EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF PRE-CANDIDACY SOCIAL SCIENCE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

Austin,

Let this document serve as a reminder that anything in life is possible. I want to share with you the reason that I began this educational journey and where it took me. I want to preface this by acknowledging that no one is perfect, and I never expect that from you. I share my experience with you because I want you to know that it is okay to make mistakes. You will undoubtedly face many challenges throughout life. When you do, remember that persistence and fortitude will lead to success.

For as long as I can remember teachers from elementary to high school always challenged me to academically perform on a level, for which I was not ready. These problems had proved overwhelming at times, due to little or no academic support, little praise from educators, and even smaller self-worth. Falling further and further behind in school, and I can say now that not only did I dislike school, I thought that higher education wasn't for me. After all, I placed at the bottom of my graduating high school class and did not apply to any institutions of higher education upon graduation. It was this feeling of low academic self-efficacy that led me to believe that I would work forever in a low paying job.

My educational turning point came late in life. After being dismissed from a Community College, I enrolled in a small private University. This institution allowed me to make mistakes, learn from my errors, and grow as a student and as a person. I have them to thank for teaching me that, in the words of William Butler Yeats, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." These words have caused me to look at my education from a different perspective. Classes were not just for learning bits and pieces of information; it became an avenue for exploration. It was this newfound passion for learning that led to a two-decade long journey in higher education. This chapter of my life will close with the completion of this body of work and the awarding of a Ph.D. degree. However, my journey continues in research and teaching with the responsibility of passing along what I have learned to the next generation.

Austin, I want you to know that I am proud of all that you have accomplished in your life thus far. You are extraordinary. My wish for you is that one day you will find a passion for education, just as I have. For now, remember to remain humble as you work to make the world a better place, in whatever way makes sense to you, in whatever way you can, and for whomever you can.

With much love,

Dad
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with deep appreciation that I recognize the following significant individuals who have provided me with the assistance, support and encouragement that have enabled me to succeed in the completion of this study.

First, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Stacey Roberts, Dr. Marie Iding, Dr. Lori Ideta, Dr. Peter Leong, and Dr. Joanne Cooper for their input and advice in reviewing the proposal and dissertation. You all have been in inspiration in this journey. I would like especially like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Joanne Cooper for her knowledge, insight, and expert guidance throughout this process. I could not have done this without you.

Second, I would like to thank my wife Jill for being the foundation of this family and allowing me the much-needed time to complete this degree. It is because of your love and support that kept me focused on completing my goal of a Ph.D. degree.

Third, I would like to thank my staff and colleagues at Kapi’olani Community College. Without the support and advice from all of you this journey would not have been possible. As faculty, all of you have shared your expertise, words of wisdom, and have been my cheerleaders. I will forever grateful to you all.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner in crime, Rikki Mitsunaga for pushing me to finish this degree. If it wasn’t for you, I would still be ABD.
ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the experience of pre-candidacy Social Science doctoral students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. First, this study examined the academic and social integration as it relates to student progression through a Ph.D. program. Second, this study examined the ways Ph.D. students’ describe their barriers to doctoral progress. Third, this study explored the relationship between student and faculty advisor. Last, this study explored the practices, processes, and values of social science Ph.D. programs. Using a qualitative case study methodology, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The data collected was aggregated and compiled using multiple levels of qualitative analysis.

Through these multiple levels of analysis, four primary themes emerged: Goals, Support and Acceptance, Reputation, and finally Challenges. The primary themes are further broken down into multiple sub-themes. The subthemes for “Support and Acceptance” include: “I don’t know what I don’t know”, “Investing in the person you are going to be”, opportunities for student engagement, and family encouragement. The subthemes for “Reputation” include: “Top notch program or a happening place”, “useless and hopeless”, and faculty expertise. The subtheme of “Challenges” includes: external commitments, poor job outlook, and lack of resources. The Goals include: self-empowerment, and “becoming an expert”. Implications for this work include the creation of formal mentoring programs, regular evaluation of pre-candidacy students, having open door policies of advising, increase the level of entrepreneurial ship amongst graduate faculty, having graduate faculty be accountable for their students, preparing pre-candidacy students to be treated as a colleague, building of academic self-efficacy.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A Personal Reflection

At the 2005 Stanford commencement the founder of Apple computers, Steve Jobs, spoke of his experiences in higher education. He began his speech with a candid confession of being a college drop out. He stated that after six months of taking required courses, he could not see the value in higher education. He decided then, to drop out but hung around campus for another eighteen months. Looking back on that experience, Jobs said, “it was one the best decisions I had ever made.” Now free from taking the required courses that didn’t interest him, Jobs began taking courses that looked far more attractive. He goes on to say that one course, in particular, calligraphy, excited him but acknowledged that he did not know what practical use if any this would have on his future. The answer to that question came ten years later when Apple began designing the first home computer.

Jobs and his team were the pioneers in multiple typefaces and proportionally spaced fonts in their applications. Without that one course in college, it is likely that personal computers today would be vastly different. Jobs said,

“You cannot connect the dots looking forward, you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something. Your gut, destiny, life, karma or whatever, because believing the dots will connect down the road will give the confidence to follow your heart even if it leads you off the well-worn path, and that will make all the difference”.

Growing up in Hawai‘i, my mother, a single parent with no college education, instilled the value of education in me. She dedicated her life and salary in the hopes that I would have a better future than she did. Foregoing her desire to attend college, she worked a full-time job as a secretary to put me through a private elementary, intermediate, and high school. Over the years,
this belief grew to heartache not only for my mother but myself as well. Throughout my academic career, I was a failure. I could never understand why I was never any good in math, science, english, social studies, and art.

I can remember watching my mother late at night sitting at her desk, going over mounting bills. I often wondered if she had made the right decision in making my life a priority and the guilt from that memory has stayed with me all my life. Barely graduating from high school, I enrolled in the local community college. My goal at that time was to be able to transfer to a four-year institution in two years was met by failure semester after semester. Finally, after two years, I was asked to leave the college. That is the day I will always remember. That was the moment when I decided to take my academic studies seriously. Knowing it was my last attempt to succeed in higher education, I turned to a small private liberal arts college. There, under the guidance of the faculty and staff, I turned my failures into a relentless pursuit of knowledge. Today, my passion for education grows stronger with every course I take, class lecture I attend, and guidance from faculty.

Again, you can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. I believe that my academic journey has led me off the well-worn path early in life, and because of that, it has made all the difference today.

**Trends in American Graduate Education**

Benefits of a post-secondary education have been well documented. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) describe the cognitive, psychosocial, moral, and attitudinal changes as a direct result of attending college. These changes also have a sustained long-term economic benefit and upward social mobility. Baum and Payea (2004) found that graduates with higher levels of post-
secondary education tend to have a higher lifetime earnings and lower levels of unemployment, poverty, and incarceration. After finishing an undergraduate degree, students are presented with multiple options. Ehrenberg (1991) suggests that students will choose one or a combination of the following: working full-time, the pursuit of foreign study, enrollment in either a graduate or professional program.

Students who choose to enroll in a graduate program will be competing in an increasingly knowledge-based American economy. Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2013) reported that six million jobs will require a Master’s degree or higher. Those numbers correlate to an enrollment increase in graduate education from 1.4 million to 2.3 million since 1980. Data collected by Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, and Hutchings, (2008) found that over 375,000 students were accepted and enrolled in Ph.D. programs across the country. While these enrollment statistics are encouraging, the graduation rates of Ph.D. candidates, in particular, are not. In 2007, American graduate schools across the country awarded approximately 604,607 Master’s degrees, compared to 60,616 Doctor of Philosophy degrees (Wendler, Bridgeman, Cline, Millet, Rock, Bell and McAllister, 2010). These enrollment and graduation numbers reflect a larger national problem, that of doctoral student attrition. Lovitts (2001) reported that the national attrition rate among doctoral students was 40-50 percent over the past 20 years. With such a small enrollment of students pursuing a doctoral education, it is the national attrition rates of these future scholars that have academia puzzled. While some administrators have labeled these obstacles as “healthy complexities” that weed out poor candidates, many in the academic community are calling doctoral student attrition a waste of resources, time and energy for both the institution as well as the student (Smallwood, 2004). “The invisible problem,” a term coined by Lovitts, (2001) is used to describe academe’s Laissez-faire attitude towards doctoral student attrition, placing the
blame on the student who departs. The current mentality regarding this phenomenon is, “if the student is at fault, then the university is not, and nothing needs to change” (p. 37). Recently, this attitude has begun to change. Administrators and policy analysts in the academic community now see the only viable solution to this problem as the reformation of the doctorate (McCarty & Ortloff, 2004).

A study by Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2006) found that graduate student mental health can play a significant factor in attrition. As graduate education changes, so does the need for student support services. Hyun et al. (2006) states that graduate students continue to face new challenges such as familial and financial responsibilities. In addition, graduate students experience their education with less guidance and require more self-motivation when compared to undergraduate students. Hyun et al.’s quantitative study focused on graduate student mental health at one large western university. Using logistic regression, the study found that 44.7% of respondents reported having emotional or stress-related problems over a 12 month period. Additionally, the study found that 30.9% of respondents reported having utilized mental health services while in graduate school. As a result of these findings, Hyun et al., (2006) recommends that awareness of mental health services, knowing how and when to refer, and removing the stigma of mental health are important factors to student retention and persistence.

The Doctoral Student Experience

As students enter Ph.D. programs, they can be challenged intellectually, financially, and socially. The ability to retain and persist in their program is dependent on many factors. McAlpine and Norton (2006), posit four variables that influence student retention. Those variables are selection/admission, program requirements, academic climate, and disciplinary
mode of research. Selection/admission refers to the ways in which departments select incoming doctoral students. Program requirements refer to the variety in course content, examination, internship, and dissertation. Academic climate is defined as, “individuals’ perception of their ability to integrate themselves into the intellectual environment” This often refers to department culture, where intellectual dialogue and collegiality are encouraged. Lastly, disciplinary modes of research refer to the way in which doctoral students experience the research component of their program.

Some programs, such as Humanities and Social Sciences, tend to have an individualistic approach to research, whereas Natural Science continues to use a team-based approach. It is this individualistic research culture, combined with an unclear program curriculum, that has led many Humanities and Social Science students to feel isolated and lost. Ali and Kohun (2009) suggest social isolation among doctoral students is prolific and counterproductive. Pre-candidacy students encounter social isolation in many forms. Anxiety avoidance, which refers to students who silently exist a program due to their inability to deal with a new and sometimes unfriendly environment, happens during the coursework stage of the program. Another form of isolation happens during the comprehensive examination stage of the program. Here, students cite a lack of preparedness and guidance from faculty as a major reason for dropping out. These findings are not isolated. In Table 1, data conducted by the National Science Foundation indicates that in the United States, Life and Physical Science Ph.D. students were finishing their degree in a shorter amount of time than Social Science students (Hoffer & Vincent, 2006).
Table 1.

Median total time to degree, registered time to degree, and age at doctorate, by academic year and broad field of science and engineering: Academic years 1978–2003

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(National Science Foundation, 2006)

RTD = registered time to degree.

TTD = total time to degree.
Another report by the Council of Graduate Schools (2010) also found that in 2008, the average time to doctoral degree completion varied from 6.7 years in fields such as physical science and engineering, and 7.7 years in fields such as social science and 9.3 years in the humanities. Various other studies have argued that further research on the topic of doctoral student experiences must be undertaken (Valero, 2001; Anderson et al., 1998; Golde, 1998; Lovitts, 2001). All of these variables fit with Tinto’s (1993) theoretical framework of graduate student persistence, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

**Statement of the Problem**

With social science doctoral student attrition consistently between 40-50 percent over the past 20 years, researchers have begun to focus on the effects of departmental climate and culture. Lovitts (2001) posits that departmental culture and climate is highly correlated to persistence and retention, specifically when it comes to social and professional integration of its pre-candidacy students. This study defines pre-candidacy as the period in a doctoral student’s studies when she or he is deemed ready to undertake independent and original research resulting in a dissertation. Doctoral students achieve candidacy by passing the written and oral portions of the candidacy examination. Candidacy should be reached after doctoral students have taken enough coursework to become proficient in the field of study. It is arguably important that more research be done in this area since it is where 2/3 of students decide to abandon their pursuit of a doctoral degree. Ferrer deValero (2001) found that most research studies on this topic have been quantitative in nature, meaning that surveys had been the primary instrumentation. Interviews, focus groups, and other observational techniques had
rarely been used, and in the opinion of Ferrer de Valero (2001), “would help fill the educational gap in the knowledge related to graduate education” (p. 343).

The purpose of this study is to provide qualitative data on pre-candidacy students’ experiences and perceptions in non-cohort social science Ph.D. programs. First, this study examines the academic & social integration as it relates to student progression through a Ph.D. program. Second, this study examines the ways Ph.D. students’ describe their barriers to doctoral progress. Third, this study explores the relationship between student and faculty advisor. Last, this study explores the practices, processes, and values of social science Ph.D. programs.

**Research Questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are pre-candidacy Ph.D. students’ perceptions of their academic and social experiences in non-cohort social science doctoral programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa?

2. What are the supports and barriers to doctoral progress among pre-candidacy social science Ph.D. students?

3. How do these students’ describe their experiences with their faculty advisors?

4. What are the practices, processes and values of social science Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa?
Definition of Terms

1. Doctoral degree – for this study, a doctoral degree is the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

2. Social Sciences - a branch of science that deals with the institutions and functioning of human society and with the interpersonal relationships of individuals as members of society (The Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2003).

3. Pre-candidacy - The period in a doctoral student’s studies when she or he is deemed ready to undertake independent and original research resulting in a dissertation. Doctoral students achieve candidacy by passing the written and oral portions of the candidacy examination. Candidacy should be reached after doctoral students have taken enough coursework to become proficient in the field of study.

4. Cohort - when a group of students starts and finish their degree together. They are accepted into the same program, take their classes together, and graduate together, building relationships with one another as they do (Tinto, 1993).

5. Attrition - Also referred to as student departure, it is the failure to complete a course of study in an institution of higher education (Tinto, 1993).

6. “Scholarly integration” – Possessing not only basic research skills but integrative and applied work, as well as teaching (Walker et al., 2008, p. 9).

7. “Intellectual community” – The hidden curriculum, sending powerful messages about purpose, commitment, and roles, and creating (or not) the conditions in which intellectual risk-taking, creativity, and entrepreneurship are possible (Walker et al., 2008, p. 10).
8. “External Commitments” – The participation in communities external to the college such as family, work, and community (Tinto, 1993, p. 116).

Chapter Summary

This Chapter covered trends in American graduate programs, the doctoral student experience, and statement of the problem, research questions, and definition of terms. The next chapter includes an in-depth review of the current literature on doctoral education.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Outline of Chapter Content

This chapter discusses the current literature regarding doctoral education. Topics in this chapter include: The decision to enroll in a Ph.D. program, enrollment trends in Social Science Ph.D. Programs, student and department purposes, barriers that affect completion rates, the importance of the faculty advisor/student relationship, adult learning, theoretical framework, and criticisms of Tinto’s interactionalist theory of student departure.

The Decision to Enroll in a Ph.D. Program

The decision to enroll in doctoral education can be a complex and difficult choice for many aspiring students. This section explores the decision to enroll in a Ph.D. program. As stated in chapter 1, Anderson & Swazey (1998) identified four factors that influence a prospective student to enroll in a Ph.D. program. They are: the desire for knowledge in the field of study, desire to teach at a college or university level, wanting to do research, and wanting to help others. Also, Zhang (2005) states that beyond the intrinsic rewards such as wanting to help others, graduate education provides the recipient with extrinsic rewards such as greater human capital, economic reward, and social status. Zhang (2005) also found that students that completed their undergraduate degrees in “high quality” colleges and universities were more likely to enroll in Ph.D. programs. A “high quality” program was defined as being highly selective in its admissions, competitive high school grade point average, SAT scores, and class standing.

While the reasons for wanting to pursue a Ph.D. and demographic data tell one side of the story, how Ph.D. students go about selecting and evaluating their program also needs to be
addressed. Morrison, Rudd, Zumeta, and Nerad (2011) explain that the reputation and quality of a Ph.D. program play a significant role in how social science Ph.D. students perceive a quality program. “Traditionally, excellence in Ph.D. programs has been seen largely coincident with the scholarly reputation of program faculty” (Morrison, Rudd, Zumeta, and Nerad, 2011, p. 536). However, among social science Ph.D. students, qualities such as academic rigor, support in meeting program requirements, fostering a sense of belonging, and training in research skills were cited as more important than scholarly reputation of the faculty. Given these findings by Morrison et al. (2011), the next section focuses on enrollment trends in Social Science Ph.D. programs.

Enrollment Trends in Social Science Ph.D. programs

The previous section of this chapter described the student of a Ph.D. program and the reasons why students choose to enroll in a Ph.D. program. It also touched on the unique needs and values of Ph.D. students in the social sciences. This section addresses in detail, why Ph.D. social science students should be further studied. Referring to Anderson and Swazey (1998), there were four reasons why students decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program. While these reasons for entering a Ph.D. program included teaching, research, wanting to help other, and higher paying jobs, the data also found that almost a quarter of their sample (23%) admitted that they applied for a Ph.D. program because they had nothing else better to do. These findings show a serious lack of understanding of the discipline and the expectation that institutions have for their students. Golde (1998), Ferrer de Valero (2001), Lovitts (2001) have all reported national Ph.D. attrition rates consistently remain at 50 percent. Further, two-thirds or 75 percent of Ph.D. students will exit their program without a degree before reaching candidacy. Taking into account
the high attrition rate of Ph.D. students and reported reason of having nothing else better to do, Zhang (2005) posits another factor in the Ph.D. decision-making process, one that involves the undergraduate major.

Zhang’s (2005) quantitative study focused on the quality of undergraduate academic majors and their advancement to graduate school. Using the dataset of the second follow up of the Baccalaureate and Beyond study, The results of that study showed undergraduates who majored in the social sciences were more likely to pursue a doctoral education because of the low economic return on their educational investment for their undergraduate degree. In addition, the expectation that a terminal degree is required in this discipline, which equates to a Ph.D. in fields such as the Social Sciences. In contrast, undergraduates who majored in business were not likely pursuing a Ph.D. because a Master’s degree is seen as a terminal degree. Also, business majors are more likely to see an immediate return on their education investment without having to pursue a Ph.D.

Student and Department Purposes

This section reviews the purpose of doctoral education from both the student and department perspectives. Also, it discusses the structure and moral obligation of American doctoral education. Historically, doctoral departments emphasize scholarship, research, and teaching, with the goal of contributing new scholars and stewards of their discipline. Golde and Walker (2006) state that the purpose of a doctoral education is to:

“Educate and prepare those to whom we can entrust the vigor, quality, and integrity of the field. This person is a scholar first and foremost, in the fullest sense of the term- someone who
will creatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable moreover, useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application.” (p. 5).

Golde et al. (2006) define the structure of doctoral education having competency in three facets. Those facets are generation, conservation, and transformation. The generation of new knowledge is the heart of any research degree. Ph.D. recipients are expected to be adept in formulating research questions, strategies of investigation, ability to analyze data, and present research findings to the academic community. Conservation refers to the understanding of historical context of the field. Every Ph.D. recipient is expected to have mastered a breadth and depth in theoretical framework, worldviews, and evolution in their discipline. Golde et al. (2006) suggest that conservation is not only concerned with preserving past knowledge but also, new scholars must have the ability to judge which ideas are still relevant and which need revision or further research.

Transformation incorporates teaching as a hallmark of the Ph.D. Conveying information and ideas about a particular discipline is expected in academia regardless of work setting since the Ph.D. graduate is an expert practitioner. For prospective students, the reasons to enroll in a doctoral program vary across disciplines. While these traits such as teaching, research, and wanting to help others were present among all disciplines, their levels of significance varied across disciplines and academic departments. For example, students in the social sciences reported a stronger desire to teach at the college or university level than those in the natural sciences. Natural science departments also had a tendency to have their students work in groups and joint project, whereas social science students tended to work alone. These differences can also be found in other studies. Golde (1998) identified multiple differences between humanities and the natural science Ph.D. curriculum and department culture. Natural science Ph.D. programs
put greater emphasis on faculty advising and research starting from program entry, whereas a humanities Ph.D. program focuses on coursework and teaching internships during the first year of study. Differences also include levels of financial aid. Natural Science Ph.D. students tend work and are paid on research grants run by their program chair. Humanities Ph.D. students, on the other hand, have little to no access when it comes to research grant funding. These department and student purposes prompt further inquiry into the practices, processes, and values of the different departments in the Social Sciences.

**Barriers that Affect Social Science Ph.D. Completion Rates**

McAlpine et al. (2006) found most students are either misinformed about the process of doctoral education or have little knowledge of navigating their way through the program. Program requirements vary in course content, examination, internship, and dissertation. Further complicating matters, some departments have little to no structure regarding minimum course requirements. This variation makes it difficult for students to estimate time to degree completion, cost associated with their degree, and seeking employment. Academic climate is defined as, “individuals’ perception of their ability to integrate themselves into the intellectual environment” (p. 8). While these variables are prevalent among all Ph.D. programs, there are many factors that are specific amongst Social Science Ph.D. students. Gardner (2010) found that the lack of socialization is a key component of attrition among social science students. Socialization is defined as, “the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization” (Gardner, 2010, p. 63).
Adult Learning

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Cor. 13:11). This Bible passage is especially significant in the context of learning. This section explores the characteristics of adult learners, self-directed learning, and how that applies to doctoral education. When trying to define the term adult learning, scholars debated the chronological age cut off. Wlodkowski (2008) suggests various cultural and historical variations as contributing factors to a universal definition and created three categories to include younger adults (18-24 years old), working age adults (25-64 years old), and older adults (65 years and older). However, chronological age alone does not define an adult learner. Mirriam and Cafarella (1999) posit that adults not only learn in different ways but also experience and internalize formal and informal academic events differently.

Historically, when discussing how students learn, the term pedagogy is typically used. However, this term is a bit of a misnomer. By definition, pedagogy is “the art and science of helping children learn.” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Andragogy, on the other hand, is defined as “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Andragogy is based on the following five assumptions:

1. As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature- from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application.

5. Adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones.

The five assumptions of andragogy have set the foundation and validity of the concept of adult learning. These descriptive characteristics are consistent and in line with what we know about doctoral education. As stated in previous sections, students who enroll in Ph.D. programs enter with a plethora of formal and informal knowledge. Examples such as previous work experience, direct knowledge of subject matter and research application are among the many qualities these students process. Also, students who enter a Ph.D. program, do so because they are motivated by some internal factors such as being a steward of the discipline has been well documented by scholars such as Walker (2008). Finally, while some students enroll in Ph.D. programs do so with a specific agenda, there are also students who enroll simply because they had nothing else better to do.

While andragogy gives insight into the characteristics of adult learners, and by extension, doctoral education, it lacks a significant step in the doctoral completion process, the dissertation. The dissertation is considered by institutions of higher education as a scholarly body of work that addresses a gap in the knowledge base. As stated in previous sections, the process of completing a dissertation can be a difficult and sometimes lonely journey for social science students due to the lack of academic and social integration.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) define this process as self-directed learning. The goals of self-directed learning are (1) to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, (2) to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and (3) to
promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning (p. 290). Each of these three goals plays an integral part of the dissertation process. Goal one is to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning. To accomplish this, an adult learner, in this case, a Ph.D. student, must learn how to be proactive about the learning process. By seeking out resources and technology that will aid in personal and professional growth, Ph.D. students are becoming proactive about their educational goals. Goal two is defined as fostering transformational learning as central to self-directed learning. Examples such as critical reflection and constant self-evaluation are used to gauge this type of learning. This goal is central to doctoral education and more specifically, qualitative research. Merriam (1998) describes the researcher as the primary instrumentation in qualitative research.

As the primary instrument, a researcher needs to constantly evaluate and reflect not only the data in a study, but also evaluate and reflect on their own biases and perspectives. The third goal is defined as promoting emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning. Examples such as having control over educational decisions both in a formal and informal setting, and is critical conducting qualitative research. This can certainly be explored in any Ph.D. program, regardless of discipline. With the help of a dissertation chair, Ph.D. students are allowed to select courses within and sometimes outside their academic majors to fulfill departmental requirements.

In addition, topics of study are honed and refined with the help of a dissertation chair, to create a quality body of work. It is this advisor/student relationship that is a key component of the doctoral student experience, and is explored in the next section.
The Advisor/Student Relationship

In the previous section, I discussed barriers that affect social science Ph.D. student success. This section explores the faculty advisor/student relationship and its impact on social science Ph.D. student retention and graduation. Given that some social science Ph.D. programs take an average of 12 years to complete, the doctoral journey can be a long and daunting process. Further, forming strong formal and informal relationships within a doctoral program can be a difficult task among social science students due to the lack of opportunity, resources, and individual barriers. O’Meara, Knudsen, and Jones (2013) found that these formal and informal relationships varied widely among different disciplines, institutional type and prestige of the program. These findings fit with Tinto’s interactionalist theory, which identifies how well students are academically and socially integrated into their discipline. Stallone’s (2004) study on the subject of program culture, faculty-student relations, cohort experience, and individual factors in doctoral student completion revealed interesting results. In this mixed-methods study, Stallone (2004) found that faculty/student relationships were not only critical; it was the most important predictor of success.

While this variable can be construed as universal among all Ph.D. programs, it becomes much more significant among social science Ph.D. students because of the lack of cohort integration and social isolation. Gardner (2008) describes this isolation as “difficult” when social science students transition from the classroom to independent research.

O’Meara et al., (2013) conducted a study on the role of emotional competencies in faculty-doctoral student relations. Their findings identified two ways faculty support their doctoral students, the display of personal competence and the display of social competence. The display of personal competence included intentional strategies to support doctoral students.
Examples of personal competence are, 1) one-on-one regularly scheduled meetings with a student, 2) attracting external funding for student projects, and 3) helping Ph.D. candidates secure grants. The display of social competence was defined as having both social awareness and social skill. Examples of social competence are the ability to empathize with students during difficult or life-changing events, and service orientations such as informal gatherings put on by the faculty to increase team building and bonding among peers.

**Theoretical Framework**

To help understand the experience of doctoral student persistence, researchers frequently use Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory on student departure, or interactionalist theory for short. Primarily suited to study undergraduate student dropout and persistence, this theory is expanded to include graduate education that examines students’ entry characteristics, individual attributes, academic and social integration, external commitments, and their relation to student persistence (Braxton, 2000). By being able to identify the elements of the institutional environment that deter students from degree completion, Tinto (1993) argues that this longitudinal model can be used as a guide in educational policy. By expanding the model to include graduate and doctoral student persistence, researchers such as The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) have given insight into a topic that has been referred to as the invisible problem in academia.

Understanding doctoral student persistence as a longitudinal process, Tinto (1993) had identified ways in which doctoral students persist into three distinct stages. These stages document the social and academic experiences doctoral students encounter over time. The first stage of the graduate persistence is defined as *transition*. In this stage, doctoral students are fulfilling prescribed coursework set forth by the department. In addition, students in this stage are
also seeking membership into the academic community. Forms of these memberships include the integration with faculty and fellow doctoral students in both a formal and informal environment. The second stage of graduate persistence involves the students’ academic progression to candidacy. In this stage the student is tested both academically and socially.

A comprehensive examination is one way doctoral programs test academic competency. Tinto (1993) states that, “Comprehensive examinations involve testing a students’ acquisition of knowledge and the development of academic competencies deemed necessary [for doctoral research]” (p. 236). Social experiences, such as peer and faculty interaction play an important role during this stage. The way a student experiences the social component of doctoral education reflects their academic competency and integration into academia. Lovitts (2001) found that social interaction with other graduate students is critical in a students’ learning experience. Peers provide social support inside and outside of the classroom, and become each other’s future colleagues.

The third and final stage of graduate persistence is the completion of a doctoral dissertation. During this stage, the doctoral student will elect to work with only one faculty member, whose job will be to advise the student through the completion of the research project. Tinto (1993) suggests that the quality of the relationship between student and advisor is critical in predicting persistence. Lovitts (2001) states that, “The advisor influences how the student comes to understand the discipline and the roles and responsibilities of academic professionals, their socialization as a teacher and researcher, the selection of a dissertation topic, the quality of the dissertation topic, the quality of the dissertation, and subsequent job placement” (p. 131).
These three stages lend themselves to Tinto’s (1993) model of graduate persistence shown in Figure 1. The model takes into account the entry attributes such as age, sex, gender, and educational experiences and measures academic and social integration over the three stages. In addition, Tinto (1993) has taken into account levels of external commitments such as work and family responsibilities and their effect on student participation.
Figure 1. Tinto’s 1993 Model of Graduate Persistence
Criticisms of Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory

Vincent Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist theory is widely used to explain college student persistence. As discussed in chapter one, Tinto (1993) identifies pre-entry characteristics, individual attributes, along with academic and social variables as integral components of his interactionalist theory. Unlike Astin’s (1985) theory of involvement, which posited that the more a student invests time and energy into learning, the greater that achievement, satisfaction, with their educational experience, Tinto’s (1993) theory adds the dimension of integration. It is this variable of integration that is at the crux of the criticism of Tinto’s theory. One criticism of Tinto’s interactionalist theory comes from Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) who cite the numerous barriers that non-traditional, and by extension adult learners, face when attending college.

While Tinto’s (1993) theory focuses on traditional aged college students, there is no mention of the varying needs and obstacles of non-traditional students. Rendón et al. (2000) describe obstacles such as: working full time or part time jobs, being a single parent, or caregivers to aging family members, as reasons non-traditional students elect to take a reduced course load. In addition, Rendón et al. (2000) found that many non-traditional students come from working class backgrounds, predominately minority and first-generation. These factors have led to a lack of time spent on campus and thus a lesser likelihood involvement and integration into the institution. Rendón (1994) found that unlike traditional age students who utilize on campus clubs and organizations as a means of social integration and involvement, nontraditional students favored validation and campus outreach and intervention. Forms of these outreach and intervention
programs are specifically tailored for their needs, such as a single parent or first generation college student programs.

Another criticism of Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory comes from Kuh and Love (2000), who indicate a lack of cultural perspective. Kuh and Love (2000) found that minority students, who attend institutions of higher education that have a distinct dominant culture may be forced to renounce some aspects of their cultural of origin.

This loss of cultural identity or inability to successfully integrate into a dominant culture has many students leaving colleges before graduation. Tierney (1992) further argues that the social integration component of Tinto’s interactionalist theory is in need of further examination. Tierney (1992) states that researchers who study cultural and social integration must take into account their own background and prejudices. By not coming to terms with his or her own preconceived notions of reality Tinto’s interactionalist theory does not reflect a multicultural understanding of social integration. Tinto never takes into account, or at least never explains to readers, that he is a “native” studying “native rituals.” As a faculty member at a mainstream university he describes processes in which he partakes. The point is not that a native observer’s analysis is useless. To the contrary, native perceptions of the world are essential to understanding the world but one must necessarily accept that those understandings are provisional, subjective, and never complete. (Tierney, 1992, p. 611)

Museus, Yi, and Saelua (2017) also critique Tinto’s (1993) theory for its lack of cultural foundation. Specifically, Museus et al. writes that “comprehensive and culturally conscious frameworks that attempt to explain the process by which campus environments influence student success are difficult to find” (p. 191). Instead, a new theoretical model of student success has been proposed. The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model attempts to
incorporate aspects Tinto’s (1993) theory such as pre-college inputs along with external influences such as familial obligation and work to include the criticisms of the Tinto model by emphasizing new variables such as cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. Museus et al. (2017) define cultural relevance as, “the degree to which students’ campus environments are relevant to their cultural backgrounds and identities” (p. 192). Cultural responsiveness is defined as, “the extent to which campus programs and practices effectively respond to the needs of culturally diverse student populations” (p. 192). Museus et al.’s quantitative study of 499 students adds to our understanding of the importance of the elements of campus environments and sense of belonging among minorities. This study also reinforces the importance of “positive influences on college student experiences and outcome” (p. 208).

**Chapter Summary**

This literature review found that pre-candidacy doctoral students in the Social Sciences face a plethora of challenges, perhaps even more so than in other fields such as Natural Science. Gardner (2010) found that social isolation lack of integration play a significant role in doctoral completion. In addition, the role of faculty advisor has been determined to be a key factor in Ph.D. student satisfaction and retention. Stallone (2004) found that faculty/student relationships were not only critical; it was the most important predictor of success. Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist theory provides the primary holistic theoretical lens for this study. The next chapter explores the research methodology for this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Outline of Chapter Content

The purpose of this study is to explore: (a) pre-candidacy Ph.D. students’ perceptions of their academic and social experiences in non-cohort social science doctoral programs, (b) the supports and barriers to doctoral progress, (c) how students describe their experience with their faculty advisor, and (d) the practices, processes, and values of social science Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. This chapter discusses this research design, role of the researcher, participant sampling, data collection and analysis, limitations of the study, and methods to ensure validation and creditability.

Research Design

A well thought out research design starts with the type of questions to be answered. Previous national studies involving the tracking of Ph.D. students’ retention, persistence, and graduation have utilized a quantitative tool such as an inventory questionnaire. Thus far, there has not been any comprehensive study utilizing a qualitative methodology. This study addresses this the subject matter from a qualitative perspective and add to the knowledge base. Merriam (1998) explains five characteristics of qualitative research as:

- Understanding of a phenomenon from an insider’s or emic perspective
- The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis
- Involves fieldwork
- Primarily employs an inductive research strategy
- The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive

For this study a qualitative methodology, specifically case study, is most appropriate because it (a) explores a bounded system over time (b) identifies different perspectives regarding
one issue, and (c) involves in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). This study is bounded in three ways. First, it is bounded by the location of the study. While the University of Hawai‘i is a 10-campus system, only the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is an extensive research and doctoral granting institution. Secondly, the selected field of study, the College of Social Science constitutes a boundary for this case study.

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Social Sciences currently grants Ph.D.’s in seven different fields of study. They are: Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Urban and Regional Planning. It is important to note that the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Communication & Information Sciences (CIS) will not be included in this study since it is sponsored by four different units (The Department of Information and Computer Sciences and the Library and Information Science Program in the College of Natural Sciences, the School of Communications in the College of Social Sciences, and the Department of Information Technology Management in the Shidler College of Business) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Finally, it is bounded by a specific amount of time. This study involved the interviewing of 5 the graduate chairs and 1 Administrator in the College of Social Sciences. Snowball sampling was used to effectively interview nine Ph.D. students in the College of Social Sciences, for a total of 15 participants during the Fall 2014 through Fall 2015 academic years.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is an important piece of any research study. When conducting a qualitative research study, the primary investigator is responsible for research design and conducts both data collection and analysis. Merriam (1998) describes the traits of a good
qualitative researcher as having tolerance for ambiguity and sensitivity. Tolerance for ambiguity can refer to the process of conducting qualitative research. “Throughout the research process – from designing the study, to data collection, to data analysis – there are no set procedures or protocols that can be followed step by step” (p. 20). Working with little to no structure can make the process of navigating a qualitative research study difficult for some novices. Sensitivity, according to Merriam (1998), must be observed during the data collection and analysis phase. Sensitivity refers to being intuitive to non-verbal behaviors and physical locations of the study. Sensitivity also refers to the primary investigators personal biases, experiences, and worldview. This section explains my biases, personal experiences, and worldview.

As a doctoral student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I have my own preconceived notions about why someone would choose to enroll, retain, and/or leave a program. Creswell (2007) writes that researchers should employ bracketing in a qualitative research project. Bracketing consists of setting aside one’s own experiences in order to view the topic from a fresh perspective. Patton (2002) writes that, “The principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 566). Lather (2003) also emphasizes the disclosure of assumptions in qualitative research using term reflexivity. “Built into the research design should be an articulation of researcher assumptions. In the written report, researchers must address how or whether their assumptions changed during the research process” (Lather, 2003, p. 187).

By addressing my own personal values, beliefs, and experiences as a doctoral student, I have gained an understanding of my biases and was open to hearing the perspectives of my participants.
Personal Values and Beliefs

When I think of the value of education that I have been instilled with, my earliest memory was as a child growing up in Hawai‘i. My parents divorced when I was young and I was living with my mother and grandparents. My mother, a secretary for the US Coast Guard, struggled to find a place to live, put food on the table, and clothe us. Although she worked hard and long hours, it seemed, at least to me, that we weren’t like other families. When we moved out of my grandparent’s home to an apartment, my mother put aside money to send me to private school. She would tell me over and over, education is the most important thing in life. It’s more important than money, cars, houses, and all the fancy things your friends have. “Even though you can’t see it, it’s the one thing nobody can take away from you.” Throughout my adolescent years I’ve tried to remember those words.

As a student I struggled with academics. While my friends had private tutors, I was left with little in terms of good study skills and habits. When I asked my father for help on the weekends, he would simply say, “go read the book.” Working as an automotive mechanic, I can’t blame him for not knowing how to tutor me. As my struggles in academic continued well into my junior-year of high school when I was dismissed from my high school for poor grades. I remember my parents and grandparents were extremely disappointed, and it was one of the worst feelings I had ever experienced.

Having poor intellectual self-confidence, I just barely graduated high school and enrolled at the local community college. Being a first generation college student, neither my parents nor I had any idea what to expect. Within two years, I was dismissed from the institution for poor academics. At this point, my mother sat me down and reiterated those words she had said to me long ago. “Education is the most important thing in life. Even though you can’t see it, it’s the one
thing nobody can take away from you.” I enrolled at Chaminade University for one semester to see if college was a realistic possibility. With the help of the academic advisors, faculty, and administrators, I graduated with a double major in English and Political Science in 2002. At my graduation ceremony, my grandmother said to me, “I’m happy and at peace.” She died a few months later. This moment changed my whole belief in education.

When deciding if I should apply for the Ph.D. program, I was faced with the difficult question of why I wanted to pursue a research-based degree. I began by asking fellow classmates in my Masters program if they were planning on applying. Most of them said no, but there were a few that were interested. Getting together over drinks, we discussed our ambitions and aspirations for being a part of the academy. For the answer for applying came easy. Money, status, family obligation, and desire to further their career were among the top choices. When it came for me to answer I said, “It’s a calling.” An odd answer and certainly not one that was common but I went on to explain. When I was attending my first University of Hawai‘i graduate ceremony when I noticed that there was a distinct difference in academic regalia. My friend remarked, “Brandon, I don’t think you or I will ever get to wear something like that.” Those words hit me hard. It wasn’t the regalia that bothered me, but the fact he believed that we weren’t smart enough to pursue an advanced degree. When it came time to apply for the Ph.D. program, I felt as though this was something that I was called to do. Since then, when I feel like quitting and leaving the Ph.D. program, I reflect on my doctoral admissions essay and remember that this degree means something beyond money, status, family obligation, and desire to further my career. It’s a calling that has shaped my identity both professionally and personally.
My Identity and Experiences as a Doctoral Student

When researching the topic of doctoral student experiences, I can’t help but think that they enter Ph.D. programs with very little thought regarding why they chose to enroll, the amount of work that is involved, and the time it takes to finish. This lack of understanding of the discipline is consistent with the research by Anderson and Swazey (1998), which found that a quarter of his sample admitted that they applied for a Ph.D. program because they had nothing else better to do. This research shows that traditional measures of Ph.D. admission (i.e. undergraduate grades, GRE scores, and writing samples) are not the only predictors of student success. My experience has been that Ph.D. programs can help alleviate much of this by implementing regular workshops to perspective doctoral students on the expectations, coursework, and career outlook before they apply to a Ph.D. program. In addition, I feel that the lack of professional experience in the field contributes to the high attrition rate amongst Social Science Ph.D. students.

By studying the experiences of pre-candidacy social science doctoral students, this study adds knowledge and a better understanding of why students at the College of Social Science decides to pursue a Ph.D. degree. Once admitted to a Ph.D. program, students enter a new phase of their academics, with research being a key component of the curriculum. Students will be challenged with comprehensive coursework in their discipline, charged to investigate a problem that has yet to be solved, and defend their findings amongst a faculty committee. Each phase of their doctoral education requires positive academic and social integration in order to retain to the next phase (Tinto, 1993).

Reflecting back on my own experience in a non-cohort program I can say that academic integration hasn’t been difficult, however consistent social integration has proven to be much
more challenging and elusive. In 2006, I was greeted into the Ph.D. program by the graduate chair, Dr. Ron Heck. This greeting was not in a formal setting such as a ceremony or meeting, but in the middle of a class. I remember Dr. Heck saying, “By the way, you got in the program. Congratulations!” That was enough for me. I felt validated and accepted into the world of academia. Throughout the next few years, I managed to take the required courses for the program. Academically, I was fine and finished all the courses within two years. Reflecting back on my social integration into the program, I felt as though I had made a smooth transition. In my Masters program I met many Ph.D. students and we became close friends. Socially, we got together before and after class to discuss our careers and current day-to-day gossip. In my program, many of the students were already working in some capacity within the university system. It was natural that we all shared in the same camaraderie.

In addition to an easy social transition, I joined the College of Education Doctoral Student Association and became a member of its council. At the time, it was fun to plan events and workshops for new and continuing students. I saw the value of having a group of students who shared in making the journey to the Ph.D. bearable and fun. However, as the years went on I moved from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa to Kapi‘olani Community College.

Being physically distant from the College of Education, it became difficult to stay motivated in the program. It wasn’t motivated again until I met two aspiring doctoral students, who were recently hired at Kapi‘olani Community College. That social integration component has proven, at least to me, to be a critical factor in retention and progress. As a group, we met regularly to discuss our progress of our dissertations. Over lunches and coffee we argued and debated theoretical frameworks, qualitative methodology, and frequently found articles that benefited each other’s study. Lieberman (1986) states that through collaboration, learners have
the freedom to be creative and innovative, the capacity to influence and share with others, and the opportunity to receive feedback, recognition, and support. Such collaboration facilitates reflection and creates a sense of empowerment. I couldn’t agree more. I believe that through the collaborative process, doctoral students in non-cohort social science programs can feel a sense of informal social integration.

Having a positive social integrative experience motivates doctoral students to persist and stay motivated. Abbey, Baily, Moore, Nyof-Young, Pedretti and Saranchuk (1997) study on the importance of long-term collaboration among seven doctoral students as they prepared for their comprehensive examinations speaks to my personal journey in the Ph.D. program. Using grounded theory, the study found four important elements that formed collaboration: Logistics, social dynamics, empowerment, and change. Logistics consisted of identifying the way the research was to be conducted, how to gather data, and methods of internal validity. This study utilized tape recordings of each session, transcribed selected discussions, and written field notes describing their experience. Each member of the group critiqued the textual accounts of the experience for internal validity. Social dynamics comprised of identifying an individual members strengths, weakness, and expertise.

Meeting on a regular basis, the group became comfortable with discussing and sharing their writing and eventually developed trust.

“Competition was set aside. I was surprised at how willing I was to share a draft of my first exam paper. I did not hesitate to offer any of my original insights or strategies for addressing the exam questions with the group. There is no need to hide or withhold anything from these people. Human relationships became more important than paper, partnerships overshadowed procedures, and caring trust replaced judgment and self-doubt” (Abbey et al., 1997, p. 106).
Empowerment came when some members of the group experienced difficulty with navigating the policies and practices of the department. Being able to discuss and evaluate their feelings within the group provided a liberation of emotion. “Our meetings provided a degree of harmony and balance to an otherwise uncertain and stressful situation. Gradually, they became a means through which we developed a sense of control over the exam requirement” (Abbey et al., 1997, p. 107).

The final element, change, came about when the group met after a school holiday. During that time, a transformation had occurred. Through consistent meetings and discussion, the group had learned what topic really interested them, why they were passionate about it, and gained a feeling of control over their studies. “Sharing a journey made each of us identify and articulate a personal reason for taking the trip” (Abbey et al., 1997, p. 109). Abbey et al. (1997) study has provided researchers a unique approach to informal social integration. The four elements of collaboration is certainly one aspect of the doctoral student journey. However, it does not address the daily life outside of their academic life, which Tinto (1993) has defined as external commitments. The next section identifies two critical incidents of external commitment that has shaped my journey to the Ph.D.

**Critical Incidents of External Commitment**

Patton (2002) defines critical incidents as, “major events that can constitute self-contained descriptive units of analysis, often presented in order of importance rather than in sequence of occurrence” (p. 439). Throughout my doctoral program, there have been two critical incidents that have made it difficult to persist and retain. The first critical instance came in the fall of 2008. As the US economy declined, the federal grant project I was working for ended, and
I found myself unemployed. For the first time in my graduate program I felt as though I didn’t belong in higher education. Though it only took three months to find another position, it wasn’t with the University of Hawai‘i. While I was grateful to have a job again, the position that I had been appointed to demanded more time and effort. I was constantly working seven days week and into the evenings. This made going to class difficult, at best. What started off as being fun and a joy, turned into burden. During this time I was ready to quit the program. I had no social support system to help alleviate any of the negative feelings I had for the new position or my situation with my doctoral program. It wasn’t until I left that position that I felt as though I could seriously continue to advance in the doctoral program. In the spring of 2010 I did just that. I took a faculty position at Kapi‘olani Community College. This 9-month position allowed me to write in the summer and during breaks. In addition, some of my new colleagues were also in similar doctoral programs. It was helpful to bounce ideas off of each other and have a different perspective from other programs. For me, having an informal socially integrated network was the difference between attrition and persistence. The second critical incident came on September 9, 2011 when my son was born. This incident came as the most incredible and most time consuming of all.

As a first time parent I felt overwhelmed with the amount of time and effort that came with caring for a newborn. In addition, the apartment we were living in was just too small to accommodate a third person. So, the day after he was born, we moved to a townhome. All of these activities, along with working a full-time job placed my ambition for a doctoral degree on hold. Five years later, I can say that I have adjusted to parenthood and taken on more responsibility at work. As a Director of Student Services at Kapi‘olani Community College, I see a targeted population of students who identify as first generation, low income, or a student with a
disability. While I did not expect to be in a position with many responsibilities, I am grateful that I can share my knowledge and stories of struggles with my students. I am given daily reminders that I am not earning a doctoral degree for me, but I am earning a degree to help my family, students, and institution succeed.

**Researcher Bias and the Use of Empathetic Neutrality**

Patton (2002) states that in qualitative research, there is no definitive list of questions that must be addressed in order to establish the investigators credibility. It is also important to note, “value-free interpretive research is impossible” (p. 569). Every researcher brings with them, without choice, a preconceived notion about the topic being studied. This study is no different. The fact that I am studying doctoral students while enrolled as student myself brings with it issues of the credibility of the researcher. Patton (2002) suggests using empathetic neutrality as a means of providing objectivity. By definition empathetic neutrality is “caring about and interested in the people being studied, but neutral about the content of what they reveal” (p. 569).

Keeping an open mind about the experiences of doctoral students, no matter how different or similar the experience may be, is important in this study. House (1977) goes on to say that the evaluator should not have previously decided what constitutes a good answer from a poor one. Instead, researchers must be impartial rather than subjective. While these suggestions are helpful in creating credibility and objectivity, Patton (2002) believes that it is difficult to achieve. For my research study, I employed the use of bracketing and empathetic neutrality as a means of researcher credibility. In addition, was be guided by the following quote: “Good qualitative research brings voice and insight forward for all constituents living complex phenomena, including underrepresented people and their experiences. Using good qualitative
work to demonstrate effectiveness allows institutions to realize their mission more fully”
(Arminio and Hultgren, 2002 p. 458)

With regard to this study, I share both an insider and outsider perspective. As an insider and current Ph.D. student, I possess firsthand knowledge of the multitude of challenges doctoral students face as they navigate their way through a program. I can identify and relate to many of the academic and social experiences they may have encountered thus far. However, as an outsider, it is possible that the practices, processes, and values of my department may be different than others. Although my participants and I are University of Hawai‘i Ph.D. students, I do not know what their academic and social norms are. Further, my own positive experience with my faculty advisor may not be the shared across departments. For this study, I need to be aware of these biases and remember that each doctoral student has had a unique experience while in their program. Further, it is this unique experience that adds further knowledge of practices, processes, and values of Social Science doctoral programs.

**Site Description**

The site chosen for this study is the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) in Honolulu Hawai‘i. Founded in 1907, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is the flagship research institution in the state of Hawai‘i. As one of the 10 campuses in the University of Hawai‘i system, UHM enrolled 20,409 students across 293 different majors (IRAO, 2012). The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is classified by the Carnegie as a R1: Doctoral Universities-Highest Research Activity. Universities in this classification award at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees each year and does not include professional practice doctoral-level degrees, such as the JD, MD, PharmD, DPT
UHM currently offers 55 different Ph.D. programs and in Spring 2017, enrolled 1,412 Ph.D. students (IRAO, 2017).

Illustrated in Table 3, data for the past seven academic years indicate that UHM has a higher rate of enrollment of women into Ph.D. programs. This longitudinal trend is echoed in the national data. Table 4 illustrates longitudinal data of all University of Hawai‘i Ph.D. programs time to degree completion (TTD) over an 8-year span. Starting from the academic year 2004-2005 to 2010-2011.

Table 2.
UH Mānoa Doctoral Program Enrollment by Academic Major Spring 2017

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**School of Travel Industry Mgt**

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**College of Education**

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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Molecular Bioscience &amp; Bioengr</td>
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<td>Molecular Biosciences &amp; Biotech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat Res &amp; Env Mgt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Res &amp; Environmentl Mgt</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant &amp; Env Protect Sci</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entomology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plant &amp; Environ Protection Sci</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tropical Plant &amp; Soil Sci</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tropical Plant &amp; Soil Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School of Law</strong></td>
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<td>Law</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>School of Medicine</strong></td>
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<td>Cell &amp; Molecular Biology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Welfare</td>
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</table>
Table 3.

Enrollment of Ph.D. Students by Gender UHM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>878</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td>1,659</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>1,664</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(Institutional Research and Analysis Office, 2012)

Table 4.

Ph.D. Awarded – Average Time to Degree at UHM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVG TTD (In Years)</th>
<th>ACADEMIC YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AY0405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Institutional Research and Analysis Office, 2012)
Within the 52 different Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the College of Social Sciences grants Ph.D. degrees in seven different disciplines. They are Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Urban and regional planning. The mission of the College of Social Science is to “foster a vibrant academic climate and to support academic scholarship.”

http://www.socialsciences.Hawai‘i.edu/about.html).

According to the college, these two themes are intertwined and provide the basis for program implementation and evaluation. The College explains how each of these themes is put into action. First, a vibrant academic climate consists of continuous improvement of course content and delivery. In addition, members of the college are engaged in research. Second, is the support of “outstanding scholarship”. The college defines outstanding scholarship in three distinct areas, which include Teaching, Research, and application. Teaching is an important area because it allows the college faculty to engage students in their pursuit of knowledge while developing critical thinking skills. The College of Social Sciences embraces the idea of research, and it perpetuates itself throughout the many disciplines. The College of Social Sciences recognizes that research adds to the creation of new knowledge and enhances the intellectual climate. Application is the ability to extend faculty expertise into the larger community. By addressing community issues through an academic lens, social scientists are able to apply research methods and begin to affect social issues.

In the academic year Spring 2017, 239 students enrolled in the College of Social Sciences Ph.D. programs. While the College of Social Sciences employs award-winning faculty, publishes numerous scholarly works annually, and produces high-quality graduates, the time to degree (TTD) completion rate amongst its Ph.D. students is alarming. Ph.D. students in the Colleges of
Social Sciences have consistently taken longer to graduate than those in the College of Natural Sciences. As discussed in chapter one, this is not just a problem at UHM, but it is a national one. Table 5 illustrates longitudinal data between University of Hawai’i Social Science and Natural Science time to degree completion (TTD) over an eight year span. Starting from academic year 2004-2005 to 2010-2011, the data suggests that the University of Hawa’i at Mānoa is following national trend of Social Science doctoral students taking longer to complete their degree when compared to Natural Science doctoral students.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVG TTD (In Years)</th>
<th>ACADEMIC YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AY 0405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Institutional Research and Analysis Office, 2012)

Participants

In any case study, purposeful sampling is critical in determining the boundaries of the study. Patton (2002) defines purposeful sampling as selecting information rich cases that the researcher can use to gain a great deal of understanding on a particular issue. This study utilized a method Merriam (1998) describes as snowball sampling, a process of asking participants in a study to refer one or more than one other person that fits your sample criteria. This study began
by interviewing five graduate chairs and one Administrator in the College of Social Sciences. This study considers them “gatekeepers” because they were asked to email or call at least two student participants who were willing to talk about their experiences as a pre-candidacy social science doctoral student and met the eligibility criteria. These “gatekeepers” according to Creswell (2007) typically have formal authority at the site or know participants that would meet the sample criteria.

To be deemed eligible for this study, a participant must have met the one of the following: A graduate student admitted to one of the seven college of Social Sciences Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa , and not be regarded as all but dissertation “ABD” by the Office of Graduate Education at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Participants agreed to be interviewed, I allowed them to choose the site, time and method of interview (ie phone, skype, face-to-face). Sites for the interviews consisted of on campus conference rooms, faculty offices, and a cafeteria located on campus. Name some of the sites? This was done to ensure that the participant felt comfortable and willing to talk openly about their experience. Following the first student interview, I asked participants to name other doctoral students that would also be interested in participating in this study. For departments whose graduate chair did not participate in the study, an email was sent to all graduate faculty in that department to recruit potential doctoral student participants. These methods yielded nine doctoral student participants, with at least one participant in each of the seven departments. A total of 15 participants were interviewed. Table 6 illustrates student participant demographic data to include pseudonym, gender, age at time of interview, department, enrollment status, and affiliation. Table 7 illustrates graduate chair/administrator demographic data to include pseudonym, gender, department, and affiliation.
Table 6.
PhD Student Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Urban and Regional Planning</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.
Graduate Chair/ Administrator Participant Demographic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College of Social Sciences</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Graduate Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Graduate Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Urban and Regional Planning</td>
<td>Graduate Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Graduate Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Graduate Chair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) states that data collection, particularly in case studies, utilizes an array of methods. He lists six forms of documentation including archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. The data collection method for this study consists of semi-structured interviews and direct observation. Merriam (1998) defines semi-structured interviews as having flexibly worded interview questions that do not necessarily have
to adhere to a particular order. In addition, semi structured interviews allow for emerging new topics. I chose this interview structure because I wanted the subjects in this study to be able to share their experiences openly and not feel that they have to adhere to a canned response. Each participant in this study was asked to engage in a 60-90 minute interview. The location was at a mutually agreeable and neutral environment. By having the participant interviews take place on a mutually agreeable and neutral environment, I had the opportunity to directly observe participants in an area where they are most comfortable in telling their experiences of progressing through the pre-candidacy years of their program.

With the permission of the participant, an audio recording device along with a tablet for writing field notes was used. The recordings have no identifying information. The purpose of having an audio recording device is to help with the transcription and data analysis. All information collected was kept in a locked file cabinet, in a locked office, in a locked building. Access to participant data is limited to the primary researcher. Participants in need of counseling services were provided with the office location as well as the phone number for the UH Mānoa Counseling and Student Development Center. In addition, a compensation for time was offered to participants in this study in the form of a gift card of $50.00 to a coffee shop or store of their choice. It is important to note that this compensation was offered to all participants regardless of interview completion.

**Deductive and Inductive Case Study Analysis in Qualitative Research**

Patton (2002) discusses two types of data analysis in qualitative research: deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive analysis is defined as “analyzing data according to an existing framework.” This is not typical in most qualitative research studies. Second is inductive analysis,
defined as “analysis that involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data. Findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst’s interactions with the data” (p. 453).

Inductive analysis is one hallmark of qualitative research that seeks to identify, explain, and define the categories developed by participants of the study. Inductive analysis also seeks to identify, explain, and define categories which the participants did not have labels or terms. It is the researcher’s responsibility to develop these terms into new and/or emerging categories. The main difference between inductive and deductive analysis is that inductive analysis “does not utilize preexisting variables before the data collection begins” (Patton, 2002, p. 56)

This study utilizes inductive analysis in its approach to define categories, themes and patterns.

**Data Analysis**

The goal of qualitative research is to make meaning out of raw data. Richardson (2000) writes that qualitative analysis and writing involve us not just in making sense of the world but also making sense of our relationship to the world and therefore in discovering things about ourselves even as we discover things about some phenomenon or interest. Creswell (2002) breaks down case study data analysis into three stages. The three stages are: preparing and organizing data, reducing the data into themes, and representing the data in figures. For this study, I collected data using multiple sources.

I was able to write reflective passages within the field notes taken after each interview. Writing a reflective passage gave me the opportunity to rethink the tone and mood of the interview. It also gave me another chance to write field notes that would have been missing during the initial interview. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that these self-memos helped in the researcher in understanding the larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues. As
stated in the data collection section, in addition to field notes, I utilized an audio recording device. The audio recording device serves as an instrument to help with the transcription of data. By having a verbatim record of each interview aided me in the next step of analysis, which includes reducing data into themes. Arguably this section of the analysis was the most difficult. Patton (2002) describes coding as analyzing raw data and labeling significant details and/or patterns while keeping in mind to use rich and thick descriptions. This study utilizes descriptive coding and pattern coding to analyze data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) define descriptive coding as using a short word or phrase to describe a passage of qualitative data. This coding method was selected because it can be applied different types of data such as interview transcriptions and field notes. Since this study involves 7 different academic departments in the College of Social Sciences, finding common and meaningful data proved difficult. Therefore, in addition to descriptive coding, pattern coding was also used. Pattern coding was used as a secondary coding method in order to identify emergent themes. For this study, I began with creating a profile of each of the participants using a descriptive coding system. In addition, I also used pseudonyms for all of the participants in this study to ensure anonymity.

The software, Microsoft excel, provided me with tools that aided in the coding and managing of the data. After the initial descriptive coding from the 15 participants, I utilized pattern coding to categorize the data into themes. Using these themes, allows for confirmation, disconfirmation, or the addition of new knowledge to Tinto’s Interactionalist theory of student departure.
Limitations to the Study

Being a novice researcher engaging in one’s first research project can be daunting. This section addresses the limitations of this research study, taking into account the methodology, participants, and the site. First, as a novice qualitative researcher, I have apprehensions about being the primary research instrument. Gathering and analyzing data is something I am not accustomed to doing. I remembered to take into account researcher bias as a fellow Ph.D. student struggling with the same supports, barriers, and external commitments. Second, being able to gain access and building a rapport with participants were also limitations of the study. Being a novice researcher and Ph.D. student in the College of Education limited my perspective as to the norms and rituals of other Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Taking the time to have these norms explained in detail did not hinder rapport building but limited my understanding of the experiences of the participants. Patton (2002) recommends having a positive rapport with those who can provide access to possible participants and credible information. Time and budgetary issues also limit this research study. Since this study was self-funded for two semesters, there were limited number of participants who were willing to be interviewed. The final limitation is the site chosen for this study. While the University of Hawai‘i is a 10-campus system, only the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is a research and doctoral granting institution. Data collected in this study is not generalizable beyond the 15 participants and the seven departments within the College of Social Sciences.

However, while this study is not intended to generalize the experience of non-cohort social science Ph.D. students, it brings awareness of the roles that academic, social integration, and external commitments play in student persistence and retention.
Ensuring Validation and Credibility

Ensuring validity and credibility is an issue that is frequently brought up in qualitative research. Validity in quantitative studies is determined by the frequency of survey data and reliability is determined by how well your instrumentation is able to yield the same outcome on a consistent basis. Qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses on the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection. By doing so, data analysis or data interpretation will be different with each study. Merriam (1998) states that qualitative research is “ever-changing and is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured” (p. 202).

This study utilized member checking and peer debriefing to address validity.

Merriam (1998) defines member checks as, “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (p. 204). For this study, participants were emailed copies of the transcript along with instructions to review and make any changes or edits to the document within 30 days. Peer debriefing is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). By using a peer debriefing as a means of establishing credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the researcher will have (a) the opportunity to test a working hypothesis and (b) provide an opportunity to develop and test subsequent steps in the emerging research design (p. 308).

For this study, I enlisted the help of Dr. Shannon Sakamoto in multiple peer debriefing sessions. Dr. Sakamoto earned her Ed.D. from the University of Southern California in Educational Leadership and is currently an Assistant Professor with Kapi‘olani Community College. Her body of work includes a qualitative study that focuses on local culture and identity.
in Hawai‘i. Dr. Sakamoto’s work experience expands well beyond Kapiʻolani Community College. Having been previously employed by the University of California San Diego and the University of Southern California, she brings an in-depth and unique expertise in University Administration, Counseling, and Residential Life.

**Chapter Summary**

This study used a qualitative research method to explore the experiences of non-cohort Social Science doctoral students. The case study method was selected for this study because is most appropriate because it (a) explores a bounded system over time (b) identifies different perspectives regarding one issue, and (c) involves in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). The data collection method and analysis is in line with and approved by the Committee for Human Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The limitations of this study have also been explained in this chapter. Finally, this study ensured validation and credibility by explaining the role of the researcher, beliefs and biases, member checking via email and the use of a peer debriefing.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Outline of Chapter Content

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the experience of pre-candidacy Social Science doctoral students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. First, this study examined the academic and social integration as it relates to student progression through a Ph.D. program. Second, this study examined the ways Ph.D. students’ describe their barriers to doctoral progress. Third, this study explored the relationship between student and faculty advisor. Finally, this study explored the practices, processes, and values of social science Ph.D. programs.

Participants in this study were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The data collected were aggregated and compiled using multiple levels of qualitative analysis. Through these multiple levels of analysis, four primary themes emerged: Goals, Support and Acceptance, Reputation, and finally Challenges. The primary themes are further broken down into multiple sub-themes. The subthemes for Goals include: self-empowerment, and “becoming an expert”. The subthemes for “Support and Acceptance” include: “I don’t know what I don’t know”, “Investing in the person you are going to be”, opportunities for student engagement, and family encouragement. The subthemes for “Reputation” include: “Top notch program or a happening place”, “useless and hopeless”, and faculty expertise. The subtheme of “Challenges” includes: external commitments, poor job outlook, and lack of resources.

Goals

Many student participants in this study expressed hope, optimism, and fortitude when they talked about some of the reasons why they decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program. In this
section I will discuss the theme of goals in its relation to this theme, which is separated into two subthemes: self-empowerment, and “becoming an expert”.

**Self-Empowerment**

Students who enroll in a doctoral program do so for many reasons. In this section, the sub-theme of self-empowerment was used to describe the participants’ experiences outside of academia and the effect it had when deciding to enroll in a doctoral program.

For Katie, a student participant in this study, the decision to enroll in a Ph.D. program was natural. As a Masters level student at the College of Social Sciences at UH Mānoa, she recalled that the Ph.D. was the only logical next step for her. Katie grew up with in a family that prided itself by putting a priority on higher education. Being well educated along with the understanding the gender dynamics in her field empowered Katie to pursue a doctoral degree.

Katie explained:

> You see, my mom and dad all have a college education. The expectation is that graduate school was not a choice but a requirement (laugh). While I was in my Masters program I loved the stuff I was learning and it seemed that getting my Ph.D. was the next logical step. I totally have a lot of support from them because I live at home and I don’t work… I mean I want to work one day and show them [my parents] that my degree and the effort I put into it was worth it. This education is just going to make me more employable, especially because i’m a woman in a male dominated field.

Katie went on to explain that it was difficult to be taken seriously in her field especially without a Ph.D. degree. She felt that being a young female put her at a significant disadvantage. Katie stated:

> Look, I get that I look young, but I’m smart and I have something to offer my field. I had a job a year or so ago and I hated it. My co-workers made fun of me a lot and nobody took me seriously. It sucks! I know it sounds silly but after I earn my Ph.D., I want to go back to that office and show them that I did it!
Kristy, another student participant in this study, describes her journey as self-exploration which she deems as empowering. Kristy is one of three siblings in her family. Both her brother and sister have earned their degrees in medicine and are now practicing physicians. “In fact, my brother is also pursuing his MBA after finishing his doctoral degree, so yes I come from a family of overachievers” Kristy said. However, Kristy’s journey has been more about self-discovery. She explains:

I am really grateful for having come here because it helped me sort of rethink what directions I was taking and also really expand what kind of options that were there but also in terms of critical thinking. You’re all aware that my department is known for its radicalness but in that sense it's been rewarding too because -- because I didn’t know to what extent that was, I know it can go extremes but for me it's been really helpful to like help me rethink what I -- my own positions were, help me undo some assumptions I have in my own critical thinking. For me the end wasn’t the priority and still isn't but now more than ever I want to be ABD [all but dissertation], I want to start moving ahead. This whole process is more about the journey of exploration, which is a different approach to education I think.

Kristy also mentioned that instead of committing to a regimented curriculum structure like her brother and sister, she decided to pursue this journey of exploration and self-discovery in the social sciences, which has made her brother and sister envious. Due to the freedom she has felt during this journey in the Social Sciences is something she describes as enlightening. Kristy describes her self-empowerment for finishing her degree in the following statement:

I know I am already young for starting and being in a Ph.D. program. I don’t want to be sort of in that group that keeps talking about the problems they but not actually finishing.

For these two female participants, the sub-theme of self-empowerment resonated with them throughout the interview and they stated that this empowerment continue to guide them as they progress in their respective programs.
“Becoming an Expert”

Student participants in this study identified the sub-theme of “becoming an expert” as a reason for applying for the Ph.D. program at the College of Social Sciences. This sub-theme is based on the participants’ experiences, particularly in the workforce.

Jill, a student participant, described her experience when applying for the Ph.D. as one of born of life experience. Jill is originally from Texas came to the University of Hawai‘i to pursue her a joint juris doctorate/ MA degree and it was in this program she was faced with the dilemma of dropping out of the juris doctorate program. Jill explains:

So my justification about going back to school and leaving Texas again was that I was going to law school and they understood that, they were like okay, law school that’s cool. Well when I was asking for letters of recommendation from my adviser for my undergrad said the only way that I will give you a recommendation if you do dual MA in JD, and I was like okay, so I applied and ended getting funding so I came here, and then I ended up really disliking it. I feel like there are all these brilliant minds being put in cookie cutters at law school, so my professor said drop out and I’ll give you a TAship and that will pay for your masters, so I said okay. So that was kind of how the teaching first started.

Upon graduation with her MA, she returned to Texas to work for a business that was owned by a family friend. After two years, Jill said, “I hate it” and was looking into other options. Her friend at that time suggested that she go back to school for a Ph.D. degree at the University of Hawai‘i. After she was accepted into the Ph.D. program she recalls that her love for her dissertation topic came from her life experience. “If it wasn’t for the job that I hated, I wouldn’t be here [UH Mānoa ] again. Having life experience is why I decided go back into my Ph.D. so that I could become more informed to become an expert and go back out and work and -- in industry”.

Hannah, a student participant in this study had a similar experience in her field. Hannah had finished her Masters degree at a private catholic university when she applied for various jobs
in Hawai‘i in her field. After three years of being told that while she was qualified and wouldn’t advance in her career without a doctoral degree she decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program. She describes her reaction to this statement by saying:

You know, I worked hard to get where I am. I’m a single parent and working a full time job. You would think that counted for somewhat of an achievement but no, all they [her supervisors] said it wasn’t enough. I think that statement is so ignorant. The more I think about it I get pissed off, but that statement was a catalyst for me to apply for the program. I can do it; I can be the person I know I want to be. I want to be respected in my job! I want to be a leading expert in the field and an inspiration for others.

The negative experiences in the workforce changed the perspective of these female participants to reach for new goals in their career. While female participants in this study acknowledged that the process of persisting toward the Ph.D. have left them emotionally charged and ready to face the challenges of their degree requirements, this sub-theme was not mentioned among the male participants in the study.

**Support and Acceptance**

All participants in this study reported having significant experiences in their Ph.D. program that revolved around varying levels of academic support and social acceptance. Academic support is defined in this study as resources, commitments, and formal practices of the department that aid in the retention and persistence of Ph.D. students. Social acceptance is defined in this study as opportunities to bond with faculty and other students outside of the classroom. The two-part theme of support and acceptance is broken into the following areas: a) “I don’t know what I don’t know”, b) “Investing in the person you are going to be”, c) Opportunities for student engagement, d) Family encouragement.
“I don’t know what I don’t know.”

Earning a doctoral degree is not easy. It is not meant to be easy. Neophytes to the academy bring with them experiences of uncertainty and doubt. Being able to successfully navigate and integrate into a Ph.D. program was a daunting task for many of the student participants in this study. For some, this feeling of uncertainty started when they applied for admission to a Ph.D. program. Shannon, a Ph.D. student in the College of Social Sciences, shared that her decision to pursue a doctoral degree isn’t something she was sure of:

I think I decided to do the Ph.D. before I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I’ve gone to Kapi‘olani Community College and I was kind of like bottom of the pack but I also felt like I could do it. So I didn’t find that my interests of what I should study exactly was being shaped or formulated by my coursework but everybody kept asking me what exactly are you interested in? I don’t know. Nobody really guided our electives process. You know what there was just not a wide variety of elective choices.

Shannon goes on to explain that once she was admitted to the Ph.D. program it was hard to find faculty that she could turn to for specific help in formulating a study. The advice she did receive was vague and ambiguous, which made her question her aptitude for success. Shannon states:

I’m finding that everybody on the committee is very open and offers to help but they don’t have specific help. And then I feel very not academic, kind of goofy like I don’t know what I don’t know, I love for you to help me a little bit to the next so just it was back and forth, tell me what you need, how I can help you and I’m thinking can you please help me. I think the chair I had seen... several chairs actually, it’s just the kind of constant questioning (of my dissertation) saying it’s too broad… so it was like this like I’m knocking my head on the wall like I don’t know.

Kristy, a Ph.D. Social Science student, also shared her experience of uncertainty. For Kristy, age and experience played a critical role in her ability to be accepted into the academic culture of the program. Kristy states:

Yeah I think it's like the proposal itself because -- because it's all -- new things for me and I feel a bit young when it comes to my exposure to ideas people or even my own experiences. You know I -- I am with people that are 10 years
older that are my good friends but they come with a whole breadth of experiences which I love learning from but I also feel sometimes intimidating… intimidated because I don’t know what I don’t know! what I can sort of offer or share and I feel like that where I like -- I imagine myself becoming ABD a little earlier but I still like am hesitant because I don’t feel like I know as much as I want to know.

This feeling of inadequacy is difficult to overcome. Not only are doctoral students expected to have a research agenda before being admitted to a Ph.D. program, but also write a publishable paper before reaching ABD status. Dyan, a graduate chair at the College of Social Sciences acknowledges the issue that students have a hard time transitioning from being students to active researchers. She explains that having a third year paper eases the transition of becoming a scholar starting from the second year of a Ph.D. student's program. She states:

So there was some issue with transition that’s why we instituted the research paper on the third year and we didn’t have that before we had a field exam, before it was just a regular exam in one of the fields. We replaced it with third year paper for this very reason... Not just questions, they have to write a real paper, publishable paper basically the criteria but these forces students no later than the beginning of second year to start doing it on beginning with third year to start on hands on research and they have a year to finish the paper but that means they are forced to transition.

Dyan goes on to say that this programmatic requirement isn’t a tool for “weeding out” weak doctoral students, but it is meant to build upon the coursework for the program and is a means of support for new students. However, having vague or no set curriculum can also frustrate new Ph.D. students. Thomas, a Graduate Chair at the College of social science praises the curriculum structure of his department by saying:

We have a very open structure. As Ph.D. programs go, we are very unusual in that the student and the advisor meet and between them they discuss and figure out how many courses the student needs to do from a prescribed set of courses that everybody has to go through.

Having the freedom of no set curriculum is an interesting departure from some of the other doctoral programs in the College of Social Sciences, however it can also be seen as a means of
supporting students. Thomas goes on to state that this support benefits Ph.D. students with “extensive” experience by saying:

We have students who have already done an extensive amount of intellectual work elsewhere and it is obvious sometimes in a University, sometimes not in a University…we don’t want to impede the progress of people like that. We don’t want to say everybody has to go through the same set of requirements because that just doesn’t make sense at a doctoral level.

While this may seem like a fast track to degree completion for experienced students, those Ph.D. students who are not as experienced also have a chance to benefit from other forms of support. These forms of support are meant to alleviate the fears and anxiety of being “lost”. It is also meant to foster academic and social integration. Dawn, an administrator at the College of Social Sciences, sees having different curriculum and entry requirements as problematic when it comes to departmental expectations of students. She explains:

I think we have a mix of practice in the college, we have some units that are [stating their requirements by saying]...before you can get admitted into a graduate school or a doctoral program they need the master’s degree. One program for example expects that you have a master’s degree in hand or you might be admitted into the Ph.D. program...it's not automatic thing. And then other programs are really seeing that the MA is really on route to the Ph.D. and they're focused more on having a strong pool and then being able to somehow be selective in that pool and so those are -- they are just two different models. I think a danger can be the length of time to degree that sometimes can get stretched out.

What is clear is that this “mixed practice” of curriculum and entry requirements does not give students a clear picture to the road ahead. In the next section, I will discuss the theme of “investing in the person you are going to be.”

“Investing in the person you are going to be”

In the previous section, I discussed some of the issues my Ph.D. student participants face upon entering their Ph.D. program. The issue of uncertainty coupled with a unique departmental culture, curriculum, and expectations, participants shared their frustration and rough start in the
Participants in this study discussed a wide range of supportive experiences provided by their respective departments. For some Ph.D. students, this academic support began with an initiation by the department. Brenda, a Graduate Chair in the Social Science department, explained that students are inducted to the department in a variety of ways. For the program she oversees, there is a mandatory orientation for new students. This orientation includes basic information about the program requirements, how things work with the Office of Graduate Education, resources, and most importantly, the expectation of new Ph.D. students. Brenda explains the expectation of new students by saying:

This is really a new chapter in your life that, you know, people will start viewing you differently now. Meaning that we will start viewing you, you know, as you progress through the program as colleagues and not necessarily as students. And so, there is an expectation there that you will be professional not only in your interactions here, but as you represent the university and, you know, sort of like get them feeling like I’m at this new level. And so, part of that is the responsibility to come to that with that new level, that I need to take my study seriously. I need to prepare for my eventual employment wherever that may be. So, we don’t necessarily say, you know, academia versus research or whatever-- or clinical practice, but it’s helping them already starting with that shift into think about what they want in their future.

By viewing Ph.D. students as colleagues, Brenda has given these neophytes of the academy a sense of belonging and acceptance. Another form of acceptance described by Dyan, a Graduate Chair in the College of Social Sciences, is mentorship. In the previous section, I had discussed the issues of feeling uncertainty and doubt that participants felt, being a part of this new community. Dyan explained that her department is exploring the idea of having a formal mentoring program for students. This idea was suggested to her by the senior Ph.D. students.
during one of their meetings as a way to support Ph.D. students. In addition, Dyan’s department also provides a physical space for new Ph.D. students. She explains:

> So another kind of support that’s an innovation by the all new graduate chair is to provide offices to all our first year students because if a student doesn’t have an office in the department, then they don’t get emerged so much and they just come to take classes.

Brenda offers her new Ph.D. students a similar physical space. Using assigned cubicles located at her department, students who utilize their assigned cubicles have the opportunity to study without feeling the pressure of looking for space in overcrowded coffee shops or carrying their belongings from place to place. In addition, by being in a common space among fellow students allows for intellectual interaction and academic integration. Other departments in the College of Social Sciences offer different types of academic support in the form of financial assistance through teaching internships. These teaching internships, often referred to as “TA’ing”, allows a Ph.D. student academic autonomy and creativity. Jill, a Ph.D. student in the Social Sciences department shares that:

> I only teach one class but it’s a nice class, I create the syllabus, I do the whole grading, I always -- you know I do the preps and the -- and the actual lectures but in our department there is not a lot of structure, actually there is no structure for any class, so we have to come up with up everything, what you are going to teach, what books are you going to do. I am most grateful for because I don't have loans and my CV looks awesome because I have lots of teaching experience but I am really looking forward to the ABD stage.

Jennifer, another Ph.D. student in the Social Sciences department shared her experience of being a “TA” as a way to bond with her dissertation chair. Along with the experience of teaching a class, Jennifer said in her interview that she is often picked first for research projects. In her opinion, choosing the right dissertation chair can make all the difference. Jennifer explained:
I’ve been his (Dissertation chair) TA for not only this semester but whenever he has projects I’m the first person he will call because he’s a little different but with me he doesn’t even need to talk and we totally understand each other. And I’m really kind of baffled by that say what does that say about me but he’s just I think that style that works I don’t like even though I was complaining earlier about having lack of structure I don’t like being told what to do. Maybe it’s my own thing but he lets the student explore whatever. He is excited about whatever you’re interested in. he’s always available, he’s positive and really cares about student success and I’ve seen faculty be – there’s a mean faculty out there that don’t want your success...Whereas (dissertation chair) he is literally like when you’re presenting...you’re like his baby let’s say, you’re like his – he’s proud of you. I’m your student so he sits on the edge of his seat and he’s literally a promoter for you on your behalf.

While teaching assistantships provide invaluable professional experience in the field, participants in this study also cited conference funding and publication as another high point in their program. Ph.D. students Jill, Victor, and Cindy were enthusiastic about having presented at conferences across the country in their discipline. Being able to have a conference trip paid for by the College is a tremendous benefit. Alongside with presenting at conferences, under the dissertation chair, Jill was able to also publish multiple journals. She recounts her experience with a smile and explains:

I am actually leaving tonight for my third conference, I have been to one conference twice, two different years and then another conference this would be my first time at this conference. Then I have also as master student I was able to go to Indonesia and go to conference on education which was paid for. So that’s great. All of our -- our department is really good about if there is extra money offering, and for graduate students for travel and so each one of the conferences I have gone to I have received $500 for my travel so that’s substantial when it comes to how much it costs us to travel from Hawai‘i. In addition, I have, I published two different I mean in two journals one was the futures journals and it was a co-publishing with two other graduate students when I was in my masters and then I currently being published at the moment as a co-author with one of my -- with my chair.

Each participant in this study cited numerous times that the dissertation chair had a critical influence on their academic progress. Each of the student participants identified their
success or current failures on the advice they received by their chair. For some participants like Jennifer, the bond between her and her dissertation chair were strong. Other participants in this study experienced similar. Kristy shared that her dissertation chair works best for her because he is always looking out for her best interest. She goes on to explain that her dissertation chair is also the Graduate Chair of the department. This is extremely convenient because he was always in the office and makes time for her by scheduling regular meetings. This sentiment of support is also felt by Cindy, a Ph.D. student at the College of Social Sciences. She stated that:

He is amazing like so knowledgeable and enthusiastic and very caring. You know he’d meet with you about the final papers like million times answer like zillion questions always has time for the student. Yeah, I don’t -- to be honest with you, I don’t even know why; he has been so helpful with -- I think he -- last semester I had some really like -- it was a really bad semester, I had some like horrible health issues and I think that in some ways maybe he feel like empathy for me and maybe that he couldn’t help me back then, so he goes out of his way!

Being accessible and keeping regular appointments with students, dissertation chairs become a critical component of academic success. Jill enthusiastically proclaimed that:

Well one thing she said to me when I first started it, she said I am investing in the person that you are going to be. And that really motivated me and let me know that whatever insecurities I have right now about writing and my research or anything it’s -- I am supposed to have those and that she is helping guide me to the future person that I can be.

The participants in this study who identified themselves as Graduate Chairs of their department also cited academic advising by a student's’ dissertation chair as an integral factor in persistence. Thomas shared that new Ph.D. students in his department are given an interim advisor to help guide them through the coursework portion of the degree. The decision of who the interim advisor will be is left to the Graduate Chair of the department. He states that matching a new doctoral student to an advisor is complicated and is based on the dossier of the
incoming student along with his/her research interest. The recommendation of having a research agenda or interest in mind is cross departmental sentiment. Leon, a Graduate Chair in the Social Sciences department reiterates the thought of a research agenda along with mandatory advising is an essential. He states that:

We have mandatory advising, but I mean -- since I became the chair the first thing I talk to students is you have think about a topic right away, not until you’re like finish your class work, because I told them that all the class work is based on what direction you are going, if you are taking classes... like follow this requirement but then they find that it is not what you want to do. Many students come here just want to get a pay you know enjoy here (Hawai‘i). They later find out this is not really …. The work I want to do and this is really not my interest so it's kind of you know it's not they lost their main goal. The main goal is to get it done and do high quality research creative work.

Graduate Chair, Dyan, choose another method of academic support by having an open door policy when it comes to advising. While not mandatory, the advising sessions in her department are not strictly academic but leave room for discussing any problems student encounter. She uses this open door style as a way to keep in touch with all her students in an informal manner.

By contrast, Lori’s department, functions very differently. She asks all of her students to name two possible chairs for their dissertation when they are accepted. In a small department like hers, she states that the department must focus on intensive academic advising in order to get students through the program efficiently and effectively. Because students traditionally take longer to finish a degree in her department, she has become stricter with mandatory advising. She explains that each Ph.D. student must draft a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with their dissertation chair and the Graduate chair. In the memorandum, the student lays out the timeline and benchmarks towards completion. This gives the dissertation chair an idea about what to expect over the next few years and helps to alleviate students are just “drifting” along.
She goes on to say that this idea of the memorandum of understanding is a departmental response to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Office of Graduate Education’s pressure to finish students in a timelier manner.

Yet another Graduate Chair, Thomas, explained that it was important for him as Chair of the department, to require a yearly evaluation of every Ph.D. student. This evaluation consists of a written narrative by the faculty member, on a student's progress. As the Graduate Chair he reviews all of the Ph.D. evaluations and makes an appointment with each Ph.D. students. This type of academic accountability helps a student stay focused and on track, he says.

Opportunities for Student Engagement

In the previous section, I used the theme of “Investing in the person you are going to be” to describe the levels of academic support participants in this study experienced. Another prevalent sub theme that emerged from the data was opportunities for engagement. Participants in this study viewed these opportunities as events or non-academic support services provided by the College of Social Sciences. Jill, elaborated that forms of social integration was started by a professor in her department. She states:

So there is this thing called stammtisch and one of the German professors started it and brought it over from Germany which is a tradition there and once every three weeks the professors and students get together at a place and have dinner and then the professors bring wine. We just talk in pretty much anything… we just talk about anything except school, so that’s fun. Its open to all Masters and Ph.D. students.

Having regularly scheduled informal interaction with students is a key factor to student success. Having Jill describe the concept of stammtisch allowed me to probe more into the culture of the department. She went on to say:
We also have you know like on Fridays -- every Friday one of the professor’s hold a beach potluck, we go down to Kaimana beach park and everyone is invited. Usually about five, well three or four of our faculty show up and probably about 15 graduate students but some people bring their wives, some people who have graduated some people -- you know just like you don’t have to necessarily be a part of it but it’s a department extracurricular activity happens.

This sense of camaraderie and outgoing culture is unique to this department, however other departments in the College of Social Sciences have taken a different approach to social engagement. Dyan shared that her department has elected to give students a physical space for students to “hangout” and socialize. This student lounge is open to all graduate students and is being utilized on a regular basis.

While most of the participants I interviewed had positive experiences in their Ph.D. programs, there were participants who shared a troubling and negative experiences outside the classroom. These negative experiences, over time, led to self-imposed social isolation and depression. Wearing his United States Army service uniform, I met Kevin in his Social Science department conference room. Kevin shared with me his experience living, working, and being a student in Hawai‘i. Kevin stated that as an officer in the United States Army, he has had a unique experience in his Ph.D. program. Originally from Georgia and a graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School, he enrolled at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa to pursue his Ph.D. in the area of security studies. He stated that he has a difficult time with adapting to the culture of Hawai‘i, the University, and the Ph.D. program. Kevin voiced his frustration and said:

I was surprised at how little interaction we have with professors, so, but I think that’s a difference between NPS (Naval postgraduate school). You know at NPS I was funded even if you have one class you’d spent all day on campus. The professors are all committed to security studies and international relations, and you just you’d hang out you have lunch you have coffee and you’re always talking and there’s always side projects going on that you’re involved in. Here (University of Hawai‘i)...nothing.
The animosity of being an active military officer in a department that is geared more towards a "hippie" culture, Kevin shared that he feels singled out for being an active duty officer. He mentioned one incident in class, the professor was discussing the politics of military occupation in Hawai‘i and he felt that the professor was judging him. He recalls:

so, their (faculty in the department) philosophy is that, you know, the military we’re fascist we’re taking over Hawai‘i we’re ruining Hawai‘i. So, when you’re sitting there in front of them and they’re saying these things, you know, it’s – they’re looking at you, right? I don’t think he’s (dissertation chair) is going to fight the – the Hawaiian studies’ professors and the feminist because, you know, there is this attitude that people like me are – we’re fascists we’re wrong we’re, you know, don’t encourage them.

Kevin also recalled his daily interaction with his classmates. As he spoke, I observed the frustration on his face as described the feeling of wearing his military uniform on campus.

Kevin elaborates:

This is the fourth time I’ve ever worn my uniform here. I was surprised that most young people won’t say anything, but there is definitely an iciness that comes over the conversation when they find out that I am in the military. And I think it’s just the national mood, right? They don’t realize that, you know, most of us are just, you know, hardworking family guys and this is a job.

The stigma of being in a culturally different department, whose views are completely different than your own can be a challenge. While Kevin has found support in a limited number of faculty in his department, he is also challenged with social integration. When I asked Kevin if he had been invited to social activities outside of the classroom, he responded by saying:

No. They – I asked the question and I was bluntly told that if I attended more meetings would – I would probably understand them a little better. So, I made a point of asking for some of the meetings to get moved to accommodate my schedule and no one ever answered that e-mail.
At the end of our interview, Kevin reported that he chose to engage in a self-imposed social isolation. He explained that he would continue to pursue his degree at the College of Social Sciences with the support of his dissertation chair and without engaging in other who thought of him as an outsider.

Feeling like you are a part of a larger community of learners has a positive impact towards not only academic progress, but the building of professional relationships after graduation. Cindy shared that in the beginning of her Ph.D. program, she was happy to meet new people and engaged socially outside the classroom. This acceptance into a community of learners changed when she began to experience issues with her mental Health. She cried as she shared her story:

I just started like not sleeping and talking really fast and not like just having -- like sort of lost -- lost track of things and just having like crazy like plans and so my teachers saw that and said well just take some time, don’t come to class just do like response papers for each class and -- but it was very confusing time and then you know nobody wanted to deal with me so it was kind of... [cries]. I was taking classes, I was even teaching a class by myself when I was like removed from it, another student took my place. I mean I don't know I guess I tell you because otherwise it makes no sense. Like I was diagnosed like some years ago with bipolar depression and then last semester for reasons that like the doctors cannot understand I had the worst like manic episode like the worst, the worst.

When I asked Cindy if she felt support from either the faculty or classmates, she said she had a very disheartening experience. She went on to say:

I guess I don’t see anyone because I don’t have classes any more so I mean people that -- not people there is like -- one girl that stopped talking to me now we have a little talk and when we see each other we say hi, I was like how is it going...we used to be really, really close but that’s not anymore. Well because of these sorts of issues that I had a lot of my friends sort of distanced themselves. Because it was like mental health issues, so people just like sort of backed off and...just didn’t want to deal with it [nervous laughter/crying].
The experiences the participants shared fascinated me and allowed me to fully understand social integration into their respective departments. The final sub-theme of family encouragement will be discussed in the next section.

**Family Encouragement**

In the last section I discussed the subtheme of opportunities for social engagement. In this section I focuses on another prevalent theme among participants, family encouragement. During interviews, participants frequently cited their family as an agent of support. For Shannon, her husband, while not a college graduate would simply ask her how is it going with school and allow her the opportunity to share her accomplishments and frustrations with her progress. Being unfamiliar with Ph.D. milestones are common among participants. For Victor, a Ph.D. student in the College of Social Sciences, his family has been supportive when he experienced numerous setbacks in his academic progress. Victor’s negative experiences in the Ph.D. program began when his first dissertation chair retired, his committee disbanded, and he was left with no one who was willing to take him as a student. He recalls the his frustration with the department:

> My family is in shock and once I got to e-mail from my advisor I sat on it because I didn’t know how to respond and I wrote numerous drafts and sent it to my family who advised me too on my language and what to say and like they’re extremely supportive. I mean, it’s like constantly the topic of conversation here. I mean, it’s where I invested a tremendous amount of my life into and what I was passionate and wanting to do so I mean, I was willing to go into heavy debt just to like complete my degree, get to ABD. But I was cut short so my whole family is just kind of like what the hell happened.

Victor spoke of the hard time he had gone through and how his family has come together for him to provide him a place to live, help him look for work, and close this chapter of his life. For Kristy, family support was unconditional despite the lack of awareness of the process. In
Kristy’s case, her siblings had pursued advanced degrees in the field of engineering. By contrast, a Ph.D. degree curriculum can and does vary widely. Kristy stated her family’s concerns of finding gainful employment and finishing her degree in a timely manner by saying:

I think they are just concerned about whether I get a job so I always have to talk about that but then but as long as like I have a path because it's something so different for them you know as Indians they view engineering doctors as like positive or like upward moving career paths and this is something very different though they have always been like down for any field in education. I think like that was the most frustrating with my parents as they think I am going to be done this year like they are like oh you are coming back from Hawaiʻi this year. And I was like I am not even ABD yet, they don’t know what that means and they expected it to be lot shorter time and I have to keep like it's -- it's frustrating to like already have these anxieties about what I am doing with my career in my career and then to have to translate that to my family.

Because Kristy’s parents are not physically living in Hawaiʻi, it was difficult for them to understand the day-to-day responsibilities of the program. Kristy went on to say that her family is still excited that she is pursuing her Ph.D. and has since explained the process to them. With a better understanding, a realistic parental expectation can be achieved. For participants who live with their families, the experience was different. Kevin shared with me that his wife and child have been his inspiration for his continuation in the program. As a first generation college graduate, he is appreciative of the understanding nature his family has given him. In his interview he stated:

Yeah, family stuff, so I come home late at night because of classes Saturday morning, Sunday mornings I’m writing. And there’s times when they were going to do things and obviously I got to stay home and read, but I think they’re okay with that. They’re proud of what’s happening.

Having a supportive family unit has been a reassuring force for Shannon. As a wife, mother of young child, and a College professor, Shannon shared her ever changing responsibilities and its effects on her dissertation progress. Writing her proposal during the
semester is difficult for her given all the other things going on in her life but the one constant source of support has been her husband. Shannon shares that her husband, a high school teacher, regularly “checks in” with her to see how things are going. “He is definitely not an academic” but I know he cares and he wants me to succeed.

**Reputation**

Many participants described various aspects of their department as an influential factor in either applying for the Ph.D. program or factor in non-completion. For participants in this study, the theme of reputation came up frequently and in different forms. For some participants, they described reputation in relation to their Ph.D. program or department but for others, they used reputation to describe their dissertation chair only. Through their stories, participants revealed their vulnerability and pride for their program. This theme of Reputation is divided into three subthemes that include: “Top notch programs”, faculty expertise, and “useless and hopeless”.

**“Top notch program or a happening place”**

When you are known for being a highly regarded doctoral program for a specific course of study, the expectation is that prospective students will be anxious to enroll. Leon, a graduate chair, explained that his department is known for work in the Asian and Pacific region. So for students who are interested in this specific region, “we are the program for them” Leon said. He explained further:

So we have lots of faculty studying [researching] in Thailand, India, Cambodia...Indonesia, China, Japan, all our program is one of the best to study in this region, in the United States... I mean because we are the closest.
This great reputation led Thomas, a graduate chair, to discuss in great detail, how his department got to this point. Thomas said that students are exposed to the department in a variety of ways, and at different stages in a prospective student's career. He recalls students as early as undergraduates hearing about their doctoral program and getting excited at the possibility of attending graduate school. This excitement builds when Masters level students learn of the high level of publications and expertise of the faculty in the department. Thomas states:

[prospective students] hear about our reputation or look at our website, hear somebody from our department giving a lecture, or see us at a conference. Conferences are a major draw, especially...where every year we have a sizeable contingent of both grad students and faculty presenting and you know I have been attending [conferences]regularly now for the last 15 years and there is always a buzz around one of our contingents, “Why are their people so good? Why are their grad students so polished in their presentations?” Word gets around you know there seems to be a top notch program or a happening place

This theme of a “top notch program” was also iterated by Jennifer, who applied to a program at the College of Social Sciences because of the department’s reputation. She recalls the research she did about the department prior to applying. Starting with the department's website, she went to see the graduate chair to discuss her interest in the program. In that discussion she became excited at the innovative research, and publication prestige. Jennifer explained:

This was the best program for me because of their reputation. They are into publishing! I never got the impression from other programs inquired about. All of the other programs only talked about courses I needed to take and blah blah... This program [at UHM] made me want to become a member of the academe. Not only do I want to be an expert in my field, but I also want to continue to produce new knowledge. That’s why I love being here. I really feel at home.

Jennifer went on to say that she has gone to multiple national conferences, sponsored by her department. At those conferences, she is frequently approached by other doctoral students
who are in her words “awe struck” of her presentation and her department's reputation. She attributes the positive reputation of her department to hard working faculty, staff, and students.

**Faculty Expertise**

The subtheme of faculty expertise came out of the data as an important part of why potential students chose to enroll at the University of Hawai‘i College of Social Science. This subtheme differs from the previous sub theme of “Top notch program or Happening place” in its description of specific dissertation chairs as a source of inspiration. For participants Cindy and Katie, this sub theme resonated with them. Cindy enthusiastically talked about her dissertation chair by saying:

> Because of my [dissertation chair]/advisor...I think like 70% of the literature that I had -- that I read was either his stuff or stuff that found through his book and so I invited him to be in my committee via Skype because I was in Brazil and he said yes and then he kinda said you know you should apply and that’s it. So I didn’t apply for anywhere else. I came here because of him.

Having heard her talk about her dissertation chair in such high regard led me to ask about her experience after being admitted. Cindy had noted many positive experiences. One of those experiences happened before she was admitted. She confessed that the reason she applied to a Ph.D. program was simply because she didn’t have anything else better to do. This happenstance came about when she began reading and studying after graduating with her Masters degree. Her dissertation chair was the source and mechanism for pursuing a Ph.D.. This transformational choice is something she doesn’t regret and is looking forward to continuing to work with her chair and reaching ABD status.
Katie also had a similar experience. Coming out of her Masters program, Katie did research on the Ph.D. program that would best fit her. While not happenstance like Cindy, Katie always knew she wanted a Ph.D. She said in the interview:

I decided that research was always something I was interested in doing and especially in the Social Science field. I met with the department and at that time my future advisor. I found her to be inspirational! She [dissertation chair] was the one that helped me to make up my mind about continuing my education at UH...I am thankful that I can depend on her for anything. Even now, we are working on my proposal and preparing for my comps... I know she has my best interest in mind.

For other participants however, the theme of reputation came from a lack of understanding of the departments focus, and poor programmatic fit.

“Useless and Hopeless”

When listening to the participants of this study describe the barriers they encountered in their doctoral program, words such as “useless” and “hopeless” define their educational experience. While this is a negative reflection of the doctoral experience, it was interesting and thought provoking as to how the participants came to describe it as such. This subsection reflects the experience of two participants in this study, Kevin and Victor. Kevin and Victor are participants that enrolled in two different Ph.D. programs at the College of Social Sciences. Kevin came to the University of Hawai‘i as an active United States military officer. Formally based on the east coast, Kevin made clear that his current Ph.D. program has not his first choice program. Kevin stated:

I was coming out of NPS (Naval Postgraduate School), I applied through an army program to go to school – to be a funded student. I applied to University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, and University of Hawai‘i. I was not accepted into the army program, so I didn’t go to Hopkins or Chicago, so this is where I’m at...I’m still being paid [by the Army], so I got to do what I do and I’m happy
to still be in the army because we’re downsizing.

His critique of his Ph.D. programs reputation continued when asked about the curriculum. He felt that the education he was receiving was full of useful facts that didn’t pertain to his passion, which were security studies. Kevin explained:

I should have known that NPS [and the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa ] would be significantly different. I was still surprised at the lack of rigor. I’m sure these professors are good at what they do, but they seem – here’s how I describe it to my old friends at NPS, flotsam and jetsam.

Kevin elaborated that this institutional misfit, lack of rigor, and classes filled with useless information had him frustrated. With no other program that accepted him at the current time, he said prospective students that were interested in his topic should “go somewhere else.”

Sarcastically he stated:

It depends on what you want to do. If you want to study feminism in the South Pacific, maybe this is the place. If you want to study security studies, unless some of those structural changes change even a recognition by the department that there are and there needs to be a leader of an IR security studies, that would help.

For Kevin, this poor institutional fit and reputation carried into his personal life. In his interview he spoke about the frustration in educational rigor he feels not only for him but also for his family. His child, who is enrolled at a local DOE school on `Oahu, is at the top of his high school class but, according to Kevin, his child is capable of doing so much more. He describes the DOE as a measurement of mediocrity. As the interview progressed Kevin discussed the importance of structure and motivation. In his previous graduate school he described a culture of rigor and inclusion. He states:

You’ve got to be very methodical and you apply the rigor, whereas in NPS, I mean professors would drag you along. You will be tired you want to go home you want to get drunk, [expletive] your dog, kick your wife. They would talk forever and they’d make you get excited about things and tell you that tomorrow you need to be at this room because there’s a CIA guy coming in
and talk about torture. [Smiling] All right, I’ll be there.

Victor’s experience in his Ph.D. program has also been one of frustration and an uphill battle to try and reach ABD status. After having completed his coursework required for his degree, Victor’s dissertation chair retired and took a position at another University. At that time, Victor was told that he could keep his chair and move forward toward reaching ABD status. However, this was just the start of he called, departmental negligence. He recalls:

So the advising process became very difficult because obviously he is vested in another institution and we communicate via e-mail. But I found that communication to be kind of backtracking all the time. We would have a discussion, he’d give me advice and then I’ll work on it for four months and come back to him and he’d be like oh, no, do it this way instead. So I would just kind of like chasing this elusive goal to try to get to my comps basically.

After a lot of going back and forth, Victor was able to set a date for his comprehensive examinations. He recently took and passed his examinations. However, shortly after passing, he received an email from his chair saying that he was no longer willing to keep his as his student. In addition, he was also told that two other members of his committee would no longer be willing to continue with him as well. This “evaporating” committee created undue hardship for Victor. He explained:

Yeah. They – I don’t know if fell apart would be the right way to say it, it’s more like it evaporated. But what it felt like was that they weren’t really doing their job and ended up like I was in communication with my committee about whether or not to continue in the program at UH because to do so I had to take on student loans basically. And my advisor kept saying like what’s the rush, you have to like really put in the time to do this. Well, in the meantime I’m taking on debt in the meantime and then after five years having them like drop me it’s left me with basically a lot of debt and nothing to show for it. So I wouldn’t say my committee fell apart I’d say they like they broke my contract.

After his original committee had in his words, “evaporated”, Victor tried to rebuild his committee. However, with only 10 graduate faculty members in the department, this task proved difficult. As we spoke about how he planned to move forward, his voice became curt as he said:
My [former] advisor had always said the hard thing would be comps, getting through the proposal will be a more streamlined process. And so once I received the news from my committee I asked them to help me reform my committee and so they told me I needed to have a proposal in hand so I took the time to write my proposal but it was kind of like the chicken and the egg scenario so it was like writing a proposal for an imaginative committee at this point, an imaginative chair, so I couldn’t write specifically toward what a possible chair would want and that’s the difficulty of it.

Taking the advice from members of the department who he could work with, Victor took it upon himself to write three separate proposals that possible replacement dissertation chairs could be interested in. All of his efforts resulted in one faculty member offering to advise Victor on his coffee breaks. This response from faculty to his hard work has led Victor to feeling useless in his effort to pursue his doctoral degree and his reputation in the department and academia. The experiences of the Victor and Kevin lead into my next and final theme of challenges. This theme incorporated the experiences of all participants in this study.

**Challenges**

This study was to investigate the experiences of pre candidacy social science doctoral students as well as the norms of the department. As such, all participants in this study voiced their opinions about the challenges of their doctoral program or department. The sub themes of this section are broken into three sub-themes, which are: external commitments, poor job outlook, and lack of resources.

**External commitments**

One of the primary challenges participants described in this study, is the sometimes “overwhelming” other factors that they faced while being in school. participants stated in particular the responsibilities of being a parent and working full time as a factor that has contributed to slower academic progress. Jordan, a Ph.D. student in the College of Social
Sciences shared that she was torn between her dissertation, which she called her “first baby” and now a mother to a young daughter. Feeling guilty is a daily experience for Jordan. She explained:

Every time I try to resume my Ph.D. studies (dissertation proposal) I feel like I’m missing out on her life! I mean… it's so hard, she’s only 2 years old and I want to be there for her… I’m at the point of my life where I honestly want to quit. It’s become clear that my plans have changed and that I’ve put a priority on my family. Should I feel bad for that? Should I quit? What kind of an example am I setting for her? How do I tell her that mommy quit something she loved for you.

Listening to Jordan speak, I began to ask her if anyone else in her family had similar situations. She shared that she was the first in her family to go to graduate from college and the first to attempt a Ph.D. degree. Being a first generation college student, she felt the added pressure from family to finish what she started. Even though she said that her dissertation chair was understanding and willing to work with a modified timeline, she felt guilty. Jordan said:

[my chair] has been super cool with me taking longer but I know that deep down she wants me to hurry up and finish. I mean she has a lot of other students and I feel like I’m wasting her time. Also, to be honest, I’m not sure I can keep paying for school.

The idea of having to juggle Ph.D. tuition payments, the cost of raising a child, and paying rent was too much for Jordan. In the interview we took a short break for her to compose herself and continue with the interview. At the end of the interview Jordan took into account all that we talked about and said she needed to have a serious discussion with her husband.

Like Jordan, Shannon also shared her struggle of being a doctoral student, professor, and mother. Shannon shared:

I was always working so being from here and local I was not – I didn’t come to UH Mānoa simply to be a student and I was always working even to pay my rent and to do all that stuff. So I think that proved as a challenge you know when you’re trying to be an academic but also be working at the same time as you know, very difficult.
Shannon further shared that it was the combination of other commitments outside of being a doctoral student, was a reason for her difficulty to progress in the program. While her family has been supportive as much as possible, she has feelings of guilt for not being “present” for everyone. Graduate chairs at the College of Social Sciences have also noticed this trend in non-cohort programs as well. Leon, a graduate chair at the College of Social Sciences, shared that commitments outside of academics along with being in a non-cohort program has led to longer times to degree completion. Leon Said:

Right now it's like eight years the normal time for our Ph.D. students. I would talk about it you know why they take longer, I’ll give you some best insights. We try to minimize the class work, try to make it faster-- this is my concern by the way…. I’ve been a [graduate]chair since last summer, so only one year, but I mean this is one issue we need to get the student out quicker! One problem is that they need to work. We have students who work at KCC [Kapi‘olani Community College] and they teach 3 or 4 classes per semester… they don’t have time to write and the process takes longer!

Leon went on to say that because of these other commitments his students undertake, they lose focus of the goal, which is to earn a Ph.D. and do high quality work. Specifically, he noticed that his students lose focus when they are a TA/GA get stuck and distracted in trying to succeed at a temporary job. Dyan shared a similar situation in her interview that Ph.D. students in her department also take on other teaching and/or other positions in order to survive in Hawai‘i. Dyan explained:

For people who don’t have financial support, that’s a minority but we do have them, of course they can get side tracked or they would get a job which is not related to their Ph.D. study and that takes the focus away from the studies.

This sentiment was also acknowledged by Dawn, an administrator at the College of Social Science. Dawn shared that some programs at the College are aware of the problem of longer time to degree achievement. Dawn stated there are programs that would not be willing to talk with you [the researcher] because we [the College] has identified them as the programs who
take the longest to complete its Ph.D. students. Dawn spoke on behalf of the programs that did not want to be interviewed or did not respond to requests for interview by saying that some programs require fieldwork. Fieldwork consists of going out to a field site and collect data, and depending on the study, can take a very long time. It’s an “immersion process”, Dawn said, and “it’s hard to know when enough is enough.”

In an interesting twist, Lori, a graduate chair at the College of Social Sciences shared her experience of international students with young children who intentionally delay their progress in the program because they like the US educational system. Lori shared:

[PhD students] have children and they don't want to go back yet because taking the kids out of their school that’s -- that’s a problem for at least two or three people we have had that you know they brought up in this system and taking and putting them back in that country where they really don't have those language skills. I am struggling with one of our students and he is staying a little bit longer than needed to, his kids are doing great [in Hawai‘i] and if they went back but that is a fear that you know you have a child here or a you bring a child very young and they like the educational system and so that’s a real pull.

Lori went on to say that intentional delay of a doctoral program due to a family educational decision is a problem that is happening in other departments across the University of Hawai‘i. It is this intentional delay that strain the limited resources departments at the University have.

**Poor Job Outlook**

Participants in this study acknowledged that job outlook was a significant challenge, especially in these tough economic times. This theme resonated particularly with graduate chair participants. Leon mentioned in his interview that the job outlook in his department was so tight that Ph.D. graduates had no opportunity to work in higher education as a tenure track faculty member. Leon recalls:

I think there aren’t enough faculty positions. I heard during my seven -- eight years here, only one student…recently she was interviewed by University of
Oregon. But I am not sure whether she will get the position. The others do a postdoc or some doing like work in the company or like government agency.

While Leon recognizes that the University of Hawai‘i is not a Tier one institution, he sees the need to raise the caliber of graduates coming out of his program. He states that “students need to publish more!” “We [the faculty] also have to do a better job of publishing.” Thomas, another graduate chair, expanded on this theme when he explained that in his field, there are less and less tenure track positions nationally. When his students arrive at this realization, they have to either accept it or they drop out of the program. Thomas further states:

The main thing is ‘The elephant is in the room’. We all know. When I finished my Ph.D. back in ’89 you know 3 out of 4 people finishing Ph.D.’s got jobs as junior faculty members. You know you knew even if you didn’t get into the top schools you could get into a whole range of respectable state universities and Liberal Arts colleges, etc. That situation has changed completely today. So our grad students sometimes just figure out, “You know what I spend 5 to 7 years here in this Ph.D. and there is no guarantee whatsoever that I will get a genuine job at the end of it.” so that is the major reason I think why people change careers and dropout, etc.

For Ph.D. student participant Jill, this is something she worries about regularly. She acknowledged in her interview that having a good paying job that’s in her area of expertise may be hard to come by. Heather started her journey toward the Ph.D. as a first generation college graduate. In doing so, she overcame many hurdles such as little financial resources and navigational knowledge of higher education, and to some extent a lack of parental understanding. To this day, Heather is frustrated when she has to explain the Ph.D. process with her parents. She explains:

They think I am just playing in Hawai‘i, like I am on the beach all the time. I’m from Texas and the expectation there is that I am supposed to be married and having babies, I am 30. Right now my parents think it’s [Ph.D. program] is a waste of time. They support me being happy but -- they think that I could make a better choice in my career. I think they are just excited for me to finish school so that I can get a real job.
She went on to say in her interview that jobs in her field are hard to find and mentions that the reason why she applied to a Ph.D. program was to more than just push papers in a office, which was the job she had with a Masters degree. Jill worries that all the effort she put into her Ph.D. program will yield little in the job market. Thomas explained that he is very candid with every prospective student and they appreciate that. He want to be able to keep all of the reasons why a student should and should not join the program. He shared:

I find myself here telling students when they enquire about the program, “Are you really sure you want to do this?” I am also a parent. I have got a 24 year old and I have got an 18 year old and a 16 year old and if my eldest son were to ask me you know, “Should I join a graduate program in the social sciences in humanities side?” You know the same question I ask is, “Are you really sure you want to do this?” So one out of four times you are going to get a great job. There is no guarantee of success!

**Lack of Resources**

This final sub theme of the lack of resources was expressed exclusively by participants who identified themselves as graduate chairs of the College of Social Sciences. According to the participants, the lack of resources in their department have led to difficulty in attracting and retaining students. For example, Brenda, shared that priority for TA/GA ships are given to new doctoral students entering the Ph.D. program, as an incentive, however, this hierarchy doesn’t benefit students who are closer to, or are already ABD status., She stated that due to the lack of TA/GA ship funding, “students must look for work outside the university, which slows a candidate’s progress down and leads to longer degree completion times”. Leon also acknowledges this challenge of not having enough funding for TA/GA ships to give to every doctoral student. Each year is challenging and we are constantly looking for projects to put our students on, but it's hard. Thomas explained that in his department, his challenges have been with students who have to find their own source of funding. He said:
Now when you have as you often have in the natural sciences an aid package that lasts 5 years and it is virtually guaranteed. You know you are feeding off of the research money generated by the advisor, etc. there is a continuous monitoring as well plus you are already in a project you know. You know many things get defined for you whereas here [in the Social Sciences] it is a complete opposite. The funding [in this department] is not guaranteed. You have to come up with a project entirely on your own. You can’t piggy back on somebody else’s research that is already ongoing. Those are tough things to do. Even very good students find the act of actually articulating a proposal extremely difficult because it has got to be original and yet it has got to be worth doing. That is a tough combination. If it is worth doing chances are that it has already been done before.

Dawn, an administrator at the College of Social Sciences had agreed in her interview that the lack of resources was a major impact on the College. These lack of resources, specifically, a decrease in GA/TA ships is due to the dwindling of state funding in higher education. While the lack of GS/TA ships are small, there are other ramifications to the curriculum in her College. Specifically the hiring of graduate students as part time lecturers.

Dawn states:

I have been a little bit concerned about is given our budget shortfalls, we’ve had to limit the number of GA positions a bit and at the same time we need -- we need to cover a curriculum so we are hiring lecturers to do that and some of the departments are hiring graduate students for lecturers, but that level of support is really much less than a full time faculty. For example, for teaching one class a lecturer would be paid about $5000 plus there are no fringe benefits… no medical benefits or health support and no tuition waiver.

Dawn went on to state that the long term effects of being underfunded and to some extent providing limited benefits for students leads talented and qualified students looking elsewhere for a Ph.D. simply because these students can, in her words, “get a better package at other universities”. Dawn also mentions a cut in aid for international students. In previous years, international students were funded through the East West Center for four years, but now that has significantly changed. She explains:
In the past students who were funded through the East West Center and that had been a big support for Ph.D. students, there has been some change in that where East West Center still does support students but not quite to the degree they used to. Students who were funded would be international students, housing would be provided by East West Center and it was basically full funding and no expectation to work. And so those students were actually progressing very well through their Ph.D. program and there was a limited time that they are funded on East West Center so they had pressure to get out in four years.

While support for international students has declined, the time to degree completion has expanded. Dawn admits that the average time to degree completion at the College of Social Science typically takes seven years. This longer time to degree completion can be problematic, especially for international students, who are not allowed to work under their Visa.

Summary

Four major themes emerged in this study: Goals, Support and Acceptance, Reputation, and finally Challenges. Participants described the many reasons for enrolling in a Ph.D. program. Whether to gain self-empowerment or to become an expert in their field, participants were clearly passionate about their goal of becoming a doctor. Several participants also shared their experience of forms of support and acceptance into their doctoral programs. This theme proved to be one of pride and success by some participants, but also emotionally charged among other participants. This sense of emotional discourse carried on when describing the reputation of the department and the College of Social Sciences. Some participants felt that the education they were receiving was engaging, while other had praised their program as a ranking with the best in the country. Finally, participants expressed their frustration with challenges in their programs, specifically when it came to balancing work, home, and school life. They also cited the lack of
resources in the department, specifically funding for TA/GA ships and the poor job outlook once they finished their Ph.D. degree.

It is my hope that by examining the experiences of these participants, that research in this area is critical to the future of doctoral education at the College of Social Science.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Overview

This research study, *Exploring the Experiences of Pre-Candidacy Social Science Doctoral Students*, produced valuable information for faculty, students, and graduate chairs on the topics of academic and social experiences, supports and barriers to degree completion. Further, this study explored the importance of the Dissertation Chair and the practices, and values of the College of Social Sciences at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. This chapter begins with a summary of the study and results, to include the purpose of this study, its importance in light of graduate education, and objectives of the study using the research questions as a primer. Next, I address the results as they apply to the existing literature. Finally, I present the implications for theory as they apply to Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory of student departure to include doctoral persistence, implications for practice and future research.

Summary of the Study

Looking back to 2007, I asked myself which topic in higher education administration I could focus on my dissertation. It would have to be a subject that would add new knowledge to the field while expressing the voices of students. As a new doctoral student, I read an article about doctoral attrition and immediately knew that it was a topic that I wanted to pursue. Researching the literature, I found many problems existed in graduate education. Lovitts (2001) found that the overall attrition rate across the country consistently hovers around 50 percent. Furthermore, when examining the problem of attrition, it became clear that there were significant differences in time to degree completion. The trend pointed out those doctoral students in the
Natural Sciences took less time to complete their program when compared to Social Science students. Additional factors in doctoral attrition pointed me to a question of when during their program students were dropping out. Golde (1998) wrote that one-third of doctoral students drop out of their program during the first year of their program, and another third drop out before reaching candidacy, and the final third leave post-candidacy.

This study provides qualitative data on pre-candidacy students’ experiences and perceptions in non-cohort social science Ph.D. programs. Specifically, this study first examined doctoral students’ academic and social integration as it relates to their progression through a Ph.D. program. Secondly, this study examined the ways Ph.D. students described their barriers to doctoral progress. Thirdly, this study explored the relationship between student and faculty advisor. Lastly, this study explored the practices, processes, and values of social science Ph.D. programs.

The theoretical framework that guided this study is the Interactionalist theory by Tinto (1993). The framework identified the doctoral process as longitudinal, and that students persist in three distinct stages: Transition, Candidacy, and Dissertation. These stages document the social and academic experiences doctoral students encounter over time. Beginning with the first stage called Transition, the doctoral student begins with coursework and navigating the academic and social memberships of the departmental community. Next, the Candidacy stage involves the completion of a comprehensive examination, which is one way doctoral programs test academic competency. These examinations are defined by Tinto (1993) as “testing a student's acquisition of knowledge and the development of academic competencies deemed necessary [for doctoral research]” (p. 236). Social experiences, such as peer and faculty interaction play an important role during this stage. The final stage named Dissertation, is where the students elect to work
with only one faculty member, whose job will be to advise the student through the completion of the research project. Tinto (1993) suggests that the quality of the relationship between student and advisor is critical in predicting persistence.

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology, specifically a single case study in its approach to examining the research problem. I chose to use this method because it (a) explores a limited system over time (b) identifies different perspectives regarding one issue, and (c) involves in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007).

Multiple factors bound this case study. Firstly, it is bound by participant selection. To be deemed eligible for this study, a participant must have met the following criteria: 1) A graduate student admitted to one of the seven college of Social Sciences Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and 2) Not be regarded as all but dissertation “ABD” by the Office of Graduate Education at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, or 3) Be a graduate chair or Administrator at one of the seven college of Social Sciences Ph.D. programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Secondly, this study is bounded by the location. The site that was chosen for this study is the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The University of Hawai‘i is considered the flagship research institution in Hawai‘i, in addition to being the only doctoral-granting institution in the ten-campus system. Finally, this study was bound by the departments within the College of Social Science that offer Ph.D. degree tracks. Those departments include Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Urban and Regional Planning. It is important to note that the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Communication & Information Sciences (CIS) was not be included in this study since four different units sponsor it.
Those units are: The Department of Information and Computer Sciences and the Library and Information Science Program, the School of Communications and the Department of Information Technology Management at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

This study used a combination of semi-structured interviews and direct observation to collect data. Interviews varied between sixty and ninety minutes in various locations to include department conference rooms, faculty offices, and by telephone. The data gathered was then self-transcribed and sent to the participants for member checking via email.

Summary of Results

The results from the semi-structured interviews and direct observations of participants yielded four primary themes: Goals, Support and Acceptance, Reputation, and finally Challenges. The primary themes are further broken down into multiple sub-themes. The subthemes for Goals include self-empowerment, and “becoming an expert.” The subthemes for “Support and Acceptance” include: “I don’t know what I don’t know,” “Investing in the person you are going to be,” opportunities for student engagement, and family encouragement. The subthemes for “Reputation” include: “Top notch program or a happening place,” “useless and hopeless,” and faculty expertise. The subtheme of “Challenges” included external commitments, poor job outlook, and lack of resources.

Addressing the Research Questions

The first research question involved Ph.D. students’ perceptions of academic and social experiences in non-cohort social science doctoral programs at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Participants in this study had a broad range of academic and social experiences while in
their pre-candidacy stage of the doctoral program and voiced their opinions about their program. Participants in this study cited numerous examples of both academic and social experiences that made reference to one of the study’s four themes: Support and Acceptance.

Shannon specifically perceived herself as being at the bottom of the pack academically by coming from a Community College. Being able to produce something that was worthy of a Ph.D. is something she constantly questioned, as well as her ability to perform at the academic caliber the department expected. Shannon expressed further doubt when she could not find a suitable dissertation topic. Fortunately for Shannon, faculty members have been in her words, “very supportive” and she now has an excellent dissertation chair to guide her through the process. Kristy also shared her self-perception of her academic and social experiences in the department. Age and lack of experience in academia put her at a disadvantage. In the interview, Kristy talked about how much older her classmates were and how she felt intimidated by their wealth of knowledge, which led her to believe that she in some ways academically inadequate.

Participants shared their opinion of their social experiences in many different ways. While some participants found comfort and assimilation in social engagement, others found isolation and resentment. For participant Jill, the opportunity to meet other doctoral students on a regular basis outside the classroom was a positive experience. She recalls having a professor practice the German tradition of Stammtisch, which is an informal group meeting or get-together to eat, drink and talk about anything but school. Also, Jill talked about having regular beach potlucks where doctoral students can bring family members. This regular event was open to all graduate students and faculty. This sense of camaraderie has made Jill feel socially accepted and engaged.
Dyan also discussed her department's efforts at improving social engagement. She explained that her department made an effort to give their graduate students a physical space for social engagement on campus. This “student lounge” is popular with students and is utilized on a regular basis with students.

However, for participants like Kevin, his social experience is one of self-imposed isolation. Kevin referred to his department as those who praise the “hippie” culture. Since being admitted into his doctoral program, Kevin’s perception of animosity regarding his fellow students and faculty has caused him to disengage in voicing his opinion in class and being “present” on campus. Being an active military officer, his experience on campus and in his department has led him to change his daily habits such as dressing differently on campus and disengaging from any social activities that his department offers. For students like Kevin, poor institutional and departmental fit has led him to be frustrated and socially reclusive.

Another participant that had a negative social experience was Cindy. Being in the doctoral program for a few years, Cindy said she made friends with her fellow students and faculty, but that changed when she experienced mental health issues. From then on, she felt isolated, like a social outcast. Cindy disclosed that her diagnosis of bipolar depression affected both her academic ability to persist but also her perception of classmates and faculty she thought of as friends that are now, in her mind, judging her mental health.

The second research question of this research study looks at the supports and barriers doctoral students encounter during their pre-candidacy years of their program. The purpose of this research question was to explore participants’ experiences in their program and compare them to the existing literature and theoretical framework.
Participants in this study cited numerous examples of both supports and barriers that made reference to three of the study’s four themes: Support and Acceptance, Reputation, and Challenges. Figure 2 displays the different types of support both student and graduate chair participants felt, at varying levels, as support for pre-candidacy students. One comment that can be made from these findings is that mentoring support is currently an informal process. Graduate Chair participants cited this as an area that can be improved upon with formal curriculum and training.

Figure 2. Supports
Figure 3 displays the types of barriers that participants in this study indicated as either hindering their academic progress or a diminishing level of support. A common area of concern from the Graduate Chair Participants was the issue of time to degree completion. Participants who cited this mentioned that this was a field in which they need to improve upon, especially with the reduction in funding for TA/GA appointments in all departments. However, one administrator cited the requirement of fieldwork as a challenge to faster degree completion times. This administrator also cited the lack of research dollars being put into graduate education. This participant stated that the College of Social Sciences needs to be more entrepreneurial in its efforts to secure funding for research projects.
The third research question that guided this study involves the student experience of the faculty advisors or dissertation chairs. Participants in this study cited examples of student experiences about their faculty advisors that made reference to two of the study’s four themes: Support and Acceptance, Reputation.

All participants in this study cited this topic as the most crucial in regards to doctoral persistence. Having a dissertation chair that is supportive towards external commitments and knowledgeable in academic advising were key qualities cited by participants. Numerous participants cited the dissertation chair as the reason for their success or failure. Graduate Chair participants shared their departmental practices on dissertation chair selection and advising.

Beginning at the departmental orientation, some Graduate chairs implemented the practice of interim advisor/chair as they begin their course of study. Thomas shared that the function of the interim advisor is to guide the student through the coursework portion of their degree. After the coursework had been set, the student had the ability to select an advisor who best suited the dissertation topic or stay with his/her interim advisor. Another Graduate Chair, Lori, instituted a policy that has the new doctoral student select two different possible advisors before they start their program. The rationale behind this method is that students will receive consistently and mandated advising from the beginning of their program, which in turn, reduces the likelihood of “drifting” along and longer time-to-degree completion. However, Dyan’s department felt that mandatory advising sessions with a dissertation chair were not necessary and instead decided to utilize an open door policy for students. By having an informal open-door policy, students were able to come in when they needed, and not be dictated by mandatory sessions. Each department chose to implement academic advising and dissertation chair selection in a way that best suits their students.
Student participants also shared the experiences with their dissertation chairs. In the interview, all of the participants expressed the vital importance of that role and how it has either helped or hindered their progress toward the Ph.D. Jennifer explained that she considers the bond with her chair as critical to her success. She went on to describe her chair as her champion and promoter that is always looking out for her best interest. For example, whenever her chair has a research project, she is often picked first to assist. Also, her chair has helped her in securing a teaching assistantship (TA). Kristy also shared the same sentiment by stating that her dissertation chair is always looking out for her best interest while being available whenever she needed help.

By contrast, Kevin and Victor’s experience shows what can happen when a dissertation chair is not the central support figure. Already experiencing a self-imposed isolation due to contrasting and at times divisive political views, Kevin enrolled at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Social Sciences without knowing how different his political views were from those of his department. The College of Social Science was not his first choice institution to pursue his studies as part of a military benefit and when asked about the interaction with his dissertation chair, he expressed doubt about his chair defending his position on controversial issues within the department by saying, “I do not think he [dissertation chair] is going to fight the Hawai‘ian studies and feminists…He [dissertation chair] told me don’t encourage them if they argue with you”. This lack of support caused Kevin to rely solely on his ambitions and self-efficacy to persist towards the Ph.D.

In Victor’s experience, the departure/retirement of his dissertation chair caused irreparable damage to his journey. As a pre-candidacy student, Victor shared that he did well in his doctoral coursework and had been working hard to prepare for his comprehensive
examinations. However, during that time, his dissertation chair had decided to retire, leave the
department, and move to the mainland. This move was followed by frustration and what he
called “departmental negligence,” when no one else agreed to help him continue his education.
Victor ended up writing three separate proposals in the hopes that one of the ten faculty in the
department would take him as their doctoral student. In the end, no one in the department
accepted his proposal, resulting in academic limbo.

The fourth and final research question that guided this study concerns the practices,
processes, and values of the Social Science Ph.D. programs. Through mining the data, I found
the following two themes contributed to answering this research question: Reputation and
Support and Acceptance. I found that some graduate chair participants value the freedom of
having no set curriculum. This practice meant that the faculty have the opportunity to review
each student holistically, taking into account his/her previous intellectual work, and ability.
While this practice of holistic review is not happening in all departments, it is something that can
have wide-reaching effects in other Social Science departments. A Graduate Chair participant
shared their departmental practice of mandating a third-year paper. The third year paper is meant
to be an alternate requirement to the field exam, in which a student is required to submit a
publishable paper.

The department found value in this requirement in its ability to remove the barrier of
transition from student to researcher. The final practice and value of the Social Science Ph.D.
program surrounded the reputation of the department. This reputation included the sub-theme of
being a top-notch program, faculty expertise, and “a happening place.” Numerous Graduate
Chair participants openly shared that their doctoral programs were touted as the best place for
specific courses of study, such as Leon’s department, that focuses on the Asian and Pacific
Region. Other participants, like Thomas, cited his department's reputation as a marketing tool for prospective new students. His “top notch program” presents at various conferences throughout the year. It is the buzz of the poise and polished presentations that have people talking over the past 15 years. For student participant Cindy, the expertise of the faculty-led her to apply for a Ph.D. program at the College of Social Sciences. She remembered that 70% of all the literature she was reading was written by her current, dissertation chair. Cindy said, “…I did not apply anywhere else. I came here because of him”.

The results of the study indicate that more research on doctoral student experience is needed. While literature on doctoral student education focuses on attrition, little has been done on the experiences pre-candidacy students, specifically those enrolled in a Social Science program. The next section will examine the literature on barriers that affect Social Science Ph.D. completion rates, the advisor/student relationship, and the decision to enroll in doctoral education.

**Addressing the Literature**

*The decision to enroll in doctoral education*

As discussed in the literature, pre-candidacy doctoral students experience various academic and social levels of integration, along with varying external commitments. Beginning with the literature on the decision to enroll in doctoral education, Anderson and Swazey (1998) cite four factors that influence a prospective student to enroll in a Ph.D. program. They are a desire for knowledge in the field of study, desire to teach at a college or university level, wanting to do research, and wanting to help others. Also, Zhang (2005) states that beyond the intrinsic rewards such as wanting to help others, graduate education provides the recipient with extrinsic
rewards such as greater human capital, economic reward, and social status. Participants in this study concur with the literature, citing the extrinsic rewards of greater economic and social status.

Morrison, Rudd, Zumeta, and Nerad (2011) further explain that the reputation and quality of a Ph.D. program plays a significant role in how social science Ph.D. students perceive a quality program. Participants in this study also concurred with the literature by citing their programs as “top notch and a happening place.” Leon called his program one of the best programs in the country for studying the Asian region. Thomas explained that conferences are a way for his students and faculty to present their research. At those conferences, his program's reputation for quality and innovation attract potential doctoral students. Cindy concurred with the literature by saying that she chose to apply to the Ph.D. program at UH Mānoa because of the research and publishing her dissertation chair had done. Her desire to learn from her dissertation chair and passion for teaching made UH Mānoa the only choice for her.

*Literature on the barriers that affect Social Science Ph.D. completion rates*

McAlpine and Norton (2006), posit four variables that influence Ph.D. student retention. Those variables are selection/admission, program requirements, academic climate, and disciplinary mode of research. This study found that the variables: selection/admission, program requirements, and academic climate were present in participant experiences. Starting with the variable of selection and admission, participants stated various points of view. While some participants felt as though they were well informed of departmental processes, courses, and advisor selection, others felt as though they were not informed of the politics of their department. Kevin stated that, “I should have known that Naval Post Graduate School (NPS) and the
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa would be significantly different. I was still surprised at the lack of rigor. I’m sure these professors are good at what they do, but they seem – here’s how I describe it to my old friends at NPS, flotsam and jetsam’.

Participants also expressed their opinions about program requirements. While some departments, such as Thomas’s, expressed enthusiasm for an open curriculum, other participants, like Dyan, have set milestones for students. She stated, “There was some issue with the transition. That is why we instituted the research paper in the third year, and we did not have that before. We had a field exam before; it was just a regular exam in one of the fields. We replaced it with third-year paper for this very reason...Not just questions, they have to write a real... publishable paper. The criteria force students, no later than the beginning of the second year...on beginning with the third year to start on hands-on research and they have a year to finish the paper, but that means they are forced to transition.”

Finally, the academic climate factor was well discussed in this study. Defined by McAlpine and Norton (2006), the academic climate is defined as, “individuals’ perception of their ability to integrate themselves into the intellectual environment” (p. 8). Participants cited experiences such as being a teaching assistant, ability to attend and present at national conferences, having a physical space for studying, and informal mentoring as contributing to a positive academic climate. Other participants cited issues with mental health and polarizing political views as contributing to a negative academic climate.

Literature on the Advisor/Student Relationship

As discussed in the literature review, O’Meara et al., (2013) conducted a study on the role of emotional competencies in faculty-doctoral student relations. Their findings identified two
ways faculty members support their doctoral students. They are the display of personal competence and the display of social competence. The display of personal competence included intentional strategies to support doctoral students. Findings of this study suggest that faculty supports, such as regular meetings with dissertation chairs and holistic evaluations of students, contribute to student success. Social competency is defined as having both social awareness and social skill. This was also found in the experiences such as informal gatherings, and the ability to empathize with the changing lives of doctoral students. Finally, this study found similarities to Stallone’s (2004) article on factors associated with student attrition and retention. In that article, Stallone states that faculty/student relationships were not only critical; it was the most important predictor of success. Participants of this study also cited the faculty/student relationships as a strong support, and without it, students would undoubtedly fail in their endeavors toward a Ph.D. degree.

**Implications for Theory**

The Interactionalist Theory of student departure by Tinto (1993) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The theory was chosen because of its holistic approach to examining doctoral education. The Interactionalist Theory explores forms of both academic and social systems as well as external commitments. The results of this study reflect that forms of participation play a key role in a pre-candidate's ability to retain and persist in doctoral education. The first stage, identified as *transition* by Tinto (1993) is the time when students first enter their program. At this early stage, the development of academic and social interactions are critical to gaining acceptance from the community of peers and faculty. Also, this stage tests the pre-candidate's commitment to doctoral completion. Tinto (1993) explains:
Given the implicit tie between graduate study at the doctoral level and the attainment of career goals, continuation at this stage [transition] will mirror individual goals and commitments as well as individual perceptions as to the relevance of the institutional programs to those goals...the movement from transition to subsequent membership involves a series of individual judgements about the desirability of membership and the likely costs of further involvement. (p. 236)

Results from this study reflect these same principles of acceptance into a community of peers and faculty. Further, participants in this study explained that the goal of attaining a Ph.D. was a form of self-empowerment. Participants related their desire to learn more, to engage in self-discovery, and negative work experiences as catalysts for persisting. Further, the results also show that all participants experienced forms of academic and social interactions at the beginning of their journey. Forms of academic interactions include the awarding of GA/TA-ships, mandatory orientations, informal mentoring, scholarships, and the opportunity to present at national conferences, and office space for students. Forms of positive social interaction include informal dinners and beach potlucks. The study also found negative forms of social interactions such as self-imposed social isolation due to poor departmental fit and social isolation due to mental health issues.

Results from this study also show that external commitments that arise can cause undo stress and hardship in a pre-candidate’s ability to persist. Tinto (1993) identified external commitment as, “The demands of external communities that limit involvement in the communities of the department” (p. 233-234). This study found that external commitments, such
as full-time employment and parenting/spousal responsibilities, factored negatively into the ability to progress in a timely manner.

The next stage of the theory, identified as candidacy, is where the student is tested further, both academically and socially. A comprehensive examination is one way doctoral programs test academic competency. Tinto (1993) states that “Comprehensive examinations involve testing a student's acquisition of knowledge and the development of academic competencies deemed necessary [for doctoral research]” (p. 236). Social experiences, such as peer and faculty interaction play an important role during this stage. The way a student experiences the social component of doctoral education reflects their academic competency and integration into academia. Further, this stage identifies the importance of specific affiliations with faculty/department for the purpose of completing a dissertation.

The results of this study confirm that elements of the candidacy stage were taking place among participants, specifically the importance of the dissertation chair. However, this study found that importance of the dissertation chair as a central figure of a student's academic and social experience begins sooner. Participants explained that formal advising and dissertation chair selection begins at the time of entry. Further, this study found that the most important factor in pre-candidacy persistence is a dissertation chair’s ability to advocate for his/her student as well as assist in forms academic and social integration. It is this pivotal shift from Tinto’s theory that needs to be further examination.

The final stage of the theory is the completion of a doctoral dissertation. During this stage, the doctoral student will elect to work with only one faculty member, whose job will be to advise the student through the completion of the research project. Tinto states that during this stage, “individuals seek to identify a dissertation topic, successfully carry out a doctoral research
project, and defend that dissertation at a formal hearing” (p. 241). Due to research criteria, none of the participants had entered this stage of the theory. However, many student participants said that the identification of a dissertation topic is required earlier, specifically during the first year of study. Graduate Chair participants also shared the same expectation, that the topic selection is to be solidified during the coursework portion of their program. Finally, the theory implies that research opportunities lie solely in the Dissertation stage. The results of this study found that not only do research opportunities exist in earlier stages; some departments require a publishable research paper before a student reaches ABD status.

This study concurs through empirical evidence pre-candidacy students are experiencing forms of academic and social integration such as informal mentoring, teaching assistantships, financial assistance, mandatory orientation, and opportunities for social engagement. Further, participants also concur that entry orientations such as educational and occupational goals are taking place and in this study are being cited as a form of self-empowerment and self-discovery. Next, this study concurs that external commitments are a negative factor for time-to-degree completion. Finally, the results of this study point to a reworking of Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory to put a stronger emphasis on the relationship between the student and dissertation chair, as well as an update on when students identify a research topic and opportunities for pre-candidacy students to conduct research.

Implications for Practice

This study has several important implications for practice for doctoral education programs and graduate student development. Using the advice given by participants of this
study, this section honors their voice as well as addresses implications for practice in three different areas: Program structure, Dissertation chairs, and Ph.D. students.

Program Structure

The first programmatic implication is reflected in Hannah’s advice about running a mentoring center. She states, “Having insight from students who are ABD or just getting ready to finish their dissertation would be super helpful! I wish they had something like that [mentorship] in my department. I think that would totally help me stay motivated and keep moving toward finishing”. Other participants in this study also suggested that a formal mentorship program be offered to all Ph.D. students as early as the first year. While multiple departments at the College of Social Sciences have instituted some form of informal mentorship, having a formal structure would allow for additional academic integration to take place within the department. Other suggestions, such as having a student led mentoring program overseen by faculty and students were mentioned by participants, as a way of keeping students accountable and able to meet departmental deadlines promptly.

The second programmatic implication reflects Thomas’s suggestion of having faculty turn in regular narrative evaluations on every Ph.D. student. In his interview Thomas stated:

Every year every Ph.D. student is evaluated. When they do courses at the end of the course not only do they get a grade which they get to see the faculty then has to write a one to two paragraph subjective narrative study evaluation of the student. The faculty member can choose to share with the student or can keep it confidential from the student, but they all get sent to me [Graduate Chair] for every Ph.D. student.

This holistic approach to student evaluation gives a balanced assessment of a student's ability to progress and become a member of academe. I found that this programmatic requirement was happening in one out of the seven departments at the College of Social Sciences. Instituting this
type of evaluation College-wide would help both students and faculty by providing an early alert for under-performing students as well as a comprehensive evaluation.

The final implication reflects participants’ frustration with the lack of familial understanding of academic and social demands. External commitments such as children, spouse, and other familial obligations proved to be obstacles for many. Multiple participants in this study experienced support by their spouse, parents, and children at varying levels. However, most said that their family simply didn’t understand the doctoral process. One way to alleviate this frustration is to expand doctoral student orientations to include family members. By explaining the process of doctoral education in a way that informs and solicits family support, as well as continued outreach to families, would benefit the experience of the student and department.

_Dissertation Chair_

This study found that the most influential factor in doctoral education is the dissertation chair. Participants describe their experience with their dissertation chair in the following ways: my champion, my promoter/cheerleader, always supportive, amazing, knowledgeable, involved, open, good at what they do, dis-invested. Through these experiences, participants openly shared three pieces of advice for dissertation chairs.

First, participants recommended that faculty keep an open door policy for their doctoral students. Due to external commitments such as work, parenting, and providing elder care, finding the time to meet with a dissertation chair can be difficult. While formal meeting and evaluations should be scheduled on a regular basis, having an open door policy creates a welcoming environment and provides ample opportunities for students to meet informally with their dissertation chair.
Second, participants recommended that graduate faculty be entrepreneurial in their research endeavors. Unlike faculty in the Natural Sciences who regularly work on research grants and projects, those in the Social Sciences emphasize teaching. These differences, as identified by Golde (1998), affect the way that students experience their Ph.D. program. For example, Ph.D. students in the Natural Sciences start working and are paid on research grants run by their program chair at the beginning of their program. Whereas, Humanities Ph.D. students have little to no access when it comes to research funding opportunities. These differences have Graduate Chairs and Administrators calling for faculty to seek out grant opportunities for their students.

The final recommendation for dissertation chairs is to be accountable. Data from this study found that while the majority of dissertation chairs were supportive of their students, some participants felt that their dissertation chair displayed attitudes of dis-investment, and a lack of caring. Victor shared that his dissertation chair retired before he was eligible to be ABD. Because of this, Victor experienced numerous obstacles when writing his proposal, keeping his committee together, and selecting a new dissertation chair. He describes his relationship with his dissertation chair and committee as “evaporating” and advises future dissertation chairs to be accountable to their students, especially if they are going through significant life changes. Further, if a chair is unable to continue, that the student is given ample warning and immediate tangible alternatives to continue their education in a timely manner.

Ph.D. Students

Several graduate chairs, student participants, and one administrator presented advice for future doctoral students. Leon shared his advice of remembering the larger picture by saying,
“Being a graduate assistant is important but do not lose sight of the larger goal, which is completing a dissertation.” He went on to explain that too often; doctoral students become so involved in teaching classes, planning curriculum, and grading papers that they forget the reason they began to pursue a Ph.D., which is to produce new knowledge in a discipline. Brenda’s advice to new doctoral students is to be prepared to be treated like a colleague. In her department's new student orientation, she explains the seriousness of the journey and expectations of incoming students. In addition, Ph.D. students must acquire the attitude, maturity, and responsibility needed when representing their department. The final advice for students is from Dawn, an administrator from the College of Social Sciences. Her advice about being your own advocate stems from many years of experience working with numerous doctoral students. She states:

Stand up for yourself! If you wait till your committee tells you, okay you’ve done everything we need you to do... you will never finish. You know what's good enough that you can just get out... that you can refine! You are making a contribution to the literature and that it is not going to be [the] perfect work of all time that you’ll grow even after you leave this place.

This poignant statement serves as a reminder to students who believe that doctoral education demands perfection. It also alleviates many fears that incoming students have about their academic self-worth. For example, Kristy shared her apprehension of becoming ABD and beginning the process of selecting a dissertation topic. She states:

I am with people that are ten years older that are my good friends but they come with a whole breadth of experiences, which I love learning from but I also feel sometimes intimidating. Intimidating because I do not know what I do not know! What I can sort of offer or share, and I imagine myself becoming ABD a little earlier, but I still like am hesitant because I do not feel like I know as much as I want to know.

Like Kristy, Shannon also shared that she did not feel “academic” enough. Bouncing from faculty to faculty, Shannon was worried that she did not measure up to the expectations of the
department. By sharing Dawn’s words of advice, students like Kristy and Shannon can better understand what it means to be a pre-candidacy doctoral student and begin to stand up for themselves by building academic self-efficacy.

**Implications for Future Research**

This exploratory qualitative research study presents many implications for future research. In this section, I will discuss the numerous opportunities to expand the study of pre-candidacy doctoral students’ experiences. First, this study focused on one research institution, the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. Because of the limitations of being the only large public doctoral granting institution in the State of Hawai`i, future studies could be expanded to include other mainland institutions of equal parameters in the United States. Second, this study focused solely on the experience of Social Science doctoral students. Lovitts (2001) states that Natural Science doctoral students experience significantly different supports as pre-candidacy students when compared to those in the Social Sciences. Future studies can expand on this by utilizing a comparative analysis of the experiences of pre-candidacy Natural Science doctoral students.

Third, the sample size of this study was limited to the experiences of 15 participants. Future research may include using a larger sample size to help generalize the experience of pre-candidacy students. Fourth, this study could focus on the gender-specific experiences in Social Science programs. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) found that females experience social support and stress differently than males in graduate programs. Castro, Garcia, Cavazos, and Castro (2011) also found differences in the way female students experience doctoral education. Specifically, female students benefited from intrinsic motivation factors such as resolve, perseverance, and independence. This study found that female participants identified strongly
with the subtheme of self-empowerment and becoming an expert. This subtheme can be explored further to better understand if there are gender differences and the decision to enroll in doctoral education.

Fifth, this study focused on pre-candidacy students as part of the participant criteria and parameters of the study. An interesting expansion of this study would be to include the two other stages of Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory on graduate and doctoral students, which are: candidacy, and dissertation. Conducting a qualitative longitudinal study of the doctoral process would provide a unique insight into the experience of Social Science doctoral education. Sixth, this study would benefit greatly by focusing on the international student experience. The data found in this study suggests that international students enter Ph.D. programs under different circumstances than those who are United States citizens. Specifically, international students do not have the ability to work while completing their Ph.D. program and face financial aid timelines to complete a degree. Further, this study found that international Ph.D. students who enroll their child (ren) in US schools might intentionally delay their progress to keep their children in an American education system. This phenomenon was brought up by multiple participants and would be worth exploring in greater detail. Seventh, this study found that for some participants, departmental culture and norms were barriers to completion and in some cases, led to self-imposed isolation. A future study on department cultural norms would be interesting.

Finally, a future study would benefit from examining the doctoral education of pre-candidacy students from another theoretical lens. While this study viewed the experiences of students through the lens of Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist theory of doctoral persistence, another research study on the subject using Museus et al's (2017) Culturally engaging campus

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide qualitative data on pre-candidacy students’ experiences and perceptions in non-cohort social science Ph.D. programs. Specifically, this study first examined the academic and social integration as it relates to student progression through a Ph.D. program. Secondly, this study examined the ways Ph.D. students’ describe their barriers to doctoral progress. Thirdly, the study explored the relationship between student and faculty advisor. Lastly, the practices, processes, and values of social science Ph.D. programs were explored. The theoretical framework that guided this study is the Interactionalist Theory on college student outcomes by Vincent Tinto (1993).

Using a combination of semi-structured interviews and direct observation to collect data, this study yielded four primary themes: Goals, Support and Acceptance, Reputation, and finally Challenges. The primary themes are further broken down into multiple sub-themes. The subthemes for Goals include self-empowerment, and “becoming an expert.” The subthemes for “Support and Acceptance” include: “I don’t know what I don’t know,” “Investing in the person you are going to be,” opportunities for student engagement, and family encouragement. The subthemes for “Reputation” include: “Top notch program or a happening place,” “useless and hopeless,” and faculty expertise. The subtheme of “Challenges” includes external commitments,
poor job outlook, and lack of resources. The results of this study added to the existing research on doctoral student experiences.

Tinto (1993) describes a student’s goals, commitments, financial assistance, and external commitments as entry orientations in his longitudinal model of doctoral persistence. Participants in this study explained that the goal of attaining a Ph.D. was a form of self-empowerment. Participants related their desire to learn more, the need for self-discovery, and negative work experiences as catalysts for persisting. Results from this study also show that external commitments that arise can cause undo stress and hardship in a pre-candidate’s ability to persist in a timely manner. Tinto’s theory also describes forms of academic and social integration as being crucial to persistence in the candidacy phase of his longitudinal model.

The results show that all participants experienced forms of academic and social interactions at the beginning of their journey. Forms of positive academic interactions include the awarding of GA/TA-ships, mandatory orientations, informal mentoring, scholarships, opportunities to present at national conferences, and office space for students. Forms of positive social interactions include informal dinners and beach potlucks. The study also found negative forms of social interactions such as self-imposed social isolation due to poor departmental fit and social outcast due to mental health. This study found that importance of the dissertation chair as a central figure of a student's academic and social experience begins at the time of entry.

Finally, this results of this study point to a reworking of Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory of student departure to underscore the importance of the relationship between the student and dissertation chair, identified that pre-candidacy students work with their dissertation chair to select research topics and research opportunities as early as their first year, instead of the Dissertation stage posited by Tinto (1993). These are factors that can be further explored in
future research. It is my hope that future doctoral students will gain inspiration from the
experiences of these participants. In addition, I hope to have inspired other departments to think
about how to best support their students and help them avoid the barriers to Ph.D. completion.
APPENDIX A: Certificate of Exemption

UNIVERSITY
of HAWAI‘I*
MĀNOA

June 3, 2014

TO: Brandon Chun
Principal Investigator
Educational Administration

FROM: Denise A. Lin-DeSheiter, MPH, MA
Director

SUBJECT: CHS #22224- “Exploring the Experiences of Pre-Candidacy Social Science Doctoral Students”

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On Jun 3, 2014, the University of Hawai‘i (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45CFR 46.101(b)(Exempt Category 2).

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at http://www.hawaii.edu/irb/html/manual/appendices/A/belmont.html.

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via email at uhirb@hawaii.edu. (The subject line should read: Exempt Study Modification.) The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program at 956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

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APPENDIX B: Agreement to Participate in Doctoral Education Study

Consent to Participate in Research Project:

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF PRE-CANDIDACY SOCIAL SCIENCE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Use this type of CONSENT FORM for research projects that involve:

- Research participants who are ADULTS (age 18 and older)
- Interviews
- Researcher does NOT have a pre-existing relationship with participants (e.g., researcher does NOT have a position of implied or actual authority over the participants, as is the case with relationships such as teacher-to-student, supervisor-to-supervisee, boss-to-employee, doctor-to-patient, service provider-to-service user)
University of Hawai‘i

Consent to Participate in Research Project:

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF PRE-CANDIDACY SOCIAL SCIENCE DOCTORAL STUDENTS

My name is Brandon Chun, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH), in the Department of Educational Administration. As one of my interests, I conduct research. The purpose of this research project is to explore the experience of pre-candidacy social science doctoral students. I am asking you to participate in this project because you are currently a doctoral student in the college of social sciences, a Graduate Chair, or Administrator in the College of Social Sciences.

What activities will you do in the study and how long will the activities last? If you participate, I will interview you once in person. The interview will last for about 60 to 90 minutes. I will record the interview using a digital audio-recorder. I am recording the interview so I can later type a written record of what we talked about during the interview. I will evaluate the information from the interview. If you participate, you will be one of a total of 15 who I will interview individually. One example of the type of question I will ask is, “Tell me a little about your professional goals and aspirations prior to applying to the Ph.D. program?” If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask you, please let me know now.

Benefits and Risks: There may be no direct benefits to you in participating in my research project. The results of this project might help me and other researchers learn more the experiences pre-candidacy social science doctoral students encounter. I believe there is little or
no risk to you in participating in this project. There is a possibility you may become uncomfortable or stressed by answering an interview question or questions. If that happens, we will skip the question, or take a break, or stop the interview. You may also withdraw from the project altogether.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**: I will keep all information from the interviews in a safe place. Only myself and my project advisor, Dr. Joanne Cooper, will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawai‘i Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study.

After I write down the interviews, I will destroy the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project in my typed papers, I will not use your name or any other personal information that would identify you. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your name. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

**Voluntary Participation**: Participation in this research project is voluntary. You are free to choose to participate or not to participate in this project. At any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission without any loss of benefits.
Questions: If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at via phone (808) 734-9550 or e-mail (btchun@hawaii.edu) or Dr. Joanne Cooper via phone (808) 956-7919 or e-mail (jcooper@hawaii.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights in this project, you can contact the University of Hawai‘i, Human Studies Program, by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Please keep the section above for your records.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign the following signature portion of this consent form and return it to ***.
Signature(s) for Consent:

I agree to join in the research project entitled, EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF PRE-CANDIDACY SOCIAL SCIENCE DOCTORAL STUDENTS.

I understand that I can change my mind about being in this project, at any time, by notifying the researcher.

I agree to have my audio recorded during the interview   [ ]  [ ]

YES   NO

Your Name (Print): ________________________________

Your Signature: ________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
APPENDIX C: List of Interview Questions for Graduate chairs/Administrator

Questions for Graduate chairs/Administrators

1. Tell me a little bit about your department.
   a. What are some of the faculty’s accomplishments/accolades over the last few years?
   b. How many advanced degrees do you offer in your department?
   c. How does a perspective student go about applying for the Ph.D. program?
   d. What are the steps to a Ph.D. degree in your department?
   e. Is it necessary to complete these steps in order?
   f. How long do students usually take to complete their degree?

2. Tell me about your doctoral students
   a. How many students apply and how many are accepted for admission in a given year?
   b. What are your criterions for admission in the Ph.D. program?
   c. What are some of the undergraduate majors your students earn prior to entering the Ph.D. program?
   d. As the Graduate chair, what are your expectations of newly admitted Ph.D. students?
   e. What types of support does your department provide its doctoral students?
   f. What do you think are the barriers to Ph.D. completion?

3. What is a typical curriculum for a pre candidacy Ph.D. student?
   a. How many classes are they expected to take in a given year?
   b. Other than coursework, are there other opportunities pre-candidacy students can engage in?
   c. Are these opportunities mandatory?

4. Is academic advising mandatory for pre-candidacy Ph.D. students?

5. How do students go about selecting an advisor?
   a. What is the role of a faculty advisor?
   b. Are there instances where students ask to change advisors?
   c. On average, how many students does a faculty member advise?
d. Are there any other support services offered to Ph.D. students?

6. What types of internship or research opportunities are available for Ph.D. students in your department?

7. When students graduate, what type of jobs are they qualified for and where (geographically) are they?

8. If you could give one piece of advice to your doctoral students, what would it be?

9. This study focuses on the academic and social experiences of non-cohort doctoral students in the College of Social Science. After having met with you, and discussing some of the practices, processes, and values of your department, would it be possible for you to email your doctoral students and see if any of them are interested in participating in this study?
APPENDIX D: List of Interview Questions for Students

Questions for Ph.D. students

1. Tell me a little about your professional goals and aspirations prior to applying to the Ph.D. program?
   a. Why did you decide to pursue a Ph.D. degree?
   b. Why did you decide on this major?
   c. Did your undergraduate major help to influence your decision to pursue a Ph.D.?
   d. Was there someone in particular that has influenced your decision to pursue a Ph.D.?
   e. Try to recall the day you found out that you were selected to the Ph.D. program; how did you feel?
   f. What did your family and friends think about your decision to enroll in a Ph.D. program?
      i. Do they support you?
      ii. Do they understand what steps are involved in a Ph.D. program?
      iii. In what ways do they support you?
      iv. In what ways do they not support you?
   g. What do you think are the necessary skills or tools in your Ph.D. program?

2. Tell me about your experience in the Ph.D. program so far?
   a. What have been your greatest accomplishments?
   b. What have been your greatest challenges?
   c. What are you looking forward to?
   d. What are you most apprehensive about?

3. Are you enjoying the courses you have been taking in the Ph.D. program?
   a. What is the best course you have taken so far? Why?
   b. How many courses are you planning on taking every semester?
   c. What has been the greatest challenge in your coursework?

4. Other than coursework, have you had other opportunities to engage in academia?
   a. What types of activities have you participated in?
1. Conferences?
2. Research opportunities?
3. Publications?
4. Teaching?

b. If none, why did you decide not to participate in any opportunities in academia?

5. Tell me about your relationship with the faculty.
   a. Do you have a faculty advisor?
      i. How did you go about selecting your faculty advisor?
      ii. How often do you meet with your faculty advisor?
      iii. What do you talk about?
      iv. Do you discuss your career or research aspirations with your faculty advisor?
      v. Do you discuss the challenges with your advisor?
         1. Do you feel supported when you discuss the challenges with your advisor? How?

6. Institutional fit.
   a. How well do you feel like you fit in your academic department?
   b. How well do you feel like you fit in your program?
   c. Do you have any opportunities to engage with other Ph.D. students in your program?
      i. What kinds of things do you do?
      ii. Do you find these opportunities helpful/empowering? If so, How?
      iii. Do you think it would be helpful to have more of these opportunities?
      iv. Do you think these opportunities should be mandatory for all Ph.D. students? Why?

7. Advice.
   a. If you could give some advice to new doctoral students in the program, what would it be?


Institutional Research and Analysis Office. (2012). Enrollment data by Academic Major at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Institutional Research and Analysis Office. (2013). Average time to degree completion for natural science and social science majors at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.


http://chronicle.com/articles/doctor-dropout/33786/


