

Functions of the Doctoral Dissertation Advisor

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide suggestions for doctoral dissertation advisors. The content was developed from discussions with colleagues, doctoral candidates, recipients of advanced degrees, and reviewing literature pertaining to doctoral studies. This article provides some general guidelines and practical functions for doctoral dissertation advisors.

Introduction

Those who succeed in academic scholastic writing at the advanced levels typically write an excellent doctoral dissertation. In writing a dissertation, there appears to be an enjoyment of the constant flowing of ideas. At the doctoral level, mentors are critically important in helping their students complete the dissertation, and later in getting graduates published at the national level in refereed, juried, peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to establish some basic functions of the doctoral dissertation advisor. Hopefully, the suggestions will help others in the doctoral advisement process.

Basic Functions of the Doctoral Dissertation Advisor

The following suggestions are functions of a doctoral dissertation advisor:

1. Keep a folder for each doctoral student. This will give you the opportunity to review previous and current work completed by the student. It will give you the opportunity to review your own comments. Reviewing the folder periodically enables you to firmly grasp the student's concerns with conducting research.
2. Keep track of emails that you send and other correspondence. Make certain that you communicate to students frequently. Not communicating with doctoral students is condescending and shows disrespect.
3. Establish a personal, but professional relationship with your doctoral student advisees. Being a mentor is a very serious responsibility. See each of your students first as people. They have goals and aspirations just as you do.
4. Develop your own style in dissertation advising. The best way to develop your own style is simply by doing it.
5. Be positive in working with doctoral students on their dissertation. Make certain to provide feedback that is constructive and useful. Always strive to be positive and enthusiastic in working with doctoral students on their dissertations. Be cheerful, optimistic, and helpful. Direct advisees to relevant sources of information.
6. Know your strengths, attributes, weaknesses, and limitations.
7. Do your homework in working with each advisee. Make certain to study the dissertation topic your advisee is interested in developing.
8. Think about your own dissertation experience. Avoid any mistakes that were made. Incorporate effective strategies that work.

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9. Encourage advisees to document what they want to do as a dissertation topic.
 10. Strive to make a difference as an advisor to your advisee. Model appropriate behavior.
 11. Make your presence matter in the life of the doctoral student.
 12. Accept the responsibility of doing a good job.
 13. Accept the fact you know more about writing a dissertation than your advisee.
 14. As an advisor, recognize the time when the dissertation topic must be revised or changed. Do not be afraid to tell an advisee when they are wasting time on something that will not work or is not relevant.
 15. Be ready to suggest to your advisee the need to shift the research time to other areas of the dissertation if you see the advisee bog down.
 16. Do not hesitate to tell the advisee to put more effort into the dissertation.
 17. Make certain to realize as an advisor there are many different strategies for writing a doctoral dissertation.
 18. Encourage doctoral students to talk with others who are writing their dissertation. They often can provide practical feedback and encouragement.
 19. Encourage doctoral students to communicate with others in different colleges or departments who are writing their dissertation.
 20. Encourage advisees to explore ideas beyond your suggestions.
 21. Tell your advisees how you like to work with them. If you need to work from an outline – tell the advisee. Let advisees know your own work habits.
 22. Remember, it is the advisee's dissertation – not yours. They must do the work.
 23. If you are an inexperienced dissertation advisor, try to work with a colleague who has successful experience. As an advisor, you are there to help. Help as much as you possibly can.
 24. Be supportive of the advisee's work. Use specific examples in telling advisees their work is good or not acceptable. Point out where the work needs improvement.
 25. Make certain you develop the habit of getting things back to students in a timely manner; hopefully, within five - ten business days. Through being

diligent in your efforts, the advisee will keep focused. Read dissertation chapters at your earliest convenience. Do not let too much time elapse. Remember, you are a busy person and so is your advisee. Establish timelines with the advisee and meet them.

26. Give your doctoral students the responsibility of meeting deadlines.
27. Encourage students to contact you if you have taken too long to respond to them.
28. As an advisor, give lots of suggestions. Be specific, exact, concise, detailed, and comprehensive in all aspects of your advising.
29. Encourage your doctoral students to talk with their committee members throughout the entire process. Other committee members might suggest different approaches or a new study altogether. When this happens, meet with the advisee. Perhaps you will agree or disagree. Keep the dialogue open and positive.
30. It is your duty to encourage your advisees to do the work that must be done to have a quality and professionally satisfying dissertation.
31. Be available. If this means meeting with a doctoral student at a location other than the university, do it. Some advisees need a lot of attention, guidance, and direction. Others are self-directive. Be flexible and adaptable.
32. The advisee should not hear major changes for the first time at the proposal defense.
33. In giving guidance to your advisees, constantly prepare them for their proposal defense and ultimately defending their dissertation. This will keep them focused.
34. Do not take on the job of advisor if you do not intend to make it a priority. Dissertation advisement takes an enormous amount of time and commitment. During the entire process, it will be necessary for you to meet with the other members of the dissertation committee to discuss the progress of the doctoral student.
35. You want your students to tell you “I like the way you are always available, keep up the good work.”
36. The doctoral student and advisor should consult someone other than the student’s committee members for special advising or expertise.

37. Help your advisee when there is a need to clarify the dissertation topic.
38. Try to obtain adequate funding for your advisee's research.
39. Link students with similar dissertation topics together.
40. During the advisement process, dissertation advisors should mentor students by helping them to prepare manuscripts for publication in national, refereed, peer reviewed journals.
41. Consider or recommend doctoral students for university responsibilities, such as facilitating classes when professors are unavailable, and giving examinations at distance learning facilities. This gives them experiences in higher education.
42. Involve doctoral students with coordinating orientation sessions for new students.
43. As a dissertation advisor, develop an approval form for both the proposal and dissertation defense that must be signed by all committee members prior to scheduling a formal meeting. By doing so, the committee members agree the student is ready to present and defend.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the purpose of this article was to establish some general functions of a dissertation advisor. There are numerous functions of a dissertation advisor and these are only a few. In addition, my intention was to provide some general guidelines for thoughtful consideration. Perhaps, you can add to the list.

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