

# What Makes a Successful Doctoral Student?

## An Applied Study of Applicants to the Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership

James R. Martin Jr., PhD, Leah Georges, PhD, & Peggy Hawkins, PhD

### Background

From its beginnings in 2011 through January of 2015, the Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership had roughly 700 applicants. The program accepted approximately 77% of those that applied. While many of these admitted students have successfully completed the program, others have experienced challenges of various kinds, sometimes related to an overall lack of academic preparation in their previous graduate work for the demands of doctoral work at Creighton University. In an effort to improve the selectivity of the admissions process, and ultimately admit students who are well prepared for the rigors of doctoral work at Creighton University, we studied the relationship between a number of applicant characteristics and their likelihood to successfully finish the EdD program.

### Research Question

What factors in an applicant's academic background may be predictive of their ability to successfully complete a dissertation in the Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership?

### Method

We evaluated the predictive value of applicants' undergraduate GPA, master's level GPA, the type of undergraduate (BA, BS), and type of master's degree held by the student (MS, MA, MEd, etc.), and the applicant's professional background on the students' likelihood to successfully defend a dissertation within the Doctoral Program In Interdisciplinary Leadership.

### Data

The researchers analyzed student admission file data from 2011 – July of 2015. A variety of parametric tests were used to assess the significance of relationships between the noted factors. All 705 applicants (512 admitted and 193 rejected applicants) were included in the analyses. This particular study presents findings from admitted students only.

### Results

#### Undergraduate and Master's Level GPA and Status

Undergraduate GPA of EdD Graduates	Undergraduate GPA of Active EdD Students
3.11	2.90
Master's Level GPA of EdD Graduates	Master's Level GPA of Active EdD Students
3.67	3.56
T-Test: Undergraduate GPA and EdD Graduation	T-Test: Master's Level GPA and EdD Graduation
$r = .15, p < .001$	$r = .10, p < .001$

*A statistically significant, though weak, relationship exists between students' undergraduate and master's level GPA and successful completion of the dissertation in the Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership.*

#### Career Field and Status

Students in our program generally come from one of the following career fields:

Career Field	Graduated	Active
Business	2.5%	12.3%
K-12	2.1%	18.0%
Higher Ed	5.7%	21.9%
Healthcare	1.2%	3.1%
Military	0.4%	3.9%
Government	0.2%	3.9%
Other	0.6%	2.5%

*No statistically significant relationship exists between career field and the likelihood that a student will successfully complete the program. Nor is there a relationship between career field and active or withdrawn status.*

#### Type of Degree and Status

Students entering the program generally hold BA, BS, or Associate's degrees as their first listed degree.

T-Test: UG Degree Type and Status  
 $r = .04, p < .000$

T-Test: Grad Degree Type and Status  
 $r = .09, p < .000$

*A significant relationship, though very weak, relationship exists between those students who hold BA degrees (as opposed to BS degrees) and successful completion of the program. A somewhat stronger relationship exists between those who hold MA degrees (as opposed to MS or MEd degrees) and success in the program.*

### Revisions to the Admissions Process

- The paper admissions form was revised to create a Qualtrics™ survey.
- Admissions review files were moved to a easier to access BlueLine site.
- Additional questions were added to denote the type of undergraduate and graduate degrees held by the applicant.
- Qualitative insights (not featured in this presentation) were used to add greater specificity to the evaluation tool
- Greater communication was instituted among recruiters & reviewers to clarify the evaluative factors.
- Given the limited strength of the correlations, a holistic approach is emphasized.