedback for each PhD student. Another explained of the significant variance of time dedicated to student feedback, "I have students who are in data collection and may not submit writing for a term. I have others who are fantastic writers and only require 10 or 12 hours per term. Others may require more than 25 hours."

Next, we checked for differences in time commitments between serving as a major adviser in EdD and PhD programs. Of the programs that reported they only offer a PhD an average of 242 hours was spent advising each term, compared to those only offering the EdD (310 hours per term), there was no significant difference ($t(53) = 0.819$, $p = 0.417$).

Service Guidelines and Pay for Chairs

When we asked about formal or informal guidelines in the department for the recommended number of dissertations that faculty should commit to as chair/major advisor, 64.86% indicated no guidelines with 35.13% providing a formal or informal guideline. For the 39 respondents who entered a specific number, the average was 5.15, ranging from one to 14. One respondent mentioned that most faculty at their institution chair over 20 students. Another reported, "One is the requirement for teaching doctoral courses but five or less is the guidance. Right now, the practice for many in our department

is 10+." One other respondent also explained differences for EdD and PhD, "We have EdD and PhD candidates - 10 EdDs; 2-3 PhDs." One participant reported that the guidelines differed based on tenure status, with one being the guideline pre-tenure and no guideline post-tenure.

In terms of compensation for serving as chair/major advisor, 47.79% indicated that this was embedded in the faculty contract/time, 10.62% receive additional funding/release time, 33.63% reported no compensation, and 7.96% provided a written response explaining the compensation. Five respondents mentioned that they get a course release or equivalent pay for a course when they have more than a stated number (i.e., five, six, seven, ten) or a "large cohort" of students. One respondent explained they can opt instead to get a one-time payment of $2,000 per student. Two respondents said that they get summer compensation for dissertations. One of reported their institution is considering course releases when serving a "large number" of students, though their institution has yet to define the value. Another respondent stated, "We are told it's part of teaching load but that doesn't make sense because our formal teaching load (40%) is met with regular classes. We are told it's not part of service load. This, the math/numbers don't add up." Finally, we asked respondents if in their opinion, their institution has enough faculty qualified to serve as chair/major advisors, compared to the number of doctoral students. Overall, 25.66% indicated yes, 66.37% indicated no, and 7.96% indicated they were not sure.

Committee Member Commitments

The next set of questions focused on faculty service as committee members on doctoral dissertations, not as the advisor/chair. A total of 98% of respondents indicated that they served on at least one or more doctoral dissertations in a typical year as a committee member. On average, respondents indicated that they served on 8.52 dissertations in a typical year, ranging from one to 30.

Meetings and Time Commitment for Committee Members

Next, we asked about meeting frequency, in which no respondents reported holding regularly scheduled meetings, 72.41% (*n=84*) meet as needed, and 27.59% indicated it depended on the student. In terms of how often the meetings were held, 44.74% (*n=51)* indicated that meetings were infrequent, typically just at proposal and defense. Of that grouping, 41.18% reported they meet as needed, 17.65% meeting around one or two times total, 17.65% only at proposal and defense (or just defense), 9.8% no meetings, 7.84% said rarely, and 5.88% meet yearly. In contrast, the majority of respondents (55.26%) reported meeting with students with some regularity even as committee members, with 66.67% meeting at least once a semester, 28.57% meeting monthly, 3.17% bi-weekly, and 1.59% weekly. One participant noted that their time commitment depends on their role on the committee, and another reported that their time depended on the chapter of the dissertation. In a typical semester, when we asked about time commitments for meeting with students, 102 respondents indicated an average of 3.10 hours spent meeting per student per semester, ranging from 0.5 to 15 hours. The time commitment for providing written feedback averaged 6.81 hours per student, ranging from one to 50 hours.

Finally, we compared the average time commitments between serving as a committee member in EdD and PhD programs. Of the programs that reported they only offer a PhD an average of 82 hours was spent advising each term, compared to those only offering the EdD (102 hours per term); This difference was not statistically significant, ($t(59) = 0.638$, $p = 0.263$).

Service Guidelines and Pay for Committee Members

In terms of formal or informal guidelines in the department for the recommended number of dissertations that faculty should serve on as a committee member, 79.28% (*n*=88) of respondents indicated there were no guidelines. Of the 23 respondents who entered a number, the average was 5.43, ranging from one to 15. One respondent explained that this differs in pre-tenure (two to three) and post-tenure (no guideline). Some respondents provided a bit more detail about their guidelines. One participant mentioned that tuition is collected for dissertation hours even though faculty remain uncompensated. Another participant mentioned that dissertation chairs are discouraged from serving as a committee member on other dissertations. One surprising response stated, "We have no recommendations on this. The higher and adult education EdD programs have over 120 doctoral students and just four faculty - so we're pretty [expletive deleted] wiped out right now."

In terms of compensation for serving as committee member, 35.34% of respondents indicated this was embedded in the faculty contract/time, 6.9% receive additional funding/release time, and 55.17% reported no compensation. One respondent indicated that they receive a stipend that can be used toward research when a student graduates.

Lastly, we asked respondents if in their opinion, their institution has enough faculty qualified to serve as committee members compared to the number of doctoral students. Overall, 30.17% indicated yes, 58.62% indicated no, and 11.21% indicated they were not sure.

DISCUSSION

Our first research question sought to determine the average number of advisees per advisor, which was 7.58 students. Our second research question aimed to determine how much time is committed to advising doctoral students. Rounding up the average number of dissertations chaired in a typical year from 7.58 to eight students and multiplying that value by the average time spent meeting (13.86) and providing written feedback (22.51) for each student, the average dissertation chair/major advisor spends approximately 291 hours a semester working with their students (the average drops to 233 if individual responses are used for the calculation). Rounding up committee service outside of the chair role, from an average of 8.52 students to nine students, and multiplying by the average time spent meeting (3.1) and providing written feedback (6.81) for each student, the average dissertation committee member spends approximately 89 hours a semester working with their students (or 86 hours as computed for each individual). Combined, faculty serving on dissertations in higher education doctoral programs can expect to average 380 hours of committee service on average per semester.

Comparing the time commitments between EdD and PhD programs, we saw no significant differences in the average hours spent advising per term. However, practically speaking, finding that

on average faculty advising spent on average almost 70 more hours a semester in EdD programs compared to advising hours in PhD programs was particularly interesting. Whether this is a function of systemic student self-selection differences, or the nature of the programs, remains unclear. More research is needed to further explore time differences by degree type. What this finding suggests is that while it is a higher advising time commitment on average for EdD programs compared to PhD programs, the difference is not significant.

While PhD and EdD students both are seeking to pursue advanced degrees, their research objectives, career trajectories, and academic backgrounds may lead to distinct advising needs by group (Foster et al., 2023). As transparent definitions uniquely defining the two continue to be a challenge (Neumann, 2005), exploring how these differences affect the recruitment of selected students, organization of the curriculum, and the doctoral advising process to identify best practices for support would be valuable in the field for doctoral advising. Building off this research, more investigation is warranted to delve further into differences in the distinctive advising experiences between PhD and EdD students.

Our third research question sought to determine doctoral advisor compensation for their professional labor. For major advisor service, while almost half of respondents indicated this was built into their contracts, a third reported that they are not compensated for these activities. Moreover, with the majority of respondents indicating no guidelines existed regarding advising workloads, this activity appears largely voluntary in that faculty are typically not compelled to take a minimum number of advisees per formal guidelines (or informal guidelines for that matter). Uncompensated labor in academia is a noted concern among scholars (Lawless, 2018; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2-17), with some describing such activities as a *labor of love* (Coin, 2018). However, such voluntary based labor that is uncompensated is not only potentially harmful to faculty, and particularly women faculty who tend to take on more uncompensated labor (Coin, 2018), but it is also a disadvantage to students. In other words, given that doctoral student success is tied so closely to advising experiences (Sverdlik et al., 2018), it is essential that the institution ensures that there are faculty available to serve in these roles. When the labor in uncompensated and, as our findings show, often voluntary in nature, there is risk to coverage, an issue explored in more detail with our fourth research question. Additionally, as one participant explained, major advising does not appear to count toward teaching load, nor service expectations. If it is widespread that this labor is both uncompensated and not counted toward tenure and promotion, it threatens to become a type of invisible labor (Hamblin et al., 2020), one that is paramount to doctoral student success (Sverdlik et al., 2018), and yet, completely unvalued by higher education institutions.

Finally, our fourth research question centered around whether doctoral advisors believe there are enough advisors to support the number of doctoral students. Overall, the majority concluded there were not enough advisors to support the number of admitted doctoral students, with only a quarter indicating sufficient numbers of advisors. As respondents had indicated, using expressive and emotionally charged language at times, they overall felt “wiped out” and “continually understaffed.” These findings raise a critical concern that programs are admitting more students than they have the resources to support. This finding is compounded by the majority of participants reporting no compensation for dissertation service and a lack of formal guidelines regarding dissertation service. In other words, if institutions established policies for the number of dissertations a faculty can chair, they would then need to adequately staff enough faculty to serve the admitted students, or they would need to respond by reducing the enrollment in the program.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitations in this study include the potential variability in program structure between doctoral programs. Not only between PhD and EdD, but also based on institutional context (e.g., R1, in-person programs vs. online executive-style programs), student funding models, and curricular structure that may include dissertation elements that are completed within regular for-credit courses, such as dissertation seminars. Moreover, it may be difficult to ascertain the role of adjunct faculty in advising, as many institutions do not list adjunct faculty on their websites. Some institutions did list associated personnel, who perhaps served on dissertations but did not hold faculty roles (e.g., vice presidents and external personnel). Finally, as mentioned, several private online institutions did not list faculty, and therefore are underrepresented in this study.

It is possible that question wording choices resulted in responses that may not mirror the intention of the study. For example, as one respondent pointed out, the question about whether the institution has enough faculty to serve on dissertations was unclear because while the institution may overall have enough, an individual program might not. While the intention of that question was to say, across the institution, are there enough faculty to serve on dissertation committees for the higher education doctoral program(s), possibly meaning this was misunderstood by participants based on the question wording.

When we asked how many students were admitted to the program each year, we intended to ask about the cohort sizes of the program, not offers of admission. As one respondent noted:

> We admit 30-40 across our EdD and PhD programs, but only have 10-15 start each year; the EdD/PhD mix is quite variable. Therefore, it was unclear when it comes to program size details whether these numbers reflect offers of admission or typical cohort sizes.

A few participants also wrote that they had difficulty estimating dissertation workloads due to the variability in students, stage of dissertation, and program in question. This study intended to provide averages across a large number of faculty, and based on this analysis, this study was able to successfully capture data that will help faculty, programs, and institutions better understand dissertation workloads.

FUTURE RESEARCH

It has been well documented that factors that influence doctoral students’ academic success and degree completion have been strongly aligned with supportive doctoral advising (Heath, 2002; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Importantly though, the issue of quality advising remains unaddressed. While this study showed the average number of dissertations chaired and the related workload, it is unclear whether this average corresponds to quality advising, or as the data suggests, whether the average may reflect an overworked faculty trying their best to keep up to the unrealistic demands placed on them by their institutions. Further research could examine the varying levels of doctoral advisement required for doctoral student

success, taking into consideration the variance of student need for minimal supervision to needing more substantial time and support. Broader investigation into the factors that contribute to the range of diversity of advising support needs could help develop more tailored advising strategies, ultimately improving student outcomes, as well as clarify advisor expectations.

The preparation and training of dissertation committee chairs and members are additional critical areas for investigation. Previous research found that doctoral advisors often "learned about advising by relying on their own student experiences and observations of colleagues" (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 312). Future research should explore whether faculty receive formal training before assuming the role of a doctoral advisor and how such training—or lack thereof—affects the advising experience. Beyond the impact of previous training of doctoral advising, another aspect to include in investigation could delve into the skills needed to not only lead students, but better understand doctoral committee dynamics and developing teamwork practices towards collaboratively supporting overall student success.

Future research should explore quality in dissertation advising, as the role relates to workloads, and address strategies that can be used to improve quality. The complex nature of faculty compensation for dissertation advising, extending beyond monetary rewards, such as recognition, institutional support, professional development opportunities, and workload considerations are continued areas of investigation that can impact faculty engagement and effectiveness as dissertation advisors (Padilla & Thompson, 2016). Additional research is needed to further explore the noted issues in the understaffing of faculty compared to the enrollment demand, as well as the lack of incentives for this critical service. Finally, this study included one open-ended question that yielded 66 responses, ranging from a few words to multiple paragraphs. While this study employed some use of the open-ended responses that aligned with instrument sections, the researchers are considering future analysis focusing on these qualitative responses.

CONCLUSION

The landscape of doctoral advising reveals significant diversity in practices, particularly concerning providing feedback and the time commitments for frequent meetings. From the faculty's perspective, this variance reflects a broader absence of institutionalized standards for the relational aspects inherent in advising doctoral students. Compounding this variability is the disparate institutional expectations placed on faculty members in terms of their advising loads. The absence of clear guidelines leaves stakeholders dealing with ambiguity over what constitutes a manageable workload. The additional lack of institutional standards regarding fair compensation for faculty labor exacerbates these challenges. For faculty, this uncertainty can breed burnout, hasten turnover, and exacerbate disparities, particularly affecting marginalized faculty members.

Additionally, institutional priorities, such as the emphasis on student completion rates and responsibilities of faculty members across different career stages contribute to this variability. This lack of uniformity can significantly impact the quality of the dissertation experience for students, leading to incongruent outcomes in their final research products. Students may find themselves uncertain about the level of support they can expect from their advisors, further complicating their academic progress. Institutions, torn between efficiency and quality, struggle with the ramifications of this variability, unsure whether gains in productivity offset potential losses in the quality of doctoral outcomes. Addressing these discrepancies necessitates a reevaluation of institutional practices, fostering clearer expectations and prioritizing both the well-being of faculty members and the academic success of doctoral candidates.

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