Successfully Navigating Doctoral Studies in School Leadership: Diverse Minority Students’ Voices

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the factors that affect diverse minority student success as they complete doctoral studies in school leadership. Previous research on single minority student groups suggests that these students encounter challenges that prevent them from being successful. Thus, it is imperative to illuminate the avenues that actually assist students to successfully navigate their doctoral studies. Reported here are the factors that contribute to diverse minority students’ doctoral degree completion, factors that might have a detrimental effect, how to overcome these, and implications for institutions that offer school leadership programs.

Introduction
Graduate schools are engaged in institutional endeavors to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds, as well as to increase degree completion of school leadership doctoral students in an attempt to reflect the country’s increasing diversity. Such endeavors represent an effort to contribute to a “democratic citizenship” (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004, p. 17). However, graduate schools have not made considerable progress. In general, Cherwitz asserts, “African American and Hispanics are still significantly underrepresented among recipients of Ph.Ds. The two groups comprise 32 percent of all U.S. citizens in the age range of Ph.D. candidates but only 7 percent of those earning doctorates” (2005, p. 72). Therefore, it is imperative that researchers and practitioners in higher education search for better ways to promote and support doctoral students who come from diverse backgrounds. As Nettles, noted “further research should also investigate what factors contribute specifically to doctoral students’ being satisfied with their programs. Perhaps a higher retention rate could be attained once those factors are known” (1990, p. 517). Further, little is known about diverse doctoral recipients’ differences and specific experiences (Nettles, 1990). Therefore, additional inquiry should aim at “getting to the what, how and why of diversity on campus” (Gurin, Nagda, 2006, p. 20).

This paper reports the results of a study conducted to identify the factors that affect diverse minority students’ success as they complete doctoral studies in school leadership. Following is a brief theoretical overview, a description of the methods used, a summary of findings and conclusions including implications for aspiring doctoral students and institutions of higher education.
Theoretical Overview

Previous studies on educational attainment indicate that minority graduate students are lagging behind their majority peers, especially at the graduate level (Nettles 1990). However, others suggest that attaining funding to complete the doctoral program, (Border & Barba, 1998) and participating in research support groups, (Wasburn 2002) constitute contributors to the success of minority graduate students.

More recently, researchers have identified the challenges encountered by specific ethnic/ minority doctoral students. For example, in Latina/o Pathway to the PhD: Abriendo Caminos, Contreras and Gandara (2006) explore the difficulties and the successes of Latina/o students engaged in doctoral degree level studies and report that factors such as: (a) historical analysis of Latina/o education, (b) the presence of Latina/o faculty mentors as a means of ensuring student success, and (c) interventions that doctoral degree granting institutions can employ to help students successfully complete a doctoral degree program may affect their studies. Others have explored the role that identity plays in Latina/o doctoral studies success, noting that minorities enrolled in doctoral degree programs report feelings of marginalization and adopt strategies of resistance to help them achieve success in their doctoral experience (Watford, Rivas, Burciage, and Solorzano, 2006). Additionally, Torres (2006) describes the socialization process that Latina/o students utilize to experience success and explains that Latina/o students’ familial and environmental factors influences their identity and must be further explored in research studies that aim at identifying those factors that help to ensure student success in doctoral programs.

On the other hand, others determined the complexities that Latina/o students endure as they work through their doctoral programs. For instance, Kamimura (2006) suggests that Latina/o students must go through a period of enculturation to succeed in graduate school. With the same focus, Rosales (2006) explains that Latina/o students report experiencing periods of change as they find themselves in doctoral programs that are attended mainly by White student- serving institutions.

Additional studies describe the cultural challenges that Latina/o students face. These explain that Latina/o students struggle to preserve their ethnic identity while enrolled in a doctoral program (Ramírez, 2006), that Latina/o students enrolled in doctoral studies attribute their success to family, friends, and faculty advisors as well as to their gender (Segura-Herrera, 2006), that Latina/o students will face additional challenges as a result of their ethnic minority backgrounds (Vera-Sanchez, 2006).

Similarly, Hurtado and Sinha (2006) conducted a study of Latina students specifically and suggest that the socialization process in doctoral level programs impacts these graduate students academic success and achievement. Employing a psycho-sociocultural model, others explain that common day-to-day experiences of Latina/o students, their life roles, and familial expectations all play a part in the experiences of Latina/o students enrolled in doctoral programs (Castellanos, 2006).

Researchers have addressed various other aspects of the doctoral experience, and have identified students decisions to enroll in graduate school (Perna, 2004), causes of low enrollment and success rates of diverse groups in graduate studies (Jones, 2004), strategies used by African American students in order to succeed (Jones, 2004, and the specific experiences of African American Ph.D. students, prior to degree completion (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004). Research has also focused on efforts to improve the overall doctoral experience (Beeler, 1993), support provided during students’ graduate experience ( Border & Barba, 1998), ways to increase
the presence of minority students in graduate programs (Phillip, 1993), and determining doctoral attrition (Golde, 2005), embracing a more general comprehensive perspective. Other scholars attempted to determine the effect of race and gender on graduate school and degree completion (Ellis, 2001), understand graduate students decisions to enroll in graduate school (Perna, 2004), identify causes of low enrollment and success rates of diverse groups of students in graduate studies (Allen, 2005), describe the specific experiences of African American students prior to degree completion (Lewis, Davies & Smith, 2004), and highlight the challenges that first year Hispanic doctoral students experience (Millet, & Nettles, 2006).

The emphasis of most previous research, however, is on issues or factors affecting specific single ethnic groups, during the time they were engaged in doctoral studies, but the experiences and reflections of diverse minority students who have successfully navigated the doctoral studies journey have not been addressed. Furthermore, as more students from minority backgrounds pursue doctoral level studies, and encounter roadblocks to achieve success, it is imperative to illuminate the voices of those who actually completed their degrees as they reflect on their experiences, struggles and successes. As Gurin and Nagda (2006) suggest, additional research is needed to better understand the issues and challenges that students from diverse backgrounds experience, in addition to how they actually meet the doctoral studies expectations in order to graduate.

Thus, highlighting the voices of successful diverse minority doctoral students may generate important implications for both, aspiring graduate students who come from diverse backgrounds and plan to engage in doctoral studies as well as for institutions of higher education willing “to design, incubate, and test new, perhaps less obvious methods for increasing the number of persons of color who elect to complete graduate education (Cherwitz, 2005, p. 20), and take bold steps towards more creative ways to enhance doctoral graduate rates for all students.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that affect diverse minority students’ success as they complete doctoral level studies in school leadership. Diverse students referred to both male and female students from Mexican American, African American, and Asian American backgrounds. Three main questions guided the study:

1. What factors facilitate diverse doctoral students’ success (degree completion)?
2. What factors block diverse doctoral students’ success (degree completion)?
3. How do diverse students overcome the identified blocks in order to complete their degrees?

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach (Patton, 1999). The goal was “to examine questions that can be best answered by verbally describing how participants in a study perceive and interpret various aspects of their environment” (Crowl, Kaminisky, & Podell, 1997, p. 499). Further, the researchers adopted the notion that “events cannot be understood unless one understands how they are perceived and interpreted by people who participate in them” (Glanz, 1998, p.88). Thus, participants were selected using purposeful and snow-ball sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Participants

Study participants were selected using purposeful and snowballing sampling. Graduate students who met the following criteria were selected:
(a) Successfully completed a doctoral program,
(b) Identified as being from diverse backgrounds (African American, Mexican American, Asian-American, male and female),
(c) Represented each of the four doctoral specializations (Community College, Higher Education, Educational Policy and Planning, and Superintendency) in a major university, and
(d) Graduated in the last four years

A total of 18 graduates participated in the study. From these, six were male and twelve were female. Five were African American, twelve were Mexican American, and one was Asian American. The average age of the participants was 42, ranging from 34 to 58. Most participants were married, only two were single (never married) and two were divorced. The average time spent to complete the degree was 3 years, but the reported range was from 2 to 6. Most have changed jobs since graduation with a majority being promoted to a higher level position.

Data Collection and Analysis
Data for the study were collected through participants’ written responses to open-ended questions. Questionnaires were mailed using electronic media, including a request to participate in the study. Participants were asked to respond to the questions and return the completed questionnaires through electronic media and as a separate attachment. These were printed without participants’ names in order to assure confidentiality. The questions were aimed at capturing participants’ points of view without pre-determining the selection of questionnaire categories (Patton, 1990).

Data analysis was completed using grounded theory guidelines. “Grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data in order to build middle range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 250). Further, constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify emerging themes. Thus participants’ written responses were coded, compared and synthesized across participants’ experiences, specific program and ethnic background. Therefore, responses were organized under emerging categories of themes generated inductively (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). However, no comparison of subgroups’ responses was completed.

Findings
Given the focus of this study, an attempt was made to capture participants’ voices in order to address the three main research questions. Thus, findings are presented according to three major themes: factors that facilitate diverse minority doctoral students’ success (degree completion), factors that block diverse minority doctoral students’ success and strategies that these students use to overcome the identified blocking factors.

Factors that facilitate diverse minority doctoral students’ success
Data revealed that at least six factors facilitate diverse minority doctoral students’ level of success. According to the participants, completing a doctoral degree can be facilitated by mentoring, cohort membership, faculty support, graduate school personnel, family support, additional course work, and personal motivation.
Mentoring

The supportive relationship established with a faculty member through mentoring emerged as a significant factor that contributes to the students’ success. As a participant noted, “mentoring given by my professors was most helpful.” When a student is assigned a professor who is willing to spend time, and provide counsel and guidance to a doctoral student, he or she is in a better position to navigate the university structure, demands and requirements. Students value faculty who take the time to mentor them by sharing their own experiences and suggesting ideas to become successful.

A participant stated:
“The support of faculty who were willing to mentor me, and provide me with research opportunities alongside with my course work, contributed to my completion of doctoral studies.”

Another one explained,
“I also had a wonderful mentor who encouraged me to complete the program. One particular mentor shared similar situation of going to college while raising children.”

Cohort membership

The data revealed that a significant factor contributing to students’ success is cohort membership. Having access to a group of peers who are also engaged in the doctoral studies journey provides an excellent source of moral support. In addition cohort members provide empathetic listening, share resources and offer honest and constructive feedback. Participants realize that by becoming members of a cohort, they are indeed engaged in a true community of learners who are willing to work together through the doctoral experience.

In participants words,
“The doctoral program itself consisted of a fellowship program and a cohort system that served each of us in the program to help each other out throughout the program. The cohort members were a great factor in ensuring that each of us sees the program through all the way to the end.”

“Having a cohort of doctoral fellows was extremely beneficial. We worked together through the process.”

“Being in a cohort helped me the most. We met regularly and added many opportunities to discuss what we were going through.”

“It is most helpful to be in a supportive cohort that explores race and gender issues in leadership.”

Faculty support

According to the data, support from faculty facilitates diverse minority doctoral students’ success. Participants attribute their success to the interest and assistance of a few select faculty, particularly of those who come from diverse backgrounds. Faculty support may include encouraging students to pursue the degree, providing resources, spending time with the students, explaining the importance and benefits of engaging in a doctoral program, and providing guidance.
Further, faculty become advocates for students and excellent references for job searches. They also offer assistance in preparation to apply for jobs and follow these students’ careers, upon their graduations. Recognizing the value of such support, a participant stated:

“Two faculty in the program, Dr. Perez and Dr. White both encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies. Prior to considering this degree, I assumed that Ph.D.’s were for highly intellectual people who were so brilliant, that I would have never considered myself in that league. These faculty members encouraged me to consider myself “in that league” and they also demystified the doctoral experience for me, and portrayed it as something attainable.”

Another one observed,

“Faculty develop a personal interest in each of their doctoral students. They are sincerely and genuinely interested in each one of us and the main thing is they want you to succeed, since one has invested so much time, energy and money in a doctoral program. “

Graduate school personnel

The role and contributions of graduate school personnel including advisors and coordinators emerged as critical component for diverse minority doctoral student success. Participants report that they benefit from the professional assistance, knowledge, experience and helping attitude of the staff. Such assistance may come in the form of information about the university bureaucracy and other related matters, focused listening, specific orientation to processes and other tips to successfully navigate the doctoral journey. Graduate school staff also play a key role in encouraging students to complete their doctoral studies. As participants explained,

“The Graduate advisor helped me navigate through the bureaucracy at the university and bridged the gaps that needed to be bridged between all facets of the doctoral experience….A doctoral student needs to have a graduate advisor and chair that will be successful in getting the student through the program. “

“I also found a great deal of support in Ms. Flower, the graduate coordinator. She would spend time and talk to me about stress, about scholarships/fellowship opportunities, and she also took time to understand the unique cultural expectations that shaped my personal experiences and consequently impacted my academic pursuits. ”

“My graduate advisor was phenomenal in always being ready to support, guide and encourage me to keep moving.”

Family support

Support from family emerged as one of the major factors contributing to diverse minority doctoral students’ success. Participants give credit to their own nuclear and extended families for providing understanding, encouragement and support to achieve their academic goals. This support may come in very concrete ways, from providing financial assistance to adjusting family obligations. Families are willing to adjust family activities and schedules, and make special arrangements to care for their children or elder parents. As participants shared,
“Most importantly, I had wonderful emotional, mental and spiritual support at home from my wife, parents and extended family. No one in my rather large family had ever received a doctorate, although there are several attorneys, engineers and school teachers.”

“My mother was always interested in my studies. We would talk about my career and studies all the time. My husband encouraged and supported me. My son also was encouraging in his own way as a middle-schooler.”

“My husband and my family including my parents, brothers and sisters supported me during my doctoral studies by helping me take care of my children when I was commuting to and from Brownsville.”

“My family was supportive with encouraging words. They did not have a clue what this journey would entail so they did not know what to do to provide support. Eventually, my husband became my computer tech and my daughter became my first editor.”

“Both my family and my wife’s family were extremely supportive of my attendance to the doctoral program. Both my wife and I had to relocate to Austin so that I could and our families provided a great deal of emotional support throughout.”

**Taking additional courses**

The data also revealed that diverse minority doctoral students credit their success to additional courses or workshops. In some cases, these are not courses necessarily required for their program of studies. Reflecting on the additional course work, participants cited several benefits related to specific seminars and other academic events. For instance, they report that an additional dissertation seminar was instrumental in the development of their dissertation proposals. They also acknowledge that their ability to write in a scholarly fashion is enhanced through the activities and projects completed in such additional instructional offerings. As a participant noted,

“The capstone dissertation seminar, taught by Dr. Perez, was the absolute icing on the cake. Although intense, this course shaped my timeline, writing, and completion of the dissertation. It provided not only room for critique, but also the structure I needed to finish writing my dissertation.”

“The sequence of a course of study and the building block effect of those courses also contributed to my success. However, the single most important help came from a course that was not a part of the required curriculum, did not count for credit and came at the end of the course work. It taught me the structure and process of a dissertation. It helped me narrow my focus. It provided a place to get feedback on my work. The professor offered practical valuable information and supported the concept of scholarly work.”
Personal motivation

The data revealed that having a high level of personal interest and determination facilitates completing doctoral studies. Participants report that their own motivation in pursuing the degree played a key factor in navigating the journey. This inner desire is a key factor to endure the demands and challenges associated with the requirements of a doctoral degree. For some it is a life-time professional goal. As a participant put it,

“My drive to prove to people that (I a Mexican-American kid from a small border town who had coached most of his life) could not only complete a doctoral study but excel and complete even before some others who did not face the some obstacles as a minority does. I am also very proud of my experiences as a coach. I wanted to prove to people that coaches are bright disciplined individuals that believe in academics and are great motivators and providers, not ignorant, beer-bellied slobs who only care about winning at any cost.”

“As I was working on my master’s degree in educational administration, I realized that I wanted to continue to work towards a Ph.D. I knew that a doctorate would prepare me to gain a better understanding of educational leadership and research. I also wanted to have a Ph.D. before my 30th birthday.”

“I always wanted a terminal degree. The more I worked in public education, the more I observed it was necessary and more beneficial for a woman/minority to have a doctorate.”

“As I navigated through my teaching career, I then developed an interest in public school administration. I worked on a master’s degree in educational administration and then became a campus administrator. I then decided to join my two interests and pursue a doctoral degree in administration which would also teach me how to research and write and essentially to study at the doctoral level how reality gets created which was my initial interest.”

“It was always a personal and academic goal of mine to pursue a doctoral studies program in educational administration and supervision. I wanted to get a doctorate so that I could speak intelligently and be able to help teachers, principals, children and parents.

Factors that negatively impact degree completion

According to the data, doctoral studies completion may be negatively affected by several factors. Participants named lack of resources (financial and time), family separation (both nuclear and extended), negative stereotypes, and work demands as factors that might block their efforts to pursue a doctoral degree and in turn become additional stressors.

Lack of resources. The high cost associated with doctoral studies affects diverse minority students’ level of success. Participants find themselves in need of additional funding to be able to cover all expenses, including tuition and other family-related expenses, particularly if they either leave their jobs or take on jobs with lesser compensation.
“There were extraordinary financial pressures. I had not planned for this and so I was taking a financial risk. Even so, I believed then (as I do now) that eventually the financial risk was worth it.”

Similarly, lack of time to meet the demands of graduate school can also become a blocking factor. As a result, students have to be critical about their own obligations and priorities. They become very organized and disciplined in trying to respond to all their academic responsibilities, job-related duties and family obligations. As a student reflected:

“Although I had a full-time job, I used a planner to write down appointments, meetings, class assignments, and important dates to keep. At night, I reviewed my calendar to prioritize the next day activities ad keep my calendar at a glance to ensure that items that needed my attention were being addressed. I also honor as much as possible Friday nights as time to be spent with family and Sunday mornings to go to church.”

Family separation

An added burden for doctoral diverse minority students has to leave their families in order to attend the university. In some cases, students report having to move to a different city and as a result, they leave their family and children behind. Thus, family separation may cause stress, guilt and isolation which in turn may negatively impact these students level of concentration and dedication to their academic obligations.

“I constantly felt guilty about spending an enormous amount of time on my school work and my work and not enough time with my spouse. This put a big strain on my marriage, and at times, I felt that my marriage was being pulled apart so it took a lot of work to balance all three things-work, school, and family life.”

“When I was first admitted, I commuted to Dallas often because of family responsibilities. As a mother and wife, my critical obstacles were the traditional, socially-imposed perceptions about fulfilling my responsibilities. Once I relieved myself of this guilt I had very few critical obstacles.”

Negative stereotypes

The data revealed that both certain faculty and doctoral peers’ negative stereotypes might have a detrimental effect on diverse minority doctoral students’ success. It appears that unfavorable perceptions related to ethnicity, lack of ability to write in a scholarly fashion and the different experiences of these students have an effect on their own academic progress. Further, some faculty research preferences tend to keep students from pursuing alternative areas of research and how these students are socialized into the academia. As participants noted,

“Our in the doctoral program, some of my fellow students had negative stereotypes about students of color and our ability to hold our own. At times, students like myself were excluded from the decision-making process.”

“I faced overt racism, and I could clearly see that there was favoritism of certain students who were doing certain kinds of research. I found no support from faculty members to even encourage research questions I wanted to ask, nor any support to prepare for an academic career.”
Work demands
The data suggests that most diverse minority doctoral students need to continue working in order to finance their graduate studies and to provide for their families. As a result, they cannot afford to become full time students. The need to respond to the expectations of their professional responsibilities and effectively navigate graduate school obligations, requires that these students become skillful in addressing full time work demands. Further, it appears that faculty expectations do not take into consideration students’ additional responsibilities. As participants noted:

“During the day, I never studied because I was involved with my school as a principal. At the time, we were vying to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School and our progress and achievements needed to be maintained at their highest level.”

Strategies doctoral students use to successfully navigate the doctoral journey
According to the data, doctoral students resort to various means to overcome the factors that might prevent them from degree completion. Strategies that diverse students use to navigate their studies include: securing family support (financial and moral), applying for fellowships and other similar funding opportunities, balancing family, job, and doctoral studies demands, establishing positive relationships with faculty, particularly with minority professors, and developing a network of peers.

Securing family support
One way of addressing the factors that have potential to negatively affect student success is by actively securing family support both financial and moral. As students engage in doctoral studies, they must sacrifice family time and resources. Thus, it is essential to make sure that their families understand the type of commitment that will be needed. Due to the demands and expectations of doctoral studies, participants need to make special arrangements and are highly disciplined to spend time with family and children so that family members do not become resentful. As a participant pointed out:

“addressing these and other obstacles requires “first, student motivation and commitment to pursue a doctoral program; second, family support and understanding; and third, to have solved the financial issue.” Another one said, “I cut all personal, social, family functions, which my Hispanic family in San Antonio did not understand.”

Another one stated:

“As a student, I had to become more disciplined than I had ever been, committed to a lack of sleep, and sacrificed time with my family and leisure activities. Thankful, my children were very young and had very good sleep habits (in bed by 8). So much of my work was done after that time. Weekends were a bit more difficult but by managing my work schedule and school schedule, I was able to accomplish all my coursework, data collection and writing.”

Applying for alternative sources of funding
Data revealed that one way of alleviating the high cost of doctoral studies and providing for their families is securing funding through various means. For instance, participants reported
that they searched for other forms of funding, beyond their own resources. These may include student loans and fellowships offered by professional associations, philanthropic organizations, and the institution they are attending. Thus, they also apply for research assistantships, and other scholarships. Doctoral studies require extra expenses and these create additional financial pressures. As a participant noted,

“Financially, I worked when I could and I was able to secure scholarships. I borrowed some money from family and I paid it back when promised. I had to remind myself that the financial risk far outweighed what I would be able to achieve financially in the future.”

Balancing family, job, and doctoral studies demands

Data revealed that completing doctoral studies becomes a balancing act for participants in this study. Most are aware of the need to pay attention to family and children, job responsibilities and graduate school expectations. Further, it appears that they make conscious efforts to equally respond to what could be seen as competing expectations and priorities. They do so by purposefully scheduling time to spend with family members, aside from study time and work. They enact specific actions that may help to navigate their studies without compromising the quality time spent with family and the energy and time spend in meeting the academic expectations of their studies. As a participant shared:

“I took a conscious effort to balance my work, school, and family responsibilities. I had to make a point to try to spend an equal amount of time in each of the three areas and even then it was never truly balanced. One year, I even made a point take a short cruise with my wife for the New Year. That really helped. I also tried to focus on the activities that my wife valued the most in order to make sure her needs were being met.”

“I studied from 11 P.M. to 3 A.M. daily. Friday evenings were for family because I did not have classes. On holidays, if we went out-of-town, I would take my books and desktop computer, as I did not have a laptop at the time. I would study while my son and husband enjoyed the holiday. But, I was there with them, as a family.”

“Effective time management was the key to dealing with professors that did not recognize that I had a full time job. I made sure I clearly understood the expectations and deadlines for the courses and tried to stay ahead of the game. However, because of the extensive work and school load, I have pulled many all nighters.”

Establishing positive relationships with faculty and peers

The data revealed that positive relationships with faculty and doctoral peers emerged as an important strategy to navigate the doctoral studies journey. Participants recognize that getting to know faculty, particularly minority professors is essential to their success. Further, open and honest communication with professors is also regarded as a way to address some of the blocking factors. As a student remembered:

“Some professors would call me up to remind me to attend classes and to increase my class load from 3 to 9 hours each semester so I could finish. These professors developed a personal interest in each of us and the main thing is that they want you to succeed.”
Others expressed appreciation for the relationship they develop with their peers

Doctoral peers can be an excellent source of support and can provide feedback regarding students’ work. Participants acknowledge that peers become an excellent sounding boards and offer help in testing ideas and projects. As a participant explained,

“I was able to forge key relationships with other critically-minded, social justice-centered Students. We collectively formed a small reading and writing group. This group met frequently, we each read our most recent manuscripts, and we were provided with a “safe” environment from which to argue, critique, and support each other’s work.”

Another one suggested,

“Form or seek out like-minded, critical and supportive circle of colleagues. As mentioned previously, this group of friends supported my work and critiqued me when needed. They provide safe space to share ideas and challenged me to meet deadlines. In its simplest form, the group provided space for all of us to vent when we needed and blow off steam when it could no longer be contained.”

Conclusion

This study focused on the factors that contribute to doctoral studies success, defined as degree completion. Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire to capture students’ true voices. Given that prior research has focused on single minority doctoral student groups, an effort was made to include African American, Hispanic American and Asian American doctoral students to ensure diverse minority student representation.

Findings suggest that factors that have potential to facilitate doctoral studies relate include mentoring, cohort membership, faculty support, graduate school staff, family support, additional course work, and personal motivation. On the other hand factors that might have a detrimental effect on doctoral students’ success may include lack of resources, family separation, negative stereotypes, and work demands. Further findings indicate that successful diverse minority doctoral students employ purposeful and planned strategies to overcome the obstacles faced during their doctoral journey. These include, securing family support, searching for other forms of funding such as fellowships and research assistantships, balancing family work and studies, and developing positive relationships with faculty.

In summary, it can be affirmed that taken together these emerging factors reflect the components of the Tri-dimensional Foundation of the Hispanic Student Persistence Model (Pino & Ovando, 2005) to some extent. This model suggests that family support, student personal self-concept and institutional climate tend to influence diverse students’ success. Thus, it can be concluded that their presence may significantly contribute to diverse minority doctoral students’ success, but their absence may have a detrimental effect on their experiences and degree completion rates. Consequently, aspiring doctoral students need to engage in a deep personal reflection and analysis of the possibilities and demands of doctoral work prior to entering doctoral programs, to seek accurate information about institutional expectations and requirements, search for alternative ways to finance their studies, and secure family understanding and support. On the other hand, institutions of higher education must continue the search and development of innovative mechanisms that have potential to create positive doctoral degree experiences and degree completion mechanisms of students who come from diverse backgrounds. For instance, institutions
interested in attracting more diverse aspiring doctoral candidates may institutionalize the cohort concept as an effective avenue to engage students in collaborative arrangements that lead to true learning communities of scholars. Institutions should also offer additional support systems, particularly to enhance students’ ability to write in scholarly fashion, as well as generate financial support through fellowships, research and teaching assistantships and the like. Further, institutions that offer school leadership programs may also contemplate the need to recruit, hire, support and retain faculty who come from diverse backgrounds, have a true understanding of the challenges associated with doctoral work, and can relate to the unique needs of diverse minority aspirants. By doing so, these institutions will indeed be in a position to make solid contributions to better prepare all citizens who in turn might contribute to a better democratic society.
References


