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Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation

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Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral
Student Orientation

by

Russell J. Garner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in
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2018
We hereby certify that this dissertation, submitted by Russell Garner, conforms to acceptable standards and is fully adequate in scope and quality to fulfill the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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An examination of the recent literature revealed there are no established standards for orienting online doctoral students. To address this problem, the relevant literature was examined and suggested that doctoral students can be effectively oriented to their academic environment when provided with the requisite programmatic and institutional information, and factors that support socialization and self-efficacy.

A literature-based orientation was developed to examine its impact on students’ first semester success in terms of rates of retention and grade point averages (GPA). This was accomplished using a developmental study approach that included three primary phases: 1) development of a literature-based orientation; 2) implementation of a synchronous online orientation; and 3) evaluation of the impact of the orientation on students’ programmatic knowledge and their perceptions of the factors of self-efficacy and socialization.

A survey instrument was developed to evaluate the impact of the orientation on participants and administered to the fall 2017 online doctoral cohort in the criminal justice doctoral (DCJ) program at Nova Southeastern University. Survey results showed that student levels of knowledge increased significantly and those students placed a great deal of value on the socialization factors related to academic relationships with other students and faculty. Students entered the doctoral program with relative high levels of self-efficacy although their confidence level dropped slightly when asked about their ability to persist when encountering personal, financial, or familial difficulties.

Included in the evaluation phase were comparisons of archival GPA and retention data from the 2014 DCJ cohort, who did not have the option of participating in a synchronous orientation compared with the 2017 cohort who did participate in the orientation. Additional comparisons were made within the 2017 cohort between those that participated in the orientation and those that did not. The results of the quantitative analyses revealed an 8% increase in retention rates for the 2017 cohort students that participated over the 2014 cohort. The 2017 cohort students that participated in the orientation showed a slight decrease (7%) in overall GPA when compared to the 2014 cohort. Further comparisons made within the 2017 cohort showed that students who participated in the orientation had better rates of retention and GPAs than the students who did not participate.

The findings of study provided the following recommendations regarding the minimum standards to include in an orientation including the programmatic factors associated with
curriculum requirements, deadline to obtain degree, and location of important program documents such as academic calendars, handbooks/catalogs, and dissertation guidelines. Institutional components included the registration process, academic advisor information, learning management system introduction, research library introduction, financial aid and military veteran specific information. Additionally, the factors that supported socialization and self-efficacy were recommended to be included in a set of orientation standards. Those factors should support student-to-faculty-to-student academic relationships and students who encounter personal, financial, or familial barriers respectively.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to the online doctoral students who, often, must overcome many personal, familial, or financial challenges just to begin the doctoral journey. The need to provide academic support and reassurance at the earliest stages of matriculation has never been more crucial as increasing numbers of students are entering our online doctoral programs.

I must first thank God for miraculously getting me through this process! I cannot put into words the support and encouragement I received from my Chair, Dr. Gertrude Abramson who has been my inspiration and champion to finish this journey! A heartfelt thank you to my committee members, Dr. Ling Wang and Dr. Marilyn Olander who provided the much needed and timely technical advice and thoughtful insight that I so desperately needed throughout this process.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background

The investigation took place within the fully online doctoral program in criminal justice at Nova Southeastern University (NSU), a large, private, non-profit university located in South Florida. The criminal justice doctoral program (DCJ) at NSU was launched in 2011. Since the launch of the program, all newly admitted students were oriented through an email containing information such as how to register for courses, academic advisement assistance, a course offerings calendar, and a dissertation guidebook. A synchronous, literature derived orientation was not available.

Per the DCJ program coordinator, approximately 25 DCJ students are admitted to the university each fall semester in August and are added to an average population of approximately 104 active students. The current (2018) DCJ student population consists of 45 males and 59 females. Prospective students, typically, come from many different academic and professional backgrounds, including, law or legal professions, law enforcement, active duty and retired military, and academia. The DCJ curriculum requires 60 credits hours in total consisting of 33 credit hours of core courses, 15 credit hours of concentration courses, and 12 credit hours of dissertation needed to graduate. It is important to note that DCJ students need no prior experience in the field of criminal justice academically or professionally to be considered for admission to the program. Students are required to select one concentration from three subject areas including organizational leadership, behavioral science, and juvenile justice. Two courses per term are considered full-time and students are required to stay in continual registration unless
on an approved leave of absence. Students have seven years from the time of admission to complete the degree and the average time to complete is approximately five years. The dissertation process consists of the following steps for the student:

- Selection of dissertation chair/committee members
- Submission and approval of an idea paper consisting of three sections: introduction, brief review of literature, and methodology regarding a topic deemed worthy of a dissertation
- Submission and approval of the dissertation proposal (first three chapters of the dissertation final report)
- Submission of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol necessary for the protection of human subjects and to ensure appropriate research practices and prior to gathering research data
- Data gathering, upon IRB approval, and development and construction of the final dissertation report that includes five chapters: introduction, review of literature, methodology, results, and conclusions, implications, recommendations, and summary
- Presentation of an oral dissertation defense and final approval of the dissertation report by the chair and committee
- Printing, binding, and publication of the dissertation report

It is important to note that during each step of the dissertation process, students are required to complete an online progress report at the end of each semester. This purpose of the report is to track students’ progress toward completion of the dissertation and to determine if an academic or administrative intervention is needed to help the student succeed (DCJ Dissertation Guidelines, 2018).

The fully online environment allows students from any Internet accessible location to participate in the program. This detail is reflected in the variety of, predominantly, domestic locations where students reside. Student demographics include an approximate age range of 32 - 47 years old and with a nearly even male-female ratio.
Problem Statement

Entering students are often unprepared for the complexities of the online learning environment (Jones, 2013). Cho (2012) argued that future research initiatives should assess the effectiveness of online orientations in higher education. Tokuno (2008) contended that newly admitted graduate students are often perceived as self-sufficient, but found them to be just as confused and anxious as newly admitted undergraduate students. Berry (2017) added that research involving online doctoral student communities is lacking, but needed to more fully explore the unique needs of students in these, often, smaller and more isolated communities. Lightman (2015) indicated that institutions often place preeminence on the needs of undergraduate populations and thereby marginalize graduate students who are assumed to be better prepared for the academic rigor and social challenges they will undoubtedly encounter. The importance of effectively orienting undergraduate students is well documented, but Benavides and Keyes (2016) assert that research is lacking regarding a comprehensive, research-based approach to orientating doctoral students.

Stewart, Goodson, Miertschin, Norwood, and Ezell (2013) observed that competition among online-only university programs would drive institutions to strive to meet the needs of students effectively through orientations to the university and to online learning. The orientations examined focused on issues such as socialization, mentorship, self-efficacy, information literacy, or campus virtualization in support of student success (e.g., Alkadi, Beaubouef, Patton, & Brown, 2011; Benavides & Keyes, 2016). None of the literature cited provided an assessment of the effectiveness of an online doctoral orientation that included the key components deemed as critical to student success. It is
within this gap in the literature that a problem was discovered. The problem is the absence of published standards for the contents of an online orientation for the doctoral student population such as the one described above.

**Dissertation Goal**

The goal of the study was to publish a research-based set of standards for an online doctoral orientation experience given that such standards were not found in a review of the relevant literature. The goal was achieved using a developmental study approach that included three primary phases: 1) development of a literature-based orientation; 2) implementation of a synchronous online orientation; and 3) evaluation of the impact of the orientation on students’ programmatic knowledge and their perceptions of the factors of self-efficacy and socialization. Included in the implementation and evaluation processes was the development, design, and use of the Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation Survey instrument to assess the impact of the orientation on participating student’s programmatic and institutional knowledge and their perceptions of the importance of socialization and levels of self-efficacy. In conjunction with the survey, historical GPA and retention data from the 2014 DCJ cohort, who did not have the benefit of literature based synchronous orientation, were gathered to compare with the same data gathered from the 2017 cohort members who participated in the orientation. The GPA and retention comparison information was necessary to examine the impact of the orientation in terms of first semester success. It is important to note, that retention in this examination refers to the likelihood that students will continue on to their second semester in the program (Glazer & Murphy, 2015).
The implications section in Chapter Five provided information for other universities and their doctoral students regarding the potential benefits of using a research-based set of standards, regardless of the academic discipline, as a foundation upon which to add their unique orientation requirements, to improve the likelihood of increased rates of first semester student success.

Research Questions

1. What is the profile of an online doctoral student?

2. Based upon the literature, how may an orientation for entering/beginning online doctoral students be designed and implemented?

3. What observable impact did the pilot orientation for the 2017 cohort of beginning DCJ online doctoral students have on the intrinsic qualities?

4. What influence, if any, was attributed to the orientation in terms of first semester grade point averages (GPA) and rates of retention?

5. What were the recommendations after all the data were analyzed and synthesized?

Relevance and Significance

The nationwide doctoral attrition rate has remained at 50% for the last few decades. According to Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Spaulding (2016), the attrition rates for online doctoral programs are particularly troubling at up to 20% higher than traditional ground-based programs. In their study of attributing factors to doctoral persistent, Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) concluded that prospective doctoral students should understand the risks associated with undertaking a terminal degree program and develop the requisite social, academic, and financial dynamics that reportedly support persistence. Prior attempts at reducing doctoral attrition have been unsuccessful given the challenging and multifarious nature of the personal and
institutional factors preventing students from realizing academic success (Lee & Choi, 2011; Poock, 2002; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2009). The ripple effect of high doctoral attrition rates negatively influences institutional retention rates and budgets, the pool of professional researchers and faculty, and the academic goals of individual students (Cho, 2012; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016).

Butterwick, Cockell, McArthur-Blair, MacIver and Rodrigues (2012) provided valuable insight into the concerns voiced by members of a doctoral cohort in an educational leadership program. Using a qualitative methodology to gather narrative data necessary to identify common themes and pivotal moments, Butterwick et al. (2012) invited four doctoral graduates and one faculty member to recall their experiences while pursuing their doctorates. To focus the data gathering process they determined to respond to one overarching question regarding the cohort's orientation to the collective group and their associated collaborative and learning experiences. Much like online learning programs, the students indicated that the cohort-learning model allowed them keep their full-time jobs while pursuing their doctorate. The participating students expressed apprehension about beginning the doctoral journey and doubted their academic abilities to succeed. One of the male graduates expressed, "What a stupid idea to go back to school…at the age of 48." (p. 449). A female graduate relayed concern about the low success rates of doctoral students and worried that her competing personal interests might sabotage her ability to complete the program. Another female graduate recalled trepidation regarding starting a doctoral program so late in life (age 51), but was confident in bringing her considerable experience to the collective. Others expressed feelings of fear, uncertainty, doubt, and insecurities about fitting in with the cohort. The
participating faculty member relayed anxiety regarding the potential development of a them (faculty) and us (students) cohort orientation that would be counterproductive to the learning and collaborative process. A key element to the ultimate success of the cohort was attributed to the group’s commitment to the collaborative process and supporting the importance of individual differences. Butterwick et al. (2012) detailed the importance of setting guidelines and identifying values early in the program. Revisiting these commitments with students throughout their doctoral journey helps to facilitate the collaborative process and support student success.

Terrell et al. (2009) argued that prospective doctoral students are often unprepared and unaware of the risks associated with undertaking a doctoral program. Upon acceptance students quickly learn that they must be responsible for their own learning and academic progress especially during the candidacy phase where students have completed the doctoral coursework and are soon to begin dissertation work. This problem is magnified as students enter the candidacy stage and must quickly take on the role and responsibility of an independent scholar (Gardner, 2009). Terrell et al. (2009) purported that little can be done regarding students' intrinsic qualities upon matriculation, but institutions and departments have many opportunities to support and facilitate doctoral student success by fostering academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975) at the onset. They claimed that students, faculty, and administrators must work to establish an environment of trust, communication, and engagement that can be especially difficult in online learning environments. Much like notion put forth by Terrell et al (2009) that doctoral students’ progress through phases from student to researcher, Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) identified three distinct phases that occur during the pursuit of the doctoral degree.
Those phases include the transitional phase where doctoral students focus on completing the curriculum, the developmental phase where they propose and select research topics and develop a plan to conduct research, and then the research phase where they actually do the research and develop the final report of their results. It is within the initial transitional phase, though, that is of most interest because this is where students are academically and socially oriented to their surroundings, and in particular, within their program and department.

Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2016) investigated self-regulation as a component of academic achievement and recommended developing preventative initiatives early in the doctoral journey. Lightman (2015) provided a discourse on lessons learned from experiences developing a graduate student orientation program and discovered that event complexity and costliness did not translate into an effective orientation. She contended that the current and most effective methods introduced incoming students to available institutional and library resources. She argued that orientations must continue to change and evolve necessary to meet the ever-changing orientation needs of participating students. Benavides and Keyes (2016) investigated the relationships between orientation content and student retention, learning, and socialization. They found that the quality of content was significantly more important than the context (i.e., length of orientation and delivery format). In addition, they found that the numbers of participating students and the capacity of the orientation to communicate the mission of the degree program indicated an increased likelihood of first semester success.

Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2016) argued that doctoral student attrition is a nationwide problem that negatively influences academia, society, and personal goals for
success. While it seems logical that an effectively designed orientation could support retention and student success, a scarcity of research exists regarding that thesis. Online doctoral students are considered a unique or micro-population, within the larger university population, and have distinctive and nontraditional student needs. As a result, attending an on-campus orientation is nearly impossible due to geographic separation and familial, work, health, or other conflicting obligations. Online students are far more susceptible to feelings of isolation and being disadvantaged compared to their traditional university peers. Designers, therefore, have a considerable responsibility to address the specific orientation needs of their graduate populations (Tokuno, 2008).

Cho (2012) found a lack of information regarding the development of an online student orientation in higher education. Benavides and Keyes (2016) argued that the literature provides certain core elements of orientation programs, but that the assessment of the application of these elements within an orientation is lacking. In addition, that future research should examine the catalysts of orientation initiatives and the resultant effect, if any, on important issues, such as, retention, learning, and socialization.

**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

The primary assumption was that a quantitative approach would be a positive first step at exploring and identifying the foundational orientation items that may support first semester success. This information is important to NSU and other institutions that offer, or plan to offer, a fully online doctoral program. Moreover, it was assumed that study respondents provided honest responses when surveyed given the explanation of anonymity provided at the onset. The GPA and retention information obtained from the 2014 and 2017 cohorts at the end of their first semester provided pragmatic data
regarding the potential usefulness and effectiveness of an orientation as evidenced by student success in the form of GPA and rates of retention.

A significant challenge associated with this investigation was determining the empirical methods used and subsequent research results and findings that yield information that can be replicated (Creswell, 2014; Trochim, 2006) within similar doctoral programs. This was dependent on the quality of the sample used in representing the population (Agresti & Finlay, 2009, p. 15) of online doctoral students. Additional limitations involved the quantitative methodology, which can prove inflexible by not allowing changes to the survey instrument. Any interpretations of the relationships between variables, therefore, must consider the possible influence of confounding variables (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013) and that the processes associated with quantitatively reducing data gathered to numbers often results in lost information.

Specifically, this type of experimental design can be advantageous in some cases, but there are some potential drawbacks such as the problem known as carryover effect where study participants are conditioned by the intervention (De Jong, Lehmann, & Netzer, 2012). This can happen during the survey pretest period and influence the performance or behavior of participants at the posttest interval by minimizing or, in some cases, negating the impact of the intervention. Fatigue is another potential drawback of using a within-subject design where subjects may become bored or simply uninterested in participating especially in cases where they have to complete the same survey a second time (Vikas, 2017). Finally, practice effects can impact performance on subsequent tests. Taking part in different levels of the treatment or taking the measurement tests several times might help the participants become more skilled and thus be able to figure out how
to manipulate the results in order to do better on the experiment. This can skew the results and make it difficult to determine if any result is due to the different levels of the treatment or simply a result of practice (Hausknecht, Halpert, Di Paolo, & Moriarty Gerrard, 2007).

Finally, the limitations associated with the small survey sample size (n=13) and examining only online doctoral students within a single program and discipline significantly reduce the statistical power of the study. Additional limitations could be the overestimation of the effect size and low reproducibility. Thus, the small sample size limits the level of confidence of the results and conclusions made from statistical outcomes (Agresti & Finlay, 2009 p. 128, Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 10).

**Definitions and Acronyms**

The following definitions and acronyms were used throughout this study:

DCJ: doctoral criminal justice program at NSU

Ed.D.: Doctor of Education degree

GOAQ: Graduate Orientation Assessment Questionnaire (Poock, 2002)

GPA: Grade Point Average

GRE: Graduate Record Examination

MPA: Master of Public Administration

MPP: Master of Public Policy

NSU: Nova Southeastern University

OLRS: Online Learning Readiness Scale (Hung, Chou, Chen, & Own, 2010)

Online Learning: web-based learning (Simonson, 2009)

Orientation: The process of orientating new students in higher education settings (Benavides & Keyes, 2016).
Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy degree

Retention: The rate at which students remain matriculated within a particular educational institution and for a defined period of time (Gardner, 2009A; Tinto, 1975).

Self-Efficacy: Confidence in one’s ability to succeed in an online setting (Glazer & Murphy, 2015).

Socialization: Process by which students are oriented into their academic setting (Thrasher, Walker, Hankemeier, & Pitney, 2015)

SPSS: BM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 24)

Summary

This first chapter presented an overview of the research topic, process of investigation, and a proposed solution that contributed to the body of knowledge and provided implications for practice and future study. To that end, the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations provided a realistic picture of the research process and helped to moderate any assumptions made.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This review of the literature includes an overview of the problem of effectively orienting online doctoral students, a profile on the online doctoral student, an investigation of the key orientation topics that support retention, student success, and institutional and program knowledge. Also addressed are the intrinsic factors of self-efficacy and socialization and their importance to the orientation process.

Overview

Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) indicated that a significant amount of theoretically grounded research has been conducted on doctoral attrition and persistence, but argue that the bulk of such work was conducted prior to the disruption and proliferation of online doctoral programs. Additionally, the substance of such retention and attrition research focused on undergraduate populations and ground-based doctoral programs. For example, Tinto's (1975) seminal work on student dropout focused on undergraduate students and postulated that students must be socially and academically integrated upon introduction to the academic environment to persist. Tinto (1975) used the outcomes of grade point average and number of social activities to assess levels of academic and social integration respectively.

In their study, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) examined archival data from 148 doctoral students in an online Doctor of Education program. Data were gathered from a survey developed by program faculty and included the Doctoral Student Connectedness Scale (Terrell et al., 2009) to measure the level of predictability of several factors attributed to doctoral student persistence. Examples of some of the predictor variables
included financial support, support services, familial integration, curriculum, program, and instruction. A logistical regression analysis was utilized to examine the extent, if any, of the relationships between the predictor variables and the outcome variable of doctoral persistence evidenced by semester-to-semester enrollment. Five variables were found to be strong predictors of doctoral persistence including: 1) program, curriculum, and instructor; 2) support services; 3) academic integration; 4) social integration with faculty; and 5) familial integration. Interestingly, among the factors that did not contribute to persistence included financial support. This finding is in stark contrast to the findings of Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) involving traditional, ground-based doctoral students who expressed concern regarding the continual pressure associated with the ability to pay for courses. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) contended that the convenience and uniqueness of the online learning environment allows doctoral students to remain at home and maintain their employment and explains why the ability to pay for online courses was not significant. Orellana, Hudgins, and Simonson (2009) define online learning as web-based and usually taking place at a distance from the educational institution. Given the uniqueness of the online learning context, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) suggested that an effectively designed orientation program that serves both the student and their families could significantly support doctoral persistence during the initial terms of study. An effectively designed orientation could help students and their families formularize realistic expectations of the risks involved in doctoral study thereby mitigating feelings of frustration and confusion when encountering academic, personal, or familial hurdles. A critical component of the doctoral journey is, of course, the students themselves and the intrinsic qualities that form the profile of an online doctoral student.
Profile of an Online Doctoral Student

To gain a greater depth of understanding of the challenges faced by students, it is necessary to consider the type of individual that pursues an online doctoral degree. Interestingly, an exact, or nearly so, total of the numbers of active, fully online doctoral students was not found in the literature. In their recent survey, Allen, Seaman, Poulin, and Straut (2016) refer to students studying online as distance students and indicated that out of the approximately 3 million exclusively distance students, about 352 thousand are classified as graduate students. Unfortunately, those figures do not separate out the doctoral students, from among the graduate students, taking exclusively distance (i.e., online) courses.

Cross (2014) indicated that the proliferation of online doctoral degree programs continues to expand and reach greater numbers of students in response to a societal shift brought about by the digital age and a disruptive economic environment. Gardner (2009b) and Offerman (2011) concluded that this growth in online doctoral enrollment impacted the type of student pursuing the degree. Specifically, what was considered the exclusive domain of the privileged white male, over much of the last 200 years (1836 – 1960), saw unprecedented numbers of women and minorities, especially during the last fifty years, in pursuit of a terminal degree.

Gardner (2009b) examined the literature associated with the profile of doctoral students and reported the following populations: women, students other than white, international students, part-time students, older students, students with families, first-generation students, and disabled students. This list is by no means exhaustive as Gardner (2009b) purports there to be additional subpopulations, but these groups personify the
shift in doctoral enrollment. These populations are often placed into the category classified as nontraditional (Cross, 2014; Deshpande, 2016; Martinez, Ordu, Della Sala, & McFarlane, 2013; Offerman, 2011). Cross (2014), Naidoo (2015), and Sutton (2014) provide a working definition of the nontraditional student which is a working adult, often female, a minority, or international student with many competing concerns (e.g., cultural, family, job, financial, health). Because the nontraditional student has many unique and challenging barriers to achieving an advanced degree many turn to the flexibility and anywhere anytime (Maddux & Johnson, 2014) convenience found in fully online programs. Taking this concept, a step further, many higher education institutions developed online courses to meet the needs of the nontraditional student (Allen et al., 2016; Deshpande, 2016) and, in most cases, modern online doctoral students are nontraditional (Offerman, 2011). Although a scarcity of literature exists regarding the profile of an online doctoral student, research regarding the nontraditional doctoral student abounds, therefore, it is within this context that we investigated the profile of an online doctoral student.

**Studies Involving Online Doctoral Students**

The literature suggests that research is needed regarding the attributes of a [successful] online doctoral student to equip faculty and staff with the knowledge necessary to effectively screen and/or match applicants to programs where they are likely to succeed (Fuller, Risner, Lowder, Hart, & Bachenheimer, 2014; Jorissen, Keen, & Riedel, 2015; Sutton, 2014). In contrast, Lee and Choi (2011) contended that studies which sought to determine a relationship between demographic characteristics and student success or failure proved inconclusive and need further investigation. To that end,
six recent studies (2012-2016) involving online doctoral students were selected for evaluation based on the minimum data collected including demographic data and/or personal traits/characteristics (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Byrd, 2016; Cross, 2014; Deshpande, 2016; Jorissen et al., 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Heuvelman-Hutchinson, & Spaulding, 2014). The students studied enrolled in a variety of online doctoral programs in areas such as health, psychology, business, education, human services, marriage and family therapy, and professional counseling. Upon successful completion students were awarded, correspondingly, the doctor of philosophy, doctor of business administration, doctor of psychology, or doctor of education. The details of the studies are compared in the following sections.

Gender

Female students outnumbered their male counterparts in five of the six studies with the largest percentage of females to males at nearly 83% (Byrd, 2016) with the smallest ratio of females to males at approximately 37% (Deshpande, 2016). These findings are consistent with Gardner (2009b) and Offerman (2016) who indicated that increasing numbers of females are entering online doctoral programs. In only one study (Deshpande, 2016), did participating males outnumber (63.5%) female students. The smallest percentage (17%) of male students were in Byrd’s (2016) study. The largest population studied (n=16,926) were found in the study conducted by Jorissen et al. (2015) with the smallest population (n=12) listed in the work by Byrd (2016).

Ethnicity

Three of the six studies gathered data regarding race (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Jorissen et al., 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). In two of the studies (Bolliger &
Halupa, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) the highest proportion, 74% and 61% respectively, of students reported they were Caucasian. Jorissen et al., (2014) stated 41.3% of students were African-American and outnumbered, by a significant margin, the percentage of students who were recorded as white (28.9%). Interestingly only 4.5% of students reported as Hispanic/Latino (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) and in a study of 16,926 Ph.D. students only 3.7% reported as Hispanic or Latino (Jorissen et al., 2014) which was surprisingly low considering the U.S. Census Bureau (2017) reports the Hispanic or Latino race to be 18.1% of the U.S. population as of July 1, 2017. This data suggests more research is needed to determine why the Latino/Hispanic population is underrepresented in the literature regarding online doctoral students. Only one study (Jorissen et al., 2015) provided a greater range of ethnicity data by including, in addition to white and African-American statistics, American Indian (0.8%), Asian (2.1%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0%), two or more races (0.8%), and unreported (22.4%).

Age and Marital Status

Each of the six studies indicated that age data was gathered, but only four (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Byrd, 2016; Deshpande, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) of the six studies provided specific age data information. The earliest age reported was 24 and the highest ages reported were “65 or older” (Deshpande, 2016, p. 142) and with Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., (2014) reporting 69 years old as the highest age. Two of the studies (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Deshpande, 2016) provided data regarding the largest percentage of participating students that fell within a specific age range, including ages 40-49 at 38% and 35-44 at 31%, respectively. Only one (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al.,
2014) of the six studies indicated that data regarding marital status was gathered. They reported that 84% of the 132 doctoral students surveyed indicated being married.

**Student Traits/Characteristics**

Each of the six studies examined the traits of participating students and how certain intrinsic qualities, or the lack thereof, impacted factors such as student satisfaction and success. For example, Byrd (2016) indicated that when students relate with each other and experience a sense of community they are more likely to be successful. They discovered four factors that help to create community and include: a) the cohort experience; b) a live, ground-based orientation; c) sharing difficult challenges with peers; and d) using faith, prayer, and spirituality to support members of the cohort. In comparison, Terrell et al., (2009) concluded that developing a sense of community should include face-to-face and online workshops, greater use of faculty advisors and student mentors (e.g., Sutton, 2014), creating cohorts of faculty and students with similar academic interests, and better use of communication technologies. Cross (2014) purported that students must possess a strong sense of grit (i.e., determination, persistence, passion, self-motivation) to experience success. Positive correlations were found to exist between grit and GPA, but only among female students. Older students exhibited higher levels of grit than younger students did and a positive correlation was found between the number of hours per week devoted to study and grit. Cross concluded that consideration should be made to encourage nontraditional students (older persons and females) to pursue doctoral studies.

Bolliger and Halupa (2012) reported that students expressed feelings of satisfaction when learning about the research and dissertation process through related
coursework. Likewise, instructors play a pivotal role in levels of student satisfaction when they provide timely and more detailed feedback, encouragement, and motivation (Wang & Li, 2011). Students with lower levels of anxiety toward the use of online learning technologies experienced less anxiety in online courses. This is important to note because nearly 62% of the students in their study were over the age of 40 and 32% of the students had never taken an online course. This is consistent with the literature that indicates online doctoral students are at least as anxious about their studies as first-time college students (e.g., Sutton, 2014; Tokuno, 2008).

Deshpande (2016) found that online doctoral students wished for more social activities, specifically, those that occur in face-to-face settings and recommended additional study regarding the impact of culture as it relates to online student interactions. Lovitts (2008) indicated that culture significantly influences doctoral student creative performance and rates of completion. Participating students indicated they hoped to gain encouragement and support with such mechanisms in place. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) found that students who use and connect with each other, via their university Facebook pages, outside of the classroom described feelings of connectedness with peers, faculty, and the university culture. Thus, they suggested that faculty include social networking in the design of their courses to support connectedness, which could develop and support persistence in students. This is especially important as Jorissen et al. (2015) reported a significant correlation between persistence and attrition. Additionally, they conducted a student satisfaction linear regression analysis and found that online course design/delivery, clear and concise course and dissertation requirements, and students who
had not previously considered dropping out of their program(s) were factors that significantly impacted feelings of satisfaction.

A myriad of student traits exist which can contribute to or detract from their ability to succeed in an online doctoral program. For that reason, Byrd (2016), Offerman (2016), and Sutton (2014) suggested addressing issues known to cause anxiety early in the doctoral journey during the orientation phase.

**Key Orientation Topics**

Benavides and Keyes (2016) identified a link between new student orientations and retention, learning, and socialization outcomes. Moreover, they reported a lack of research regarding orienting graduate students indicating that a greater focus, at present, is on undergraduate populations. They described the purpose of their research was to determine if a relationship existed between the types of orientations (i.e., full-day, half-day, one-hour, online) used in Master of Public Administration (MPA) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) programs and the content provided to participating students. The content provided was developed to facilitate an awareness of the expectations within the student's academic program and an awareness of the competency-based learning outcomes required by the national accrediting association within their field. They hoped to discover which orientation components supported student socialization.

To accomplish their research goals, they developed hypotheses and a logic model to examine the relationship between orientation inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Benavides and Keyes (2016) included the following inputs in their orientation: demographics (e.g., size of program and faculty), orientation resources (e.g., student handbook, tips for success), program trends (e.g., communicate mission and learning outcomes, access to
information), and socialization factors (e.g., faculty and alumni presentations, team building, student organization membership). Utilizing a mixed methods process, only MPA/MPP directors (n= 108) were administered a 32-question survey designed to probe the impact of the aforementioned inputs on the outcomes of retention, learning, and socialization. Participating MPA-only students (n = 36) were qualitatively assessed to collect their impressions of the orientations. Their study findings showed that 75% of program directors surveyed indicated that 95% of the students who participated in an orientation were retained at the end of the first semester whereas only 25% of respondents indicated that attrition rates were greater than or equal to 5%. Survey findings revealed that 92% of programs had less than 5% of students earning grades lower than expected and over 80% of programs had nearly 60% of students participating in orientations.

Regarding the outcome of student retention, the only factor that was statistically significant was the participation of the department chair in the orientation presentation. In contrast, faculty size and program size did not impact rates of retention. A statistically significant relationship between the size of the program faculty and overall student success was discovered. Regarding the factor of socialization, Benavides and Keyes (2016) found that orientations that employ an array of socialization strategies are more likely to integrate students into the culture of the MPA/MPP professions. Weiner (2015) offered the notion that socialization development is a multi-dimensional process and suggests that, in the case of orientations, requires a range of socialization techniques that help to shape students' attitudes regarding their role as a scholar in the short-term and as a career professional in the long-term.
Moreover, Benavides and Keyes (2015) found that a comprehensive orientation that includes the academic institution mission, program policies and procedures, and program learning outcomes are likely to support the process of social integration of students into their academic programs. A qualitative analysis of student interviews revealed that, overall; students viewed their participation in the orientation process as beneficial at socializing them into their academic program. Some students expressed feelings of intimidation when comparing themselves to other top performing students and regarding the variations in the age of orientation participants. Other students indicated a sense of appreciation for the sincere testimonials given by invited alumni, student organization members, and faculty. Most survey respondents suggested building in a question and answer time regarding tips for academic success.

The program faculty in the online Master of Science in Instructional Technology at East Carolina University (ECU) determined that newly admitted graduate students would be better served through an online orientation. The purpose of the online orientation is to introduce students to program and course information and objectives and provide learning outcomes and portfolio requirements. Design parameters included the need to be fully autonomous and asynchronous, student-centered, and to utilize a modular design approach for presenting orientation topics in a hierarchical fashion. Orientation topic areas included course expectations, time management, academic integrity policies, institutional services available to online students, and an introduction to learning technologies. Orientation designers gathered qualitative feedback from existing students and alumni necessary to develop the orientation from a student perspective. Using a top-down, sequential design approach the orientation began with a comprehensive overview
of the institutional mission and services available and then focused on the unique instructional technologies. Technologies used in the development, included an introductory high-end production video of the campus that included Google Earth/Map footage and animation and a Second Life virtual campus tour. A background soundtrack was developed and produced by a participating student. Including a video and virtual tour of the campus for students who would likely never set foot on campus was an attempt to intensify the socialization process so that incoming students were more likely to feel connected to the university community and experience a sense of collegiate spirit. Other notable design features included the need for the orientation to be playable on multiple devices such as Mac or Windows based products and operate using standard multimedia formats (e.g., MP3, MP4, AVI, WMV, MPEG).

To assess the value and effectiveness of the ECU orientation a formative evaluation was conducted to collect data from orientation end-users (n = 23). Respondents indicated the learning modules provided relevant and useful content. Areas that received high marks were the ease of navigation and the significance of student testimonials as an effective method for engaging students necessary to orient and reduce new student anxieties. Suggested areas of improvement were to enhance curriculum advisement, adapt the orientation color scheme to match university colors, standardize multimedia presentations for quality and consistency purposes, and be more specific about which learning technologies students could expect to use and include teaching examples of how to use said technologies. The practice of orienting students online is likely to increase given that a growing number of graduate students are enrolling in fully online programs. According to Allen et al. (2016), online enrollments continue to increase with an
observed growth rate of 3.9% from 2013 to 2014. This is an increase of .2% from the previous year. A comparison of growth rates between private and for-profit institutions revealed a growth rate of 11.3% and decrease in enrollment of 2.8% respectively. Interestingly, a comparison of the periods of 2012–2013 and 2013-2014 revealed a drop (10%) in the numbers of students not taking any online courses. The continued growth in online enrollments is happening despite an overall decline in the numbers of students enrolling in colleges and universities. These micro-populations have unique academic or operational needs due to non-academic duties including career and familial responsibilities or the circumstance of being geographically separated from the university campus (Gardner, 2009; Kumar & Heathcock, 2014; Tokuno, 2008). Interestingly, the number of military students entering graduate coursework is on the rise. Radford, Bentz, Dekker, and Paslov (2016) indicated that between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 the use of Veteran’s benefits increase for graduate students from 22% to 46%. During the period of 2011-2012 approximately 41% of military graduate students completed all of their coursework online. The rate is much lower for non-military students where only about 19% completed their graduate degree online.

**Orientation and Self-Efficacy**

Students' psychological attributes are among the most researched sub-categories of factors that contribute to or inhibit student success rates in higher education. In their study of the relevant literature from peer-reviewed journals from the last 10 years regarding online course dropout research, Lee and Choi (2011) examined 35 empirical studies related to online student dropout using a qualitative codification process and constant comparative method. They identified 69 factors that contributed to the
reportedly high dropout rates in online programs. Moreover, they argued that an accepted definition of dropout was not found among the studies they investigated. They indicated that 37% of the studies provided no clear definition of dropout from online courses and when studies that did include a definition were compared, they showed no consistency across the sample size. Among the issues identified as contributing to dropout, 20% of the identified factors were categorized as psychological factors and included self-efficacy and self-confidence, internal and external locus of control, satisfaction with courses and faculty, and motivation. Each of these factors was a contributor to a positive correlation with rates of course completion. Including one or each of these psychological components in an online orientation could significantly improve students' chances of successfully completing their first semester (Newberry & DeLuca, 2014).

Shen, Cho, Tsai, and Marra (2013) reported that dropout rates are higher in online learning environments and put forth self-efficacy as a significant contributor to reduced dropout rates and increased rates of student success in higher education. Online students, typically, do not interact with the same intensity and frequency as in the more traditional, face-to-face classroom and, as such, require a higher sense of self-efficacy or the confidence in one's ability to succeed in a particular context. Shen et al. (2013) suggested that self-efficacy is linked and unique to each respective environment. Regarding the case of online self-efficacy, they focused their research on the dimensions of online learning self-efficacy, the variables related to students’ online self-efficacy, and the extent self-efficacy is related to students’ online learning satisfaction. To conduct the study, they surveyed both undergraduate (40%) and graduate (60%) online students (n = 406). They discovered that self-efficacy is multidimensional and uncovered five dimensions
including the self-efficacy to: 1) complete an online course; 2) socialize with classmates; 3) use online learning technologies; 4) interact with online faculty; and 5) engage academically with other students. They sought to uncover which demographic variables were linked with students' online learning self-efficacy. They found that gender was a significant predictor of self-efficacy to complete an online course, to effectively utilize online technologies, to interact with instructors online, and to interact with other students. They found the demographic variable of academic status (i.e., undergraduate versus graduate) was significant at predicting self-efficacy to handle online learning technologies and to interact with online instructors. The number of online courses, or a student's level of online learning experience, was a significant predictor of the self-efficacy to complete an online course, to effectively handle online technologies, and to interact with instructors and classmates online. It was discovered that each of the five self-efficacy dimensions mentioned above significantly contributed to students' online learning satisfaction. The implications of the research conducted by Shen et al. (2013) suggests that significant consideration should be given to enhancing students' levels of self-efficacy at the earliest stages of matriculation. The self-efficacy to complete an online course was most significantly associated with online self-efficacy and learning satisfaction. Therefore, an orientation designed to initiate online students on the procedures for navigating an online learning management system (LMS) could prove critical to student success (Hung, 2016).

Moreover, Shen et al. (2013) found that faculty participation in orientation was useful to effectively explain the typical course activities, learning outcomes, and program expectations new students will inevitably encounter. Supportive of this notion, they found
that the dimension of online self-efficacy was related to socialization between students, and students and faculty. Online learning has been shown to lead to feelings of isolation, especially among online doctoral students (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tokuno, 2008), and reinforces the conviction that online self-efficacy is related to social interactions. Considering that entering students vary greatly in levels of online learning experience, those with less familiarity may experience anxiety if they lack the necessary faculty and programmatic support early in the matriculation process. Shen et al. (2013) found gender differences in online self-efficacy, specifically, that females had significantly higher self-efficacy levels than male students. Possible intervention strategies included encouraging male students to participate in orientations and providing them with greater levels of support, providing immediate feedback, and by facilitating the social engagement process by involving them in discussions and groups.

Hung (2016) examined online learning readiness and students' aspirations to progress within their academic programs and found that self-efficacy was a critical dimension that influenced students' decisions regarding taking future online courses. He hypothesized that online learners' readiness was a predictor of their desire to stay in continual registration in their online programs. Using the Online Learner Readiness Scale, he investigated students' (n = 217) attitudes and abilities toward online learning. Specifically, he assessed the readiness factors of computer self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control (i.e., the learner's ability to direct themselves in the learning process), learning motivation, and self-efficacy in online communications. Using a logistic-regression analysis process revealed that the dimensions of communication self-efficacy and motivation for learning were significant predictors of student's willingness to
take additional online courses and may impact future online course registrations. Students' self-efficacy, or confidence, in using online learning and communication technologies determined the likelihood that students will register in a future online course (Glazer & Murphy, 2015). These results suggest that institutions should ensure that students are oriented to the requisite communication and learning technologies upon admission.

Orientation and Socialization

An effective orientation should help new students prepare for the culture of the university. Thrasher, et al., (2015) suggested that socialization is the method by which students are oriented into their academic setting and that through the socialization process form their academic identity. In 2004, the University of Nebraska College of Medicine developed the Fast Start program to more effectively socialize students into the unique culture of medical school (Stoddard, Paires, Carver, & Todd, 2008). Designed as a pre-matriculation program (i.e., orientation), the two objectives of Fast Start were to introduce new students to the academic environment necessary to help them adjust to life in medical school and to prepare them for the academic rigor they would soon experience. Fast Start was offered online to avoid the prohibitive costs associated with a summer, on-campus orientation. Moreover, the convenience of an online format meant that it could be offered much earlier, then a comparable live orientation, to allow students more time to process the information presented. Fast Start was delivered via the Blackboard Academic Suite. An added benefit of using this LMS was that it exposed students to the learning technologies they would experience in their courses and prior to the start of the semester; participation was voluntary.
Fast Start (Stoddard et al., 2008) was split into two sections. The first section introduced anatomy, since anatomy was not required during the admissions process and many students arrived to the university having never been exposed to the topic. The second section consisted of a more conventional and comprehensive overview of all of the nuances of the program including, for example, curriculum information, a technology guide, library information, student organizations, social opportunities, and stress management tips. The method used to evaluate the effectiveness of Fast Start in achieving its ascribed objectives required the use of predictor variables necessary to project students' anticipated performance. The outcome measure selected was the final percentage score in the first course required of all entering medical students. Another construct of interest was the use of an orientation unit within Fast Start which was measured by the predictor variable assigned to the number of web pages accessed by participating students (n = 232) and as recorded by the Blackboard system. The population studied included a single group of participants, which was later deemed a limitation, by not including a comparison group. An analysis of the results revealed that participation in the orientation unit showed a positive correlation with performance at the end of students' first semester in their first required course.

Stoddard et al. (2008) indicated that in addition to academic experience and abilities there are numerous psychosocial and socialization variables that contribute to student's expected first-semester performance. They suggested that incoming students, who are offered an opportunity to improve their academic performance and social engagement, would find value in participating in an online orientation. This vantage contrasts with Weiner’s (2015) assertion that graduate students have unique experiences.
with the process of socialization. Specifically, that online graduate students are
disadvantaged because they lack the prolonged and observational benefits found only in
face-to-face settings and are not as well equipped to enter the faculty ranks as doctoral
students socialized in more traditional, ground-based research institutions.

Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) utilized a mixed methods approach to investigate
the factors that influenced time to attainment of a doctorate in education (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)
at a southeastern public university. Participants in the qualitative portion of the study
included four students (one black / three white) and eight faculty (six male / two female)
members. The students were interviewed and the faculty participated in focus group
settings. Interview results were assigned a binary number (0 or 1) which allowed for a
percentile ranking of emergent themes and deemed to be the most effective approach at
identifying recurring themes. The quantitative portion of the study consisted of secondary
doctoral student (n = 1,028) data involving year-by-year time to attainment of the
doctorate, entering student's master’s GPA, size of the program department, proportion of
female students, and mean Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores. They discovered
that the master's GPA (higher is better), size (smaller is better) of the academic
department, proportion (higher is better) of female students, and GRE scores (higher is
better) were significant predictors of doctoral attainment. Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011)
indicated that faculty members reported much of their time was spent teaching rather than
on research pursuits or other administration tasks. Per the faculty, most doctoral students
pursued the doctorate in hopes of future financial gain. Participating students indicated
their goals were both financial and academic. The median time to degree attainment was
found to be nearly six years. Other factors considered were institutional, academic, social
and economic integration, individual student characteristics, and external factors. When asked which of these factors was most significant most participants, five students and five faculty members, indicated individual student (i.e., personal) issues as significant contributors to time to attainment. Social integration was a key indicator of decreased time to attainment and completion of the doctorate. Regarding online doctoral students, Bryd (2014) found four factors that contributed to social integration and a sense of community including: 1) a cohort experience; 2) an on-campus orientation; 3) spirituality (i.e., faith and prayer); and 4) challenging personal and institutional factors.

Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) contended that establishing advising relationships and open lines of communication with faculty and administrative staff early in the matriculation phase proved significant. Students who do not received appropriate advising often fail to make the transition to the independent research phase of the doctoral journey (Lovitts, 2008). Students need an advisor who will effectively mentor them and prod them, when necessary, to continue moving forward. Additionally, communication response time and goal setting with advisors were identified as important. Portnoi, Chlopecki, and Peregrina-Kretz, (2015) concurred indicating, though, that it is unclear how doctoral students develop socialization skills on their own. They found that the engagement processes at work during discussions with their dissertation advisors, other program faculty, fellow students, and when identifying themselves as scholars, plays an important role in the development of self-socialization.

Although a great deal of research has focused on the general process of orienting graduate students in higher education settings and the associated academic and psychosocial benefits an accepted set of orientation standards for online doctoral students
was not found. The purpose for this review of literature was to examine current and relevant literature to assemble the key topics that should be included in an orientation, at a minimum, for online doctoral students.

**Summary**

This literature review explores the recent scholarly work related to orienting students in higher education settings and with a focus on online doctoral students. The issue of orienting fully online doctoral students is a relatively recent phenomenon. The review targeted the profile of an online doctoral student and the components found in existing orientations and their impact, if any, on student success and retention. Moreover, the review considers the efforts of other colleges/universities and the unique methods they applied to accomplish the goal of introducing new students to the graduate online learning environment, curriculum, and field. Their successes and failures provided the impetus for the development of an orientation slideshow and subsequent survey instrument that was used to assess students’ knowledge and intrinsic psychosocial influences. In addition to the expected components of an orientation such as academic advising, campus familiarization, online support mechanisms, an introduction to learning and communication technologies, the literature revealed two key factors that could positively impact student success and therefore warrant closer inspection. The psychological factors of socialization and self-efficacy were found to be critical to student success in the long and short terms, but no studies were found that included these components in an orientation.

The literature supports the fact that attrition rates in doctoral programs have remained high for the last several decades and the need to intervene early in the doctoral
journey is crucial at supporting success and ultimately completion. Because no set of orientation standards were found to exist for online doctoral students, a study of the development of an orientation and its key components is an important contribution to the knowledge base for other institutions hoping to increase rates of retention and provide implications for added study and replication in the field.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Overview

This investigation sought to address the problem of the absence of a foundational set of standards for the contents of an orientation for the online doctoral student population. The findings of this study provided information for other online doctoral program orientation efforts by providing the introductory programmatic, institutional, and psychosocial factors often associated with student success. Including the factors in an orientation will help support student success at program onset in the short-term and potentially improve students’ chances of persisting through the most challenging part of the doctoral journey, the dissertation. To that end, this chapter elucidates the research design, approach, data collection, format for presenting the results, and necessary resources that helped achieve the research goal.

Research Design

Too effectively, answer each of the five research questions and achieve the dissertation goal of recommending a set of doctoral orientation standards, a developmental study was conducted that explored the impact of an orientation and its observed impact on first semester student success. This was accomplished using a developmental study approach that included three primary phases: 1) development of a literature-based orientation; 2) implementation of a synchronous online orientation; and 3) evaluation of the impact of the orientation on students’ programmatic knowledge and their perceptions of the factors of self-efficacy and socialization.
The first phase consisted of the utilization of the literature-based orientation intervention. The second phase, implementation, consisted of the delivery and facilitation of the orientation intervention using the synchronous online GoToTraining platform. The third phase, the evaluation, consisted of a quasi-experimental cross-sectional survey approach that gauged the impact of the intervention on the described programmatic, institutional, socialization, and self-efficacy variables in conjunction with end of first semester GPAs and rates of retention to help achieve the dissertation goal of developing a set of commonly accepted orientation standards (Richey & Klein, 2005).

Richey and Klein (2005) indicated that developmental research projects often employ multiple research methodologies for use during different phases of the research process. Likewise, Creswell (2013) and Trochim (2006) purport that a quasi-experimental design is called for when the sample used is not randomized, employs pre and post testing, and a comparison group. In lieu of a comparison group in this study, archived interval and ratio data in the form of GPA and rates of retention, respectively, were gathered from the 2014 DCJ doctoral cohort and compared with the same data gathered from the 2017 cohort members that participated in the orientation presentation. Additional comparisons were made within the 2017 cohort between those that participated and those that did not.

Edmonds and Kennedy (2013) explained that quantitative research involves the use of the scientific method to numerically investigate the impact of an intervention on specified variables or the relationships among variables. The four basics steps, outlined by Edmonds and Kennedy (2013), were used to develop the research design as follows.
Five measurable research questions were developed that embodied the critical elements of precision, viability, and relevance. That is, the questions had to specifically address the research variables, provide a reasonable direction for collecting the desired variable data, be supported by the literature, and be relevant to the graduate educational community of practitioners. An appropriate research design was chosen based on the five research questions, the associated variables, and the feasibility and logistics that were conducted. The identified variables were expressed in the terms of the research procedures used to measure the phenomenon of orienting online doctoral students. The desired data needed for analysis was collected using the prescribed framework and included the pre and post-orientation survey data and the end of first semester GPA and retention data collected from the 2014 and 2017 DCJ cohorts. To test the validity and reliability of the survey a group of three faculty members experienced in online curriculum design and educational research were employed to thoroughly review the survey constructs. The survey construction process is described more fully in the Instrumentation section found in this chapter.

**Instrumentation**

A survey instrument was developed to collect the quantitative data necessary to examine the impact, if any, of an orientation intervention on students’ first semester GPA and retention rates. To accomplish this task, a survey instrument was developed using three primary scales including: 1) extrinsic institutional and programmatic knowledge; 2) intrinsic quality, socialization; and 3) intrinsic quality, self-efficacy. To assess the reliability of the three scales used in the survey, a Cronbach’s Alpha test revealed that the knowledge scale had an alpha of .780, the socialization scale at .737, and the self-efficacy
analysis provided an alpha of .933. The Cronbach’s Alpha score is a mechanism used to
measure how closely, or not, each item in a given survey scale is related. The more
significant the relationship the more likely a survey is measuring what is hoped to be
measured. Alpha scores greater than or equal to .7 are consider acceptable, greater than or
equal to .8 are good, and greater than or equal to .9 are excellent. A word of caution,
though, many factors can influence the Alpha score such as the sample size and number

Lavarkas (2009) stated that a survey is a mechanism used to interpret independent
and dependent variables through the measurement process. The survey developed for this
study used a combination of design approaches recommended by Fowler (2009) and
Lavarkas (2009) and included the following three tenets:

1) Selecting/creating survey questions to address the research goals and questions
from the relevant literature (Fowler, 2009; Lavarkas, 2009)

2) Testing and revising the questions using a critical systematic review process
with those who have research experience (Fowler, 2009)

3) Utilizing a method to deploy the survey that is convenient and efficient for both
the surveyor and survey participants (Fowler, 2009; Lavarkas, 2009)

The development of the survey included a combination of close-ended questions
designed to assess students’ extrinsic knowledge of the orientation concepts presented in
conjunction with two five point Lichert-type subscales designed to assess the
psychosocial factors of socialization ((0) not important – (4) very important)and self-
efficacy ((0) not confident – (4) very confident). The survey adapted relevant sections
from two reliable and validated survey instruments to address the psychosocial concepts
included in research question three. Permission to adapt the surveys for use in this
investigation is provided in Appendix A. The Graduate Orientation Assessment
Questionnaire (GOAQ) and the Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS) was utilized in this study. The GOAQ was used because it was developed to gather extrinsic programmatic and institutional data regarding the activities involved in orientations in conjunction with activities associated with student socialization. The GOAQ was validated through an intensive focus group process (Poock, 2002) and used a five point Likert-type scale which asked survey participants to rate the importance of orientation activities (very important to unimportant). The OLRS was developed and validated by Hung, Chou, Chen, and Own (2010) across five dimensions, but only two dimensions were adapted for the instrument in this study and included computer/Internet self-efficacy and online communication self-efficacy. Furthermore, demographic information including gender, age, ethnicity, race, last enrollment, online course experience, and occupation data were collected from survey participants. Because this study evaluated the perceptions of human subjects, collecting demographic information, according to Trochim (2006), was needed to identify the characteristics of the population sampled. The characteristics of the population are explained in the results section in relation to the outcomes of the survey and the comparison of the archived and current GPA and retention data. In addition, the demographic data will be used to create a profile of an online doctoral student per research question one. Such information was collected because, according to Creswell (2014), surveys can be an effective mechanism to aid in the investigation and explanation of human phenomena. Likewise, Trochim (2006) indicated that survey research is a significant form of measurement in empirical social research.
Prior to pilot testing the survey instrument, three faculty administrators were employed for the critical survey development process to ensure, as Creswell (2014) indicated, that the assessment tool effectively measures what it was designed to measure for the intended purpose of the study. They were selected because of their expertise in a variety of graduate level academic areas, such as, grant writing, educational research, psychology, criminal justice, and online doctoral instruction and curriculum development. The members were Dr. Marcelo Castro, Ph.D., Dr. Tammy Kushner, Psy.D., and Dr. Angela Yehl, Psy.D. Each member works in the department where the online criminal justice doctoral program is managed at Nova Southeastern University. The biographies for the faculty experts are provided in Appendix B. Their invaluable participation helped to support the critical function of securing validity during the instrument design phase. Since a quasi-experimental approach was used in this study it was crucial to focus on the four validity types: 1) internal; 2) external; 3) construct; and 4) statistical conclusion to apply sound principles of scientific inquiry to minimize threats to validity (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013).

When the final draft of the instrument was completed, it was pilot tested with six current graduate students from various academic disciplines using the online survey platform, Survey Monkey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/). The Survey Monkey platform was selected to create an online version of the survey that would allow a hyperlink to the survey to be emailed to respondents. The Survey Monkey platform served as a convenient, effective, and efficient process of gathering the electronic results of each survey needed for later statistical analysis. Changes suggested by the pilot study participants during the design phase were included in the final draft of the survey.
Initial approval to conduct the research was granted by the Department Chair, Dr. Kimberly Durham where the DCJ program resides (Appendix C). Approval to study human subjects was granted through the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board application process (Appendix D).

The DCJ students were recruited using through the university email system. Specifically, the DCJ coordinator sent the entire 2017 cohort of 27 students an email invitation on August 7, 2017 with the link for the synchronous GoToTraining orientation session. Attached to the orientation notification email was the participation letter (see Appendix E) inviting them to participate in the survey and included the hyperlink to the survey located in Survey Monkey. Integrated into the survey was a statement of Informed Consent (Appendix F) that allowed those invited to participate the option to opt out of the survey if they did not wish to participate.

**Approach/Procedures/Research Questions**

*Orientation Development*

A literature-based orientation presentation was developed by identifying and compiling the extrinsic and intrinsic factors deemed significant in literature as supporting student success. A copy of the orientation presentation is located in Appendix G. This approach is consistent with the assertions made by Richey and Klein (2005) who purport that it is during the literature review where the conceptual foundation of a developmental study is established. Based on the research conducted the following factors

- overview/mission of university and department structure;
- academic advisement(course sequence and frequency, academic policies, add/drop dates, withdrawal dates, student handbook);
- registration process;
- dissertation process and steps;
- conducting research in the library;
- socialization;
- self-efficacy, were included in the orientation (Alkadi, et al., 2011; Benavides & Keyes, 2015; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Byrd, 2014; Gardner, 2009; Glazer & Murphy, 2015; Hung, 2016; Kennedy, Terrell, & Lohle, 2015; Keyes, 2016; Lightman, 2015; Lovitts, 2008; Newberry & DeLuca, 2014; Poock, 2002; Portnoi, et al., 2015; Shen et al., 2013; Stoddard et al., 2008; Sutton, 2014; Terrell et al., 2009; Thrasher et al., 2015; Tinto, 1975; Tokuno, 2008; Wang & Li, 2011; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Weiner, 2015).

Implementation

During the implementation phase, the orientation content was presented to the participating 2017 cohort. To facilitate the learning and collaborative processes involved in the orientation, Microsoft PowerPoint 2016 was utilized to illustrate the content and the online learning platform GoToTraining was used to deliver the presentation synchronously given its audio and video capabilities. According to Terrell et al., (2009) and Weiner (2015) students significantly benefit from face-to-face interactions, but attending a live, on-campus orientation is often not tenable for fully online students, especially nontraditional students (Offerman, 2011; Tokuno, 2008). A synchronous online orientation was provided to bridge this gap and facilitate the all-important process of effectively orienting newly admitted students to determine its impact and ability to support first semester success.

Evaluation

The research steps or approach that was used to answer each of the five research questions is explained in this section. Edmonds and Kennedy (2013) indicated that a quasi-experimental approach involves the non-random assignment of study participants
to each condition (i.e., treatment and control) when it is not possible or convenient to randomly assign participants. Additionally, when using pre and post assessments, modifications to the design of a study is appropriate when working with groups that are not equivalent as is the case in this study. Specifically, a modification to the process of gathering control group data entailed using archived first-semester GPA and retention data from the 2014 online doctoral cohort, who were not privy to the orientation treatment. The archival data was compared with the same type of data extracted from the 2017 cohort members that participated in the orientation, but at the post-orientation interval. Table 1 summarizes the methods used to answer the five research questions.

Table 1. Methodology Used to Answer Each Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Methodology Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What is the profile of an online doctoral student?</td>
<td>• Review of relevant literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey instrument demographic data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Based upon the literature, how may an orientation for entering/beginning online doctoral students be designed and implemented?</td>
<td>• Review of relevant literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What observable impact did the orientation have on students' intrinsic qualities of self-efficacy and socialization and their extrinsic programmatic/institutional knowledge?</td>
<td>• Orientation treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey instrument at pre/post orientation intervals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) What influence, if any, was attributed to the orientation in terms of first semester grade point averages (GPA) and rates of retention?</td>
<td>• Mean score comparison of archived (2014) and (2017) cohort first (fall) semester, GPA and retention data. Note: 2017 data extracted from participating and non-participating orientation students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) What were the recommendations after all the data were analyzed and synthesized?</td>
<td>• Data analysis/synthesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question one was developed, at the urging of the literature (Jorissen, Keen, & Riedel, 2015; Sutton, 2014), to develop a profile of the online doctoral student
to compare, primarily in terms of gender, with rates of success or failure. Understanding
the general profile of the student was essential for the development of both the survey
instrument and orientation presentation. Specifically, given a basic understanding of the
demographics of a typical online doctoral student, or the nontraditional student primarily
found in the literature, helped to inform which demographics items to assess that could
help to differentiate the uniqueness (or not) of an online doctoral student. In addition, this
information was necessary to provide recommendations and implications for future
studies involved in orienting this population.

To answer question two, the factors cited in the literature as crucial to student
success were extracted and used to develop the orientation presentation. Benavides and
Keyes (2016), Gardner (2009), and Poock (2002), contended that the orientation process
is grounded in socialization theory (Tinto, 1993) and critical to new student success,
therefore socialization was included as an orientation factor. Self-efficacy was identified
by Shen, Cho, Tsai, and Marra (2013) and Cho (2012) as a critical factor that helped
determine students’ readiness to undertake an online graduate program and important to
assess at the program start. The works of Glazer and Murphy (2016), Poock (2002),
Stoddard, et al., (2008), and Tokuno (2008) were utilized to develop the remaining
academic, technological, and institutional factors that complement the two psychosocial
factors as necessary to effectively orient incoming students.

To address question three, the survey instrument was adapted from existing and
validated instruments to assess students’ perceptions of the value of the institutional,
programmatic, and psychosocial factors derived from the literature (e.g., Kelley &
Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Newberry & DeLuca, 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw,
2012) and that should be included in an orientation. The use of surveys in quantitative research seeks to explain phenomena through the collection of numerical data and that are, typically, analyzed using statistical methods (Creswell, 2014, p. 111). In addition, surveys can assist investigators by identifying important individual perceptions and can provide essential information about the effectiveness of educational programs (Creswell, 2014, p. 379). Incoming doctoral students in the online criminal justice program are not required to attend an orientation, but were invited to attend a synchronous online orientation slideshow offered through the GoToTraining (https://www.gotomeeting.com/training) platform. GoToTraining is the online learning and training communication platform of choice provided in all the courses offered in the doctoral program and primarily used for synchronous chat sessions or specific trainings. Thus, participating students gained the added benefit of early exposure to one of the online technologies they will use throughout their tenure in the program. The orientation intervention/treatment was developed using a process described by Edmonds and Kennedy (2013) as the instrument-development design process because of its use when gathering quantitative data in conjunction with the development of an instrument and or treatment. The benefit of this design is that it provided a conceptual framework that helped develop the survey instrument and subsequent orientation intervention. The final draft of the instrument provided the individual components, from its three scales, were used in the final version of the orientation [presentation] slideshow (Appendix G). The orientation presentation took place one week before the start of fall 2017 semester courses. Each student participating in the orientation received a pretreatment (i.e.,
orientation) survey just prior to the orientation event and then again after the event to gather post-treatment data.

To answer question four, archived data from the 2014 online doctoral cohort was compared with data from the participating members of the 2017 cohort post-orientation to determine if their participation had any impact on GPA and first semester rates of retention. In other words, as Trochim (2006) indicated a quantitative assessment was necessary to determine if the treatment variable (i.e., orientation) affected the identified outcome variables. Creswell (2014) purported that this testing of variables in quantitative research is necessary when attempting to determine a likely cause and effect relationship rather than trying to substantiate the relationship between the identified variables.

Question five was answered using the analysis of the survey results and comparison data findings necessary to draw inferences from them. The analysis of the data informed the recommendation discussion regarding the inclusion of the identified critical factors necessary to establish a set of orientation standards. Included in the discussion was information regarding the research outcomes, specifically, if they were expected or otherwise (Trochim, 2006). Most importantly, the recommendations provided an opportunity to suggest implications for practice provide recommendations for future orientation research, and highlight contributions to the research knowledge base (Creswell, 2014).

A quantitative investigation was used to determine if a probable relationship existed between the orientation intervention and the indicators of student success (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). According to Creswell (2014), educational researchers will often test a theory that deals with human subjects in non-predicable circumstances. In this
case, a pilot study of the orientation was conducted to establish a baseline set of orientation standards that future researchers could use to further examine the value and effectiveness of their inclusion in orientation presentations offered online regardless of discipline. The research questions guided the investigation to quantitatively test whether the independent variable (orientation) influenced the dependent variables of first semester GPA and rates of retention, and the factors included in the survey (Creswell, 2014; Meier & Brudney, 2001).

**Data Analysis**

According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2013), the recommended parametric analysis for a quasi-experimental research design that uses a within-subjects approach and a one-group pretest and posttest strategy, should include descriptive statistics and dependent sample t tests (paired sample t tests). Mean scores were calculated and compared at a \( p = 0.05 \) significance level. A significance level of 0.05 is a common alpha level used in practice and is an indicator of how cautious we want to be about the results. Selecting the significance level prior to analyzing the data helps to reduce bias (Agresti & Finlay, 2009, p. 154). All data were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 24) (SPSS).

Per the approved IRB protocol, no personally identifying information would be gathered such as email addresses, computer IP addresses, or student identification numbers. Nevertheless, the pre and post survey data needed to be matched to conduct the prescribed within-subjects approach. To accomplish this, Fedushko (2014) and Fedushko (2013) indicated that a combination of general demographic variables such as gender, age, sex, and ethnicity could be combined with specific demographic variables such as
educational information and work history and be used to facilitate the process of establishing a web-personality/profile. To further enhance the accuracy of the matching process, survey question four required students to provide a unique, write-in answer and survey question six allowed for a large range of answers related to employment, again, to allow students to provide unique answers and further support accuracy in the matching process. Using this approach in conjunction with the small sample size the pre and post data were matched and entered into MS Excel where they were numerically coded.

The survey data were collected using Survey Monkey and then exported to Excel where they were coded for use in SPSS. For example, in the demographic data males were coded with a ‘1’ and females were coded with a ‘2.’ Similarly, the three scales were numerically coded. Descriptive statistics were run in SPSS to describe student survey participants in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, any prior online learning experience, and current employment status. This was necessary to provide information about the sample population studied and to allow an examination of potential demographic factors that might be related to the dependent variables being studied. Additionally, the knowledge scale answers were either correct or incorrect. Incorrect answers were coded with a ‘0’ and correct answers were coded with a ‘1.’ Likewise, the socialization and self-efficacy scales were coded using zero through four where Likert items ranked as either ‘not important’ or ‘not confident’ were ranked as ‘0’ and items ranked as ‘very important’ or ‘very confident’ were ranked as ‘4’ respectively. This numerical coding process helped to facilitate the paired samples testing process in SPSS.

To examine the impact of the orientation intervention on students’ extrinsic and intrinsic qualities, the mean pre and post test scores extracted from the surveyed student
sample used (n=13) from the participating members of the fall 2017 cohort was analyzed using dependent sample t-tests. Trochim (2006) indicated that the use of descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviation enable the researcher to compare the performance of individual students and, in this case, the individual survey items in each of the three survey subscales. This process was necessary to extract the individual items to include in the baseline development of a set of orientation standards. Evidence of student success in the form of improved GPA and/or improved rates of retention data was extracted from the 2014 cohort and at the end of their first semester as this group was not privy to the orientation presentation. This same data was extracted from the 2017 cohort (n=20) that participated in the orientation for comparison to the 2014 cohort data. In addition, end of first semester GPA and retention rate comparisons were made within the 2017 cohort between those that participated and those that did not participate in the orientation presentation. This process was necessary to observe any possible impact the orientation may or may not have had on student success. To summarize the following three analyses took place:

1) Data extracted from survey participants (n=13) analyzed using dependent samples t-tests

2) End of first semester GPA and retention comparison between 2014 cohort (N=22) and participating 2017 cohort students (n=20)

3) End of first semester GPA and retention comparison within 2017 cohort between participating (n=20) and nonparticipating (n=7) students

This data analysis process was developed to answer the five research questions and to provide four major outcomes: 1) the creation of an online doctoral student profile; 2) the contents that should be included in an orientation; 3) the influence attributed to the
orientation in terms of first semester GPA and rates of retention; and finally 4) the development of a set of orientation standards.

Resources

In this section, all the resources used to complete the dissertation process are discussed including access to data, faculty, staff, students, and technology within the DCJ department. The DCJ department chair provided her verbal and written approval for accessing the following resources with the stipulation that all university and IRB protocols were acquired prior to conducting any data collection.

*People Needs.* Faculty experts were used to validate the orientation survey instrument and six active NSU graduate students were used to pilot test the survey. Only those educators that occupied the dual roles of faculty member and director of an online degree program were entreated for their participation in the instrument validation process. The DCJ program coordinator was called upon to email the survey at pre, post orientation intervals, and gather the GPA and retention data from the 2014 and 2017 cohorts. The coordinator was be asked to provide the data without any identifying information (i.e., names, email addresses, identification numbers) to minimize risk to the participating students.

*Technology Needs.* The orientation presentation was provided synchronously to the participating DCJ 2017 cohort using the GoToMeeting online forum. The university email system was utilized to administer the survey instrument to each newly admitted doctoral student. The quantitative data gathered was analyzed using MS Excel and the SPSS statistical software package maintained on a DCJ department desktop computer.
Summary

The steps involved in the quantitative process were needed to provide the requisite approach to effectively explore the phenomenon of orienting online doctoral students to achieve the overall research goal of establishing a set of orientation standards. Moreover, the survey instrument proved to be an effective mechanism in the data collection process by facilitating the process of comparing the mean scores within each of the three subscales. This was necessary to determine if any changes in student performance could be attributed to the orientation presentation. This data was compared against the end of first semester GPA and retention information, for the 2017 cohort that participated, since they were the first group to receive the synchronous, literature derived orientation. To establish a baseline of end of first semester performance and to examine GPA and retention data from students who did not participate in the orientation intervention, historical first semester GPA and retention data from the 2014 cohort was included for comparison purposes.

Students who experience first semester success are likely to continue in their studies and be successful through the all-important dissertation process in deference to the reported 50% or higher attrition rate of online doctoral students (Kennedy, et al., 2015). Moreover, the data collected from the within-subjects approach and one-group pretest and posttest strategies were used for trend and relational analyses to answer each of the research questions. The results from a comparison of historical and current GPA and retention data further strengthened the recommendations/implications made after data analysis. The results are presented in a narrative format in Chapter Four.
Chapter 4

Results

Evidence of any preexisting orientation standards for online doctoral students was not found in the review of the relevant literature. Given the absence of research, there was a need to investigate the components of an online orientation, necessary to develop a set of orientation standards, which support student success in the forms of increased grade point average (GPA) and rates of retention during the critical, early stages of matriculation (Butterwick et al., 2012; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Tinto, 1975). To accomplish this goal, a developmental study approach was utilized and contained three distinct phases including: 1) development of a literature-based orientation; 2) implementation of a synchronous online orientation; and 3) evaluation of the impact of the orientation on students’ institutional and programmatic knowledge and their perceptions of the factors of self-efficacy and socialization.

This approach began with the development and implementation of an orientation product to present to students. Next input from students, via survey, as to what according to Poock, (2002), is needed in their “own orientation programs” (242) was solicited. This type of input provided a baseline of information involving the inclusion of certain topics which at a minimum should provide a solid foundation in support of first semester student success. In addition to student survey feedback, end of first term student success information from the 2014 online doctoral cohort, who did not have the benefit of a synchronous online orientation, was compared with the same information from the 2017 cohort. The results of which provided much needed information and guidance for orientation designers, facilitators, and others who may be responsible for orienting new
students (Poock, 2002) and supports the efforts involved in this study to establish a set of orientation standards.

**Implementation**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the information collected from the incoming fall 2017 cohort of online doctoral students, majoring in criminal justice, at Nova Southeastern University (NSU). Data analyses were performed to determine if there were statistically significant \( p = 0.05 \) differences (within the same group of students at pre and post orientation intervals in the three areas assessed including: 1) students’ institutional knowledge; 2) students’ perceptions of the importance of socialization; and 3) students’ perceptions of their self-efficacy. Additional end of first semester GPA and retention data was gathered from the 2017 cohort members that participated in the orientation. This information was compared with the same data gathered from the 2014 doctoral cohort who did not have the benefit of participating in a synchronous orientation.

The results provided in this chapter are organized according to the outline of research questions presented in Chapter One. Specifically, research questions three and four are presented in this chapter. The Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation Survey developed for this study provided the primary source of information. The data collected from the survey were coded and analyzed using the SPSS, Version 24. Secondary data were analyzed by comparing the mean GPA and retention rates from 2017 and 2014 cohorts, respectively. This chapter includes the presentation of the t-test matched sample studied, demographics, statistical method, and findings, and concludes with a chapter summary.
Sample, Population, and Demographics

The Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation Survey was sent electronically to all (N=27) of the newly admitted fall 2017 doctoral cohort registered in the online criminal justice doctoral program. The communication included a notification about the orientation presentation and an invitation to attend. This occurred one week prior to the orientation presentation that took place on August 15, 2017, and again less than two weeks after the presentation. A total of 22 (81% response rate) pre-orientation surveys were returned. A total of 20 students participated in the orientation presentation and a total of 15 (56%) post-orientation surveys were returned.

The t-test paired samples size (n=13) reflects students that completed a pre-orientation survey, participated in the orientation, and completed the post-orientation survey. The matching response rate included six females (46%) and seven males (54%) and where the race data collected revealed that nine white (69%), two black or African American (15%), one of Hispanic race (8%) and one (8%) from multiple races (8%) participated in the survey. The age data collected indicated that two (15%) were aged 21-29, three (23%) were aged 30-39, five (39%) were aged 40-49, and two (23%) were in the 50-59 age range.

When asked about enrollment history, nearly all of the respondents provided a unique answer ranging from as soon as two months prior (one student (8%)) to entering the doctoral program, to a reported 16 year gap (one student (8%)) since last being enrolled in a college/university. The greatest number of students (two students (15%)) indicated being enrolled within the last eight months and two other students (15%)
reported the gap at 14 months with the remaining nine students providing unique responses. A majority of respondents (69%) reported having previously taken an online class and 31% reported having never taken an online course prior to matriculation. When asked about occupations, three (23%) students reported being in the legal profession, three (23%) students in protective service positions, two students (15%) indicated they were in law enforcement, two (15%) others reported they were involved in life, physical, and social science occupations, and one student (8%) reported being a police officer. The percentage of remaining respondents (approximately 16%) reported occupations in the management and education fields.

Statistical Method

Using a paired samples t-test, the online doctoral students’ responses regarding their institutional knowledge and perceptions of the importance of socialization and self-efficacy were compared prior to and after the orientation presentation. The purpose of the paired t test was to evaluate the difference, if any, between two sample means when the sample selections are not independent as in this case within this group of subjects (Trochim, 2006). Specifically, the analysis of data was used to determine if a statistically significant difference existed within the independent variables associated with extrinsic knowledge including: 1) number of required doctoral credits; 2) years to complete program; 3) email in Blackboard (BB); 4) location of syllabus in BB; 5) how to register for classes; 6) academic calendar location; 6) official email requirements; 7) grade appeal process location; 8) personal/academic issue resolution; 9) library scholarly research; 10) Dissertation Guidelines/IRB process; 11) Course of Study Guidelines; 12) dissertation defense information; 13) financial aid information; and 14) US Veteran student
information. Additionally, the following independent variables associated with socialization were examined: 1) on-campus social activities; 2) online social activities; 3) academic relationships with peers; 4) academic relationships with professors; and 5) participating in NSU social media forums. Finally, the following independent variables associated with self-efficacy and the abilities to complete certain academic tasks were examined: 1) complete an online course; 2) complete/defend dissertation; 3) use Blackboard; 4) keep pace with doctoral schedule of classes; 5) adapt personal learning style; and 6) persist despite challenges.

Findings

The findings associated with each of the research questions are provided in this section. Specifically, a summarization of the findings from Chapter Two regarding the profile of an online doctoral student is included to answer research question one. The findings regarding the contents to be included in an orientation product derived from the literature associated with research question two is summarized. Additionally, the quantitative information collected from the Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation Survey is associated with research questions three and four are provided. Research question five is fully discussed in Chapter Five.

Research Question One: What is the profile of an online doctoral student?

This question was first examined through the lens of the current literature where it was discovered online doctoral students, and doctoral students in general, are often included in the larger classifications of graduate student or non-traditional student. Literature regarding graduate students typically included master’s level students and did
not provide the precise profile information sought in this investigation. Therefore, it was necessary to examine the literature regarding the non-traditional category of students to gain a better understanding of the profile of an online doctoral student. To that end, six recent studies were found involving nontraditional students and that included demographic data for online doctoral students. The data extracted from the literature was compared to the demographic information gathered through the survey. A summary of the information found in the literature and gathered from the survey is provided below:

**Gender/Literature:** Female students outnumbered male students in five of the six studies examined; **Gender/Survey:** female to male ratio evenly split

**Age and Marital Status/Literature:** A majority of students (84%) were married and fell in the age ranges of 35-49 (69%); **Age and Marital Status/Survey:** Ages concentrated in 40-49 range and marital status data not collected

**Ethnicity/Literature:** Predominantly Caucasian in two of the three studies that gathered ethnicity data with the next highest category being African American;

**Ethnicity/Survey:** Predominantly Caucasian with African Americans the next highest category, followed by Hispanics

**Student Traits/Characteristics/Literature:** Older students and female students often possess higher levels of persistence, a sense of community and culture is important, prior online experience lessened anxiety, often anxious/unsure about ability to succeed, connectedness with faculty important, more than half had never taken an online course; **Student Traits/Characteristics/Survey:** Socialization was reportedly not important and students responded with high levels of self-efficacy, two year plus enrollment gap, working at time of matriculation, only about one third had no prior online course experience

**Research Question Two:** Based upon the literature, how may an orientation for entering/beginning online doctoral students be designed and implemented?

To answer question two, the current and relevant literature was examined to determine the primary factors that help support first semester student success and the platform to deliver the content to the students. The investigation revealed that that students need to be furnished with certain institutional and program-specific information
to effectively navigate their new online academic online environment. Additionally, the psychosocial factors of socialization and self-efficacy were identified as important factors that students need exposure to at the earliest stages of matriculation to, again, aid in first semester success. The specific factors identified were included in the orientation and designed to introduce the newly admitted 2017 cohort to the following:

- University email system
- Research library
- Financial aid
- Veteran student-specific information
- Learning management system
- Academic calendar
- Curriculum requirements
- Registration procedures
- Academic policies/procedures
- Dissertation Guidelines
- Importance of socialization, social media, peer-professorial relationships
- Self-efficacy support, importance of persistence, overcoming setbacks

The GoToTraining platform was selected as the delivery mechanism because it allowed students to participate online from any internet-accessible location and provided the desired video and sound capability for the synchronous session.

*Research Question Three: What observable impact did the orientation have on students' intrinsic qualities of self-efficacy and socialization and their extrinsic programmatic/institutional knowledge?*
To answer the question, survey questions 7-24 were used to extract information related to students’ knowledge. The pretest mean scores for the knowledge subscale was 10.07 (SD=3.07), the socialization subscale was 1.75 (SD=.62), and the self-efficacy subscale was 2.82 (SD=.79). The posttest mean scores for the knowledge subscale was 13.69 (SD=1.84), the socialization subscale was 1.61 (SD=0.85), the self-efficacy subscale was 3.01 (SD=0.95). A paired samples t-test of the three subscale scores yielded a significant difference (p=0.00) in the mean scores between the pre and posttest information in the knowledge subscale. See Table 2 below.

Table 2. Paired Samples T Test Results: Mean Survey Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pretest mean (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional/Programmatic</td>
<td>10.07 (3.07)</td>
<td>13.69 (1.84)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Subscale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization Subscale</td>
<td>1.75 (0.62)</td>
<td>1.61 (0.85)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy Subscale</td>
<td>2.82 (0.79)</td>
<td>3.01 (0.95)</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional frequencies were examined on the knowledge subscale to study changes between pre and post answers (i.e., correct vs. incorrect). The range of correct pretest answers ranged from four (7.7%) to 13 (23.1%) with the highest frequency of correct answers (12) at 30.8%. The range of incorrect posttest answers ranged from 10 correct answers (15.4%) to a perfect score of 16 (7.7%) and where the highest frequency of correct answers was evenly spread between 14 (30.8%) and 15 (30.8%) correct answers. An examination of the percentage increase or decrease of correct answers within the individual knowledge subscale questions indicated that students’ scores increased from pre to post intervals by 100% in questions 9 and 21 and by 350% in question 14. An
examination of the questions which changed to a value of greater than or equal to 30 percent included questions seven (30%), 10 (50%), 12 (60%), 16 (30%), 17 (30%), 19 (67%), 20 (33%), and 22 (57%). Question 18 showed an 11% decrease in the percentage of correct answers between per and post intervals and question 13 showed no change (0%). The remaining questions, questions 8, 11, 15, indicated a change of less than 30%. The effect size (Cohen’s delta (d)) was calculated at d=1.428. See Table 3.
Table 3. Knowledge Subscale: Individual Question Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Subscale Questions</th>
<th>Pre Correct Answers</th>
<th>Post Correct Answers</th>
<th>Percentage Increase or (Decrease)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. There are a total of ________ credit hours required in the Criminal Justice Doctoral Program?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I have ________ years to complete the Criminal Justice Doctoral Program?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. To send an e-mail within your Blackboard course you must use which of the following?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Within the Blackboard classroom where can I find the grading scale and assignment due dates?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In order to register for classes each semester I can use which of the following programs?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Where can I find the academic calendar for the Criminal Justice Doctoral Program?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. All official e-mail communications are sent using which of the following systems?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Where can students find the grade appeal process?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>350%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. If a personal or academic issue arises during a course(s) that could negatively affect my academic performance what is the first action I should take?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. To access an online journal article in our Alvin Sherman Library, I can search by name or by subject.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. If I need help using the Alvin Sherman Library to conduct academic research I can call or e-mail the staff at the?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. To find information about developing a dissertation, choosing a dissertation chair/committee, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process I should review which of the following?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. When should my Idea Paper be completed according to the Course of Study Guidelines?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. If I am not ready to defend my dissertation by the end of the last dissertation course (CJI 9003 Dissertation IV) what am I required to do?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. According to the Financial Aid Office, all University students must continually meet the four Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) criteria to remain eligible for financial aid?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Where can students who are U.S. military Veterans connect with other Veteran students’ on-campus?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional paired samples t-tests were conducted to look for potential differences in pre and posttest mean scores by individual item within the socialization and self-efficacy subscales. No significant mean differences were found between the pre and posttest information. The effect size was calculated for the socialization and self-efficacy subscales at $d=0.185$ and $d=-0.219$ respectively. See Table 4.

Table 4. Socialization and Self-Efficacy Subscales: Individual Question Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socialization Subscale Questions</th>
<th>Pretest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-campus social activities</td>
<td>0.15 (0.55)</td>
<td>0.38 (0.77)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online social activities</td>
<td>1.15 (1.21)</td>
<td>0.85 (1.34)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing academic relationships with my fellow doctoral students</td>
<td>2.85 (0.99)</td>
<td>2.77 (1.48)</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing academic relationships with my doctoral professors</td>
<td>3.38 (0.87)</td>
<td>3.23 (0.83)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating on NSU social media forums (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)</td>
<td>1.23 (1.48)</td>
<td>0.85 (1.40)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Efficacy Subscale Questions</th>
<th>Pretest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Posttest Mean (SD)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete an online doctoral course</td>
<td>3.23 (0.83)</td>
<td>3.46 (0.88)</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete and defend my dissertation</td>
<td>3.08 (0.86)</td>
<td>3.15 (1.07)</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abilities to use Blackboard</td>
<td>2.77 (1.30)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep up with the doctoral course schedule (recommended three courses per semester)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.15)</td>
<td>2.62 (1.32)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt my learning style to course/instructor expectations</td>
<td>2.92 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persist in the program despite personal or financial challenges</td>
<td>2.92 (1.04)</td>
<td>2.85 (1.28)</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question Four: What influence was attributed to the orientation in terms of first semester grade point averages GPAs, and rates of retention?
To answer the question, historical data from the 2014 cohort was retrieved as this period was prior to any synchronous orientation. The data gathered included individual student GPA’s, the number of credits taken by each student necessary to calculate a weighted GPA, and the number of students who withdrew from the program at any time within their first semester. The same data was collected from the 2017 cohort for comparison purposes. The following two sections describe the comparisons made between the two cohorts. In addition, the following gender information was extracted from the 2014 and 2017 cohorts for comparison purposes within the groups examined and in relation to the findings in the literature. A total of 11 females (50%) and 11 males (50%) were admitted in the 2014 fall semester and a total of 17 females (63%) and 10 males (37%) were included in the 2017 cohort. Within the 2017 cohort, 20 students participated in the orientation including 13 females (65%) and seven males (35%) and seven student chose not to participate in the orientation, which consisted of four females (57%) and three males (43%).

Cohort Comparison: 2014 cohort without synchronous orientation compared with 2017 cohort who participated in synchronous orientation

The students (n=22) in the 2014 cohort earned an overall weighted GPA of 3.80 (4.00 scale) based on 168 credit hours taken. The students in the 2017 cohort, that participated (n=20) in the orientation earned an overall weighted GPA of 3.54 based on 150 credit hours taken. During 2014, individual GPA scores ranged from a low of 0.00 (one student), 3.33 (one student), 3.66 (one student), 3.93 (one student), and 4.00 (16 students). Two students in the 2014 cohort did not earn a GPA due to withdrawing from the program prior to registration and two others (four total withdrawn) successfully completed the fall semester and then withdrew at the end of the semester. At the end of
the fall 2017 semester, individual GPA scores from the 2017 cohort that participated in
the orientation ranged from a low of 0.00 (one student), 2.66 (one student), 3.50 (one
students), 3.66 (two students), 4.00 (14 students), and one student who dropped at the
beginning of the semester (no GPA). Two students in the 2017 participating cohort
withdrew from the program with one of the students having dropped their courses early in
the semester (no GPA) and the other student having failed their courses resulting in
academic dismissal. Therefore, the overall rate of retention for the 2014 cohort was
calculated at 82% (4/22) and at 90% (2/20) for the 2017 cohort.

Within 2017 Cohort Comparison: 2017 cohort students who participated in the
orientation versus 2017 cohort students who did not participate in the orientation?

Seven students did not participate in the orientation intervention. The weighted
GPA for those students who did not participate was calculated based on a total of 39
credits completed for an overall GPA score of 3.23 (4.00 scale) for the group. One
student within the non-participatory group, dropped out of the program at the beginning
of the semester contributing to a retention rate of 86%. This information compares to
those in the 2017 cohort who did participate (n=20) in the orientation and whose
weighted GPA was 3.54 based on 150 credit hours taken and where two students dropped
out of the program in their first semester for a retention rate of 90%.

Summary

The information needed to answer the five research questions was gathered from
three primary sources and included: (1) in the literature; (2) historical GPA, retention,
and gender information from the 2014 cohort; and (3) GPA, retention, and gender
information from the 2017 cohort. It is important to note that those who chose to
participate in the orientation and those that chose not to participate differentiated the students within the 2017 cohort.

Using a paired samples t-test, the survey information yielded results that showed a significant (p=0.00) mean score increase in the knowledge subscale and no significant differences found between the mean scores of the socialization (p=0.56) and self-efficacy (p=0.30) subscales at the pre and post survey intervals. The individual items in each of the three scales was examined. Because the questions in the knowledge scale were analogous to a test, considering that the answer to each question was either right or wrong, it was necessary to examine the percentage increase or decrease of students’ scores, for comparison purposes, at pre and post intervals. The socialization and self-efficacy subscales were Likert type scales and, therefore, each item within the scales were examined with no significant mean score differences found.

Furthermore, an analysis of the 2014 and 2017 GPA and retention information revealed an increase in the overall rate of retention post orientation and, interestingly, a decrease in overall first semester GPA scores. Included in the GPA and retention information reported, were the number of credits completed to allow for a weighted GPA calculation for comparison purposes and the gender of the students, again, for comparison to the results found in the literature regarding the profile of an online doctoral student. In accordance, with research question five, an analysis of the results is presented in Chapter Five.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, Recommendations, and Summary

The goal was to develop a set of orientation standards for online doctoral students that might enhance retention and student success after the first semester. To meet the goal, recommendations were provided to inform administrators, faculty, orientation designers and facilitators regarding the value of providing a useful and effective orientation that supports students at a crucial point in their doctoral journey when they are being acclimated to their academic environment. Five research questions were developed and critically examined against the research results and addressed in the conclusions section. The implications contain a discussion of the significance of the findings. Recommendations for future research, in light of the limitations of this study and the need for further study, are included in this chapter to further support and empower students at the critical juncture of their doctoral journey, the beginning. A summary of the overall examination ends the final report.

Conclusions

Research Question One: What is the profile of an online doctoral student?

This question was partially answered through the literature review conducted in Chapter Two where it was discovered that a profile shift among doctoral students, during the last fifty years, has been occurring away from the white privileged male toward women and minorities or the group commonly referred to as nontraditional students (Cross, 2014; Deshpande, 2016; Martinez, et al., 2013; Offerman, 2011). Students can be online students or nontraditional students, but not necessarily both. Since no information was found in the literature that specifically profiled an online doctoral student it was
necessary to gather this information for further study and implications for practice when developing an orientation. The demographics gathered via the survey suggests that the literature regarding nontraditional students appears to apply to the DCJ survey participants. This is the case because the survey results showed a higher overall ratio of female (65%) to male students, a higher percentage of white students than other races, and all survey participants indicated being employed, with the largest age range being 40-49.

The age information gathered through the survey showed that a majority of students (39%) reported being in the age ranges of 40-49, with the youngest between 21-29, and the oldest between the ages of 50-59. The literature reviewed supported these findings showing that the median age of the nontraditional doctoral student was between the ages of 40-49 (e.g., Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Deshpande, 2016).

Further, the analysis of the descriptive statistics involving ethnicity showed that 31% of the students reported their races other than white. These findings are further supported in the literature reviewed (e.g., (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Byrd, 2016; Cross, 2014; Deshpande, 2016; Jorissen et al., 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Heuvelman-Hutchinson, & Spaulding, 2014) where it was reported that the highest percentage of those seeking a terminal degree are reportedly Caucasian, with African Americans being the next largest race. Only one respondent (8%) reported they were Hispanic. The literature (e.g., Jorissen et al., 2015) reviewed indicated that the Hispanic race appears to be underrepresented within the nontraditional, doctoral population and that seemed to be the case within the study population. When asked about enrollment history, survey respondents provided mostly unique answers with answers ranging from as recently as
two months prior to matriculation to as long as 16 years since last being in an academic program. Nearly 54% of the students reported not being enrolled in more than two years and the remaining 46% reporting the gap in their enrollment at one year or less. This information supports the notion found in the literature (e.g., Cross, 2014; Gardner, 2008) that nontraditional students often feel unprepared for the rigors of doctoral study given the lengthy gaps in their academic history and thus the need for additional support, especially involving new learning and communication technologies, early in the doctoral journey.

Further, the literature review showed that many nontraditional students worked while enrolled and that their employment was a competing factor that sometimes inhibited their ability to complete a doctoral program. To that end, employment information was gathered to further examine how many students worked and what their careers entailed. When asked about current employment, 100% of the respondents indicated they were working. Survey respondents reported working, primarily, in a criminal justice related job (69%) and with 31% reporting a job outside of the criminal justice field, specifically, in the life, physical, and social science occupations or in the management and education fields.

Given this information, we were able to construct a basic profile of the online doctoral from the sample population studied as follows:

- Gender: evenly split between male and female
- Age: Approximate age range 40-49
- Ethnicity: Predominantly White with African American, and Hispanics the next largest populations
• Online Experience: Usually some online experience (this should continue to increase with time given the proliferation of online course offerings)

• Last Enrolled: Greater than two year enrollment gap

• Work History: Working at the time of matriculation and often not in a field related to the chosen doctoral major

With such a small survey sample size (n=13) it is difficult to offer this profile as a viable reflection of the typical online doctoral student. Nonetheless, the information provides a baseline for comparison in future studies regarding the profile of the non-traditional student that may seek to determine if there are characteristics that are unique to the online group. The demographic information gathered through this investigation, though, showed no discernible difference between the online doctoral and non-traditional student. Given the limiting factor of the small survey sample size further constrains any implications or conclusions drawn regarding the potential of the results found to be representative of the population of online doctoral students (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2006). It would, therefore, be valuable to explore additional and potentially unique demographic variables such as marital status, salary (financial stability), location (rural, suburban, country), length of current employment, possession of a valid driver’s license, and military veteran status as well as studying a larger sample. Further, 31% of students reported never having taken an online course and more than half (54%) of the survey participants reported an enrollment gap of at least two or more years. This information coincides with the literature that indicates doctoral students are assumed to be prepared for the rigors of the doctoral journey and are often just as apprehensive and anxious as the newly admitted undergraduate student (Butterwick et al., 2012; Stoddard et al., 2008).

Research Question Two: Based upon the literature, how may an orientation for entering/beginning online doctoral students be designed and implemented?
Chapter Two provided the impetus and information, from the current literature reviewed, as to the items identified as foundational to newly admitted doctoral students as they enter what Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) call the first stage of the doctoral journey identified as the transition stage when students are adjusting to their new academic environment. It is within this stage that students are oriented to their environment and introduced to the rigors of doctoral level coursework (e.g., Weiner, 2015). Thus, the literature reviewed provided the following items to include in an orientation. See Table 5.

Table 5. Online Orientation Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Information: university student email, library use, financial aid, military veteran students</td>
<td>Hung, 2016; Lightman, 2015; Poock, 2002; Radford et al., 2016; Sutton, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmatic Information: LMS, academic calendar, credit hours, registration, policies/procedures, dissertation, curriculum</td>
<td>Bolliger &amp; Halupa, 2012; Hung, 2016; Wao &amp; Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Poock, 2002;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socialization</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social activities: on-campus and online, peer and professorial academic relationships, social media forums</td>
<td>Benavides &amp; Keyes, 2016; Byrd, 2016; Deshpande, 2016; Lovitts, 2008; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014; Terrell et al., 2009; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993; Wang &amp; Li, 2011;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence to: complete an online course, complete dissertation, use LMS, keep up with schedule of classes, adapt learning style, persist in spite of challenges</td>
<td>Byrd, 2016; Cho, 2012; Cross, 2014; Hung et al., 2010; Jorissen et al., 2015; Lee &amp; Choi, 2011; Shen et al., 2013; Newberry &amp; DeLuca, 2014; Spaulding &amp; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tokuno, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The topics listed in Table 5 were included in the orientation presentation and then assessed using the Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation Survey. Specifically, the knowledge section was designed to assess
the extent to which the orientation presentation provided students with the desired
knowledge factors. This section of survey functioned much like an exam since students
provided answers that were either correct or incorrect. A comparison of their answers at
pre and post orientation intervals provided the information necessary to assess if students’
perceived knowledge increased. This was an important factor to study because the
literature indicated that if students are provided with the requisite foundational
knowledge they are in a better position to be successful in their first semester and
hopefully persist toward degree completion (Cross, 2014; Glazer & Murphy, 2015;
Jorissen et al., 2015).

The socialization and self-efficacy subscales were designed using a Likert type
form of measurement, and unlike the knowledge subscale, facilitated the process of an
assessment of the overall mean scores within each category and, as important, within
each subscale item. This allowed an analysis of the individual subscale items necessary to
examine the mean score changes between pre and post orientation intervals. Interestingly,
neither the socialization nor the self-efficacy scales provided significant variations among
the sample population in regard to the differences between students’ responses at the pre
and post intervals. It is possible that it was simply too early in the doctoral journey to
fully assess the factors of socialization and self-efficacy. The analysis of the survey
results indicated that student’s perceptions of socialization were that it was not important
and that they entered the program with strong levels of self-efficacy. Again, this could be
true because they had not yet experienced any of the negative setbacks, often reported
with nontraditional students concerning their academic, financial, or personal status. This
probability was offered because the literature indicates that socialization is a process that
is unique to each student and that may change over time (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tokuno, 2008). Similarly, students’ confidence in their abilities to be successful and persist may again change over time and be impacted by personal or familial barriers that they may encounter over the course of their studies (Maddux & Johnson, 2014). Each of these subscales is more fully analyzed in research question 3.

**Research Question Three:** What observable impact did the orientation have on students' intrinsic qualities of socialization and self-efficacy and their extrinsic programmatic/institutional knowledge?

This question was answered using the information provided through the three subscales assessed through the survey. The first scale, the knowledge subscale, incorporated the individual knowledge items found in the literature and determined to be critical to students’ foundational knowledge as they acclimated to their environment as a newly admitted student. The overall scale score from the t-test showed a significant change in the mean scale scores between pre and post intervals and therefore warranted a closer inspection of the individual subscale items. Students’ scores improved, at the post orientation interval, at a rate of 100% or better in three knowledge areas including: 1) how to communicate within the Blackboard LMS; 2) where to locate the grade appeal process; and 3) the financial aid satisfactory academic progress requirements. These findings are not surprising considering the literature indicates that timely communication between professor and student, and students and their program/institutions are often troublesome for students learning at a distance. Associated with timely communication is grading feedback and the need for students to know the policies regarding the grade appeal process. Further, Hung (2016) purported that providing students with the knowledge necessary to navigate the LMS is yet another factor that supports their ability
to be successful as an online student. Another critical issue culled from the literature pertained to students’ abilities to fund their education throughout the duration of their enrollment. According to Ampaw and Jaeger (2011), financial aid is often used in cross-sectional studies as a variable in predicting degree completion.

Additionally, four other items on the knowledge subscale showed an increase in the number of correct answers equal to or greater than a 50% improvement at the post interval and included the location of the grading scale and assignment due dates, the academic calendar, the due date for the idea paper, and the location of the on-campus military veteran’s center. Again, the demonstrated increase in perceived student knowledge involving items that pertain to due dates or locating the academic calendar is not surprising in that once shown how to locate this information students were then able to demonstrate their perceived knowledge (or memory) through the post survey. Nonetheless, each of these items were identified in the literature as important for students to understand and when armed with this type of basic procedural knowledge are more fully oriented academically to their program during the crucial transitional phase (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012) toward becoming a researcher. A decrease of 8% (one student) in the number of correct answers was identified in only one of the items regarding the location and information found within the dissertation guidelines. This result could indicate a loss of perceived knowledge or simply that the student forgot the information provided or that the orientation presentation was poorly designed and/or this topic poorly communicated.

The paired samples t-tests run on the socialization and self-efficacy subscales provided results that were, overall, not significant. The overall socialization mean score
at the pre orientation interval was 1.75 and at post interval was slightly lower at 1.62. Since a score of two is neutral, these scores fell between neutral and not important. Students ranked the importance of on-campus social activities as the least important to them as a group with a pre mean score of .15 and a post score of .38 which on the Likert scale translate to only slightly higher than not important. Interestingly, respondents scored two factors on the socialization subscale much higher (more than 1 point) than the other factors. When asked about the importance of developing academic relationships with fellow doctoral students, respondents’ pre and post scores, 2.85 and 2.77 respectively, and nearly equal to 3.00 (important). In addition, when asked about the importance in developing academic relationships with the doctoral professors, respondents scored this factor even higher (very important) with a pre score of 3.38 and a post score of 3.23. This suggests that most respondents in this group felt it was most important to develop an academic relationship with their professors. These findings could suggest that socialization is not very important, overall, to this group of students or at this point in time. It is possible, again, that it was simply too early in students’ journey to fully assess their need for socialization. Therefore, it would be beneficial to assess their perceptions of the importance a later point, at, or near the end of their studies to allow time for reflection on the people, processes, and factors that helped them reach their academic goals. This could be what Portnoi, et al., (2015) meant when they indicated that it is unclear how doctoral students develop socialization skills on their own, but that it appears to develop over time as students interact with each other, their professors, and the program staff and administrators. It is possible the socialization intervention was flawed in design or lacking in the process of communicating the concept of socialization and its
significance for doctoral students. In addition, the small sample size may not have captured enough individual students’ experiences, which Weiner (2015) espoused as being unique, in the process of socialization. Nevertheless, at this early stage the analyses of the results showed that this group of online students were not interested in on-campus socialization efforts, but did apparently look forward to the academic relationships they would develop with their professors. Students’ views on the importance of relating to their professors appears congruent with the findings of Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) who contended that developing relationships and open lines of communication with faculty early in the matriculation phase was important. Further, the fact that students ranked on-campus socialization activities as relatively unimportant support the assertions made by Terrell et al., (2009) and Weiner (2015) that although students could significantly benefit from face-to-face interactions, that attending a live, on-campus orientation may not be feasible for fully online students.

Similarly, the outcomes of the self-efficacy subscale showed results deemed not significant. However, looking closer at the individual items within the scale revealed that, overall, students reported having have a strong sense of self-efficacy at the onset as evidence by scores that were largely better than neutral. Respondents were least confident in their abilities to keep up with the doctoral schedule of classes and most confident in their abilities to complete an online course. Students’ confidence in completing an online course was between confident and very confident at pre and post intervals and could be attributable to either prior online course experience and/or the orientation presentation may have provided the students, with and without prior online experience, the requisite knowledge needed. This is important as Hung (2016) discussed designing an orientation
that initiated students on the procedures and skills needed to navigate the online learning management system (LMS).

Interestingly, students’ scores were neutral to low regarding levels of confidence in completing the established schedule of courses. This could mean that program designers and administrators should evaluate the feasibility of students completing the prescribed number of courses/credits per semester and within the specified period of two and a half years. Administrators should compare the median time to complete indicated in the literature (6 years) with the current schedule of classes to determine its relevance and achievability (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

Research Question Four: What influence was attributed to the orientation in terms of first semester grade point averages (GPA) and rates of retention?

The GPA score for the members of the 2017 cohort (n=20), who participated in the orientation, earned a lower overall GPA score (3.54) than the 2014 cohort (3.80). Further, the retention information obtained revealed that the retention rate for the 2014 cohort, who did not have the benefit of a synchronous orientation, was at 82% compared with the 2017 cohort who did participate in the orientation at 90%. It is important to note that the sample sizes are nearly equivalent (9% difference) at 22 students in the 2014 cohort and 20 students for the 2017 cohort that participated in the orientation which helped facilitate a meaningful comparison.

In addition, comparing those within the 2017 cohort who did not participate with those who did participate revealed an approximate 10% increase in GPA scores for those who did participate. Rates of retention among the 2017 cohort that did not participate in the orientation were slightly lower at 86% when compared to 90% for those within the cohort that did participate. Although it could be expected that an effective orientation
would support and encourage student success in some form such as in the decision to persist (e.g., Cross, 2014), the results of this investigation suggest that a synchronous orientation may not significantly impact certain intrinsic qualities, that is, the qualities students bring with them that help them succeed academically. This possibility warrants two recommendations the first being that perhaps an orientation should contain more factors related to helping or supporting doctoral students academically by including, for example, a greater focus on writing and the research process (e.g., research methodologies). The difficulty with this premise is the, often reported, limited time generally allocated for orientation, and as important, is the question as to whether or not students would be willing to fully participate in a lengthy orientation? A second possibility is to make orientation mandatory given that the seven of the 2017 cohort students that did not participate in the orientation had a lower overall GPA score (3.23) than their participating counterparts (3.54).

Another factor to consider regarding the influence of the orientation on students’ GPA and retention is gender. Specifically, there was a higher ratio of females (65%) in the 2017 cohort group, that participated in the orientation, than in the 2014 cohort (50%) that were not provided with the opportunity to participate. Cross (2014) reported a positive correlation, among female students, between grit (e.g., persistence, motivation) and higher GPAs. Requesting additional demographic data such as age, admit status (e.g., new student, readmit) would have aided in the analysis of the two populations and aid in assessing any possible positive or negative impact of gender or some other demographic variable of the orientation presentation on GPA scores and rates of retention. If a correlation could be found between success and gender this information could aid
orientation designers and facilitators in designing an orientation that is better suited to the actual attendees and perhaps with a focus on engaging males to participate more fully and/or better assess their level of understanding during the orientation process. To that end, it could have been beneficial to know the gender of those that dropped out of the program to help gain a better sense of who is dropping out to understand why. This knowledge could further aid in the design and deployment of an orientation presentation by, again, better addressing the needs of the students.

While it is difficult to directly attribute the improved rate of retention for the 2017 cohort to the orientation presentation it is possible that the students who participated in the orientation, were better equipped academically and socially lending to their first semester success, and subsequently influencing their decision to remain in the program. (Stoddard et al., 2008; Weiner, 2015). Likewise, it would not be unreasonable to conceive that the orientation presentation positively influenced students’ GPA scores by providing them with the necessary programmatic and institutional knowledge to, for example, know where to reach out for support if they were struggling academically or how to navigate the online environment. This was not the case, however, given that the 2017 group experienced an overall lower GPA than the 2014 cohort at the end their first semester. Considering that students entered the program with relatively high levels of self-efficacy, the lower overall GPA might suggest that the orientation presentation does not improve the academic skills, abilities, and study habits that students brought with them into the program.

*Research Question Five: What were the recommendations after all the data were analyzed and synthesized?*
The recommendations from the information gathered and analysis that followed are provided in detail in the following section.

**Implications**

The outcomes add to the existing literature as to the uniqueness of the profile of an online doctoral student. The findings suggest that the current non-traditional classification found in literature is appropriate in that increasing numbers of online graduate students are minority students, female, employed, and often fall within the 40-49 age range, and while many indicated prior online course experience and significant number (31%) of others entered the DCJ program without the benefit of such experience. Further, the results indicated that many students revealed large gaps in their enrollment history. Future research is needed that assesses a larger sample of the online doctoral student population, specifically in varied academic disciplines that gather additional demographic information to more accurately determine if online doctoral students, in general, are uniquely set apart from the non-traditional classification currently found in the literature. This knowledge could provide important implications for institutions and programs regarding the design of a more inclusive orientation that targets the intended group of students, and, perhaps more importantly, positively influences rates of student success and retention. In addition, the outcomes showed that 31% of the survey respondents had never taken an online course. This number is predicted to decrease as according to Allen et al., (2016) online enrollment in graduate programs continues to increase in conjunction with the expansion of online program offerings. Nevertheless, many entering online doctoral students remain without any online course experience and many more have significant gaps in their enrollment history. These factors will continue
to contribute to significant levels of stress and anxiety reported in the literature, on the part of many students, at the thought of entering a doctoral program. Therefore, it is imperative to continue studying the state of students upon admission in order to continue to develop the most effective orientations possible to meet the needs of increasing numbers who are minorities, females, and somewhat older than might be expected.

Additionally, the results indicated that doctoral students’ perceived knowledge increased because of participating in the orientation in regard to the basic programmatic and institutional policies, procedures, and minimum skills needed to navigate and communicate within the online learning environment. Future studies should include qualitative data to more fully extract any additional topics that were not addressed at the time of orientation and allow students to verbalize concerns that simply cannot be identified through a quantitative approach.

Furthermore, the results showed that students did not consider on-campus or online social activities, such as participating in social media forums, and ranked those factors between not important to only somewhat important. A possible explanation for these results is that the students chose a fully online program for the anytime anywhere convenience (Maddux & Johnson, 2014) of online learning and may not be able to travel to the campus because of physical, financial, or familial issues. Another consideration is that the majority (62%) of the students were mature adults in age range of 40-59 and their perceptions or prior use of the social media forums used by NSU such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram may differ from early adopters of said technologies as go-to mechanisms to connect with other students and faculty (e.g., Sutton, 2014; Tokuno, 2008; Wang & Li, 2011).
In contrast, students ranked developing academic relationships with their fellow doctoral students as mostly important and developing academic relationships with their professors between important and very important. This result supports the information found in the literature regarding the need for students to develop a sense of community (e.g., Terrell et al., 2009) and the need to utilize faculty as advisors and student mentors (Sutton, 2014) to help foster student success and satisfaction. Academic relationships were reportedly important to students, but students did not ascribe any significant value to the social media forums in use at NSU. Thus, it will be important to support connectedness in other avenues such as using the LMS communication technologies and by encouraging faculty to offer regular online office hours. The literature suggests that socialization is a process that occurs over time as students are socialized to their new academic environment. Therefore, future studies should assess the importance of socialization at different junctures of the doctoral journey such as at the halfway point and at the end of the program to examine the need for socialization espoused in the literature as critical to success and persistence.

The study results revealed that students entered the program with a strong sense of self-efficacy, in general, but that they were most concerned about keeping up with the prescribed schedule of classes. This finding is not surprising given that more than half of the survey participants were female which were identified in the literature as generally possessing higher levels of self-efficacy. Further, self-efficacy was shown to improve students’ chances of first semester success. An important consideration then is to focus on engaging male students by encouraging them to participate in the orientation, providing them with greater levels of support, and including them in the social
engagement process during the synchronous orientation presentation (Newberry & DeLuca, 2014; Shen et al., 2013).

These results were somewhat expected from the literature considering all of the students within the sample tested indicated they were working which was likely a significant factor that competed for students’ time – time that otherwise could be dedicated to coursework. Future studies are suggested to more fully examine the number of credits students can reasonably complete within the maximum time to degree completion and provide avenues for students to complete the program at their pace, but within the maximum allowed timeframe. For example, developing a “fast track” schedule should be considered for students with more time to study and who wish to complete their degree as quickly as possible.

Finally, the results from the comparison of the 2014 cohort and those in the 2017 cohort that participated in the orientation, showed that the GPA of the 2014 cohort was about 7% higher than in the 2017 cohort. Interestingly, the opposite was true regarding the end of the first semester rate of retention where the 2017 cohort members showed an approximate 8% increase over the 2014 cohort in regard to the numbers of students who persisted to their second semester. In addition, the comparison of the 2017 cohort members (26%) that did not participate in the orientation earned an approximately 8% lower overall GPA at the end of their first semester than did those who did participate in the orientation.

**Recommendations**

The findings contribute to the knowledge base concerning the process of orienting online doctoral students. Recommendations were formulated from the current literature
reviewed, from an analysis of the survey findings, and from the comparative information collected from the 2014 and 2017 cohorts.

*Profile of an Online Doctoral Student*

Examining the demographic information provided through the analysis of the survey findings and from the 2014 and 2017 cohort indicated that the current literature regarding the profile of a nontraditional student applied equally to the matched sample used in this investigation. These findings suggest that since females and minorities are being admitted to doctoral programs in increasing numbers and considering that females are said to perform better academically as a group and often possess greater levels of persistence then orientation presentations should seek to better engage male students (Cross, 2014; Deshpande, 2016; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Martinez, et al., 2013; Offerman, 2011). For example, it was recommended to include engagement pedagogies such as encouraging males to participate by having all of the students introduce themselves. Encouraging males to participate in group discussions and providing information on the importance of socialization, that is, the importance of connecting with professors, students, and administrators (Shen et al., 2013) could prove beneficial toward meeting program outcomes. Therefore, it is important to begin the socialization process at the time of orientation, so that students will begin to develop the academic relationships with other students and faculty how can provide the necessary support, encouragement, and motivation when needed. Additional research is recommended to investigate how the process of socialization changes as students’ advance in their journey and especially at times when they encounter personal, familial, or financial challenges.
The literature indicated that competing interests such as work, family, and health issues are driving many students to complete their studies online (Gardner, 2009; Kumar & Heathcock, 2014; Tokuno, 2008). Current technologies such as the GoToTraining platform and the communication technologies available within the LMS used in this investigation are allowing students, faculty, and administrators to collaborate synchronously and more effectively in spite of the distance barrier, thus their routine use should be encouraged by faculty.

The information gathered also revealed that the 2017 cohort members entered the program with relative high levels of self-efficacy. Again, this could be due to the nearly equal number of females as males in the program and who, according to the literature (e.g., Shen et al., 2013), possessed higher levels of self-efficacy in academic settings. Therefore, added support and encouragement is recommended to support or seek to increase levels of self-efficacy, especially within male students, by including pedagogical practices designed to enhance students’ confidence in themselves by providing them with the basic skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to be successful. This process should start, according to Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) at the orientation phase where it is critical to provide students with the necessary and foundational skills such as navigating the LMS, using communication and research technologies, introducing the most critical academic policies/procedures, providing financial aid information, and identifying available university resources. Students armed with the foundational knowledge and appropriate points of contact are more likely to have the confidence necessary to continue in the program beyond the first semester. In addition, providing online students with the contact information to advisors and faculty mentors who are accessible and student-
focused is strongly recommended to help mitigate the reported feelings of isolation (e.g., Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tokuno, 2008) often associated with students learning at distance. Future studies are recommended that assess students’ perceived self-efficacy changes beginning at the time of orientation and as they progress into their second semester. This knowledge could be used to implement prevention programs to meet nontraditional student needs, especially in cases where the student has no prior online course experience or has a significant gap in time since they were last registered in a degree program. Recommended programs include online writing and research workshops, techniques to more effectively use the electronic library, and an introduction to the available communication technologies.

**Recommended Orientation Standards**

The results from the survey analysis indicated that students’ perceived knowledge increased significantly post orientation. A closer inspection of the individual items showed that students provided more correct answers at the post orientation interval on all of the knowledge scale items except on the following two items: 1) the requirement for students to use the university email system for all official university related communications; and 2) finding information about the dissertation process. All of the survey participants answered the question regarding the use of the university email system correctly at pre and post intervals, which indicated that students were effectively educated about the necessity to check their university email regularly. A slight (one student) decrease in the number of correct answers regarding the content found in the dissertation guidelines could simply indicate that the student forgot the information provided during the orientation. Additional visual cues are recommended to be included
in the orientation presentation to further aid in the knowledge transfer process in conjunction with stopping at the end of each slide to solicit student questions and feedback to ensure, as best as possible, that participants understand the content provided.

The increase in the number of correct answers at post orientation levels suggests that overall the orientation delivered the desired institutional and programmatic knowledge content to students. This increase in perceived knowledge may have contributed to the improved retention rates of the 2017 cohort post orientation. Additionally, the survey results showed that students placed little importance on participating in social media forums, in online social activities, or in on-campus social activities. They did however place greater value on student-to-student academic relationships by indicating these relationships were somewhat important and ranked student-to-faculty academic relationships between important and very important. These findings are consistent with the literature regarding the importance of community and collaboration among [successful] students (e.g., Butterwick et al., 2012; Tinto, 1975). Therefore, including information about the importance of socialization and providing online avenues for students to connect with each other and with their professors is an important factor to be included as a standard component of an orientation. It is not completely surprising that fully online students may not be able or wish to attend an on-campus social event; nevertheless further assessment regarding the current online social presence warrants a deeper inspection to determine ways to increase online student traffic to the social media platforms in use by the university.

Self-efficacy was the second psychosocial factor assessed through the survey and the results gathered revealed that students entered the program with mostly high levels of
self-efficacy. Their responses indicated they felt confident to very confident in their ability to complete an online course, complete and defend their dissertation, use the LMS, adapt their learning style to meet instructor expectations, and persist in spite of personal or financial challenges. Concerning the confidence to keep up with the recommended doctoral schedule of classes each semester students responded they were neutral in their confidence to meet schedule requirements prior to the orientation and between neutral and confident after the orientation. This information suggests that students could benefit from increased flexibility in the schedule of course offerings to allow them to take fewer courses when personal or financial barriers are encountered. Adding flexibility to the prescribed course schedule should help students feel more confident to progress through the program should future issues arise.

Integrating institutional and programmatic factors into an orientation presentation will provide online doctoral students with the requisite knowledge to navigate and thrive in their new academic environment. The literature reviewed indicated that students could experience increased levels of satisfaction, persistence, and academic success when the psychological factors of socialization and self-efficacy are supported. The benefits associated with students’ who are effectively socialized (e.g., Thrasher, et al., 2015) to their environment and where high preexisting levels self-efficacy (e.g., Cho, 2012; Shen, et al., 2013) are supported or when lower levels of self-efficacy are identified can be enhanced through appropriate pedagogies. Therefore, it was recommended to provide newly admitted online doctoral students, regardless of discipline, with the following standard orientation items:

Institutional/programmatic factors
- Basic curriculum information to include required courses, credits hours, and degree deadline

- An introduction to the Learning Management System including communication technologies

- Registration information and academic advisor contact information

- Location of important documents such as the academic calendar, student handbook/catalog (policies/procedures), dissertation guidelines

- How to use the library to effectively conduct doctoral level research

- Financial aid information and points of contact and explanation of satisfactory academic progress

- Military [student] veteran specific information

Socialization factors
- Include Mechanisms/Initiatives which foster and support student-student and student-faculty academic relationships and educate students on their use and availability

Self-efficacy factors
- Integrate flexibility in curriculum requirements and advisement to allow students who experience barriers in a given semester the option of reducing their course load

**Summary**

The attrition rate for doctoral students has remained at reportedly high levels for the last several decades and continues to be a problem for students, faculty, staff, and higher education institutions. The repercussions of doctoral student attrition include a reduction in the numbers of researchers available to contribute to the body of knowledge and a subsequent decline in the available pool of faculty needed to teach succeeding generations. In addition, high attrition rates can sully the academic reputations of institutions and cause them to suffer financial repercussions due to a reduction in enrollment.
Even higher rates of attrition are reported among doctoral students enrolled in online degree programs (Lee & Choi, 2011). According to Allen et al., (2016) the numbers of graduate students seeking the convenience found in online degree programs will continue to increase and colleges and universities are expanding their online program offerings to meet the demand. Institutions are seeing increasing enrollments of nontraditional students who readily benefit from the accessibility and convenience associated with online learning and who otherwise would be unable to pursue their academic goals. Nontraditional students are identified, generally, as older, employed, increasingly female, minority, and with many personal, financial, familial, and work obligations competing for their time.

Higher education institutions are aware of this trend and many have developed prevention strategies and practices in an attempt to mitigate the problem. One such early prevention strategy indicated in the literature (e.g., Butterwick et al., 2012; Terrell et al., 2009) is the process of orienting newly admitted cohorts. The time of orientation is typically students’ first introduction to the institution and its faculty, staff, and students and is a critical time when students are socialized to their new academic environment. The process of orienting students, though, varies from institution to institution (Jorissen et al., 2015). An examination of the current literature in Chapter Two revealed that a set of orientation standards for online doctoral students did not exist and thus provided the impetus for this research.

The goal was to develop a set of orientation standards to support online doctoral students at the earliest stage of matriculation as evidenced by improved grade point averages and rates of retention. Five research questions were developed to guide the
research process and aid in achieving the stated goal. The first question required the
development of a profile of an online doctoral student. To answer research questions two
through five a developmental study approach was utilized and consisted of three primary
phases: 1) development of a literature-based orientation; 2) implementation of a
synchronous online orientation; and 3) evaluation of the impact of the orientation on
students’ programmatic knowledge and their perceptions of the factors of self-efficacy
and socialization.

These three phases were accomplished by developing the online orientation
presentation whose contents were informed, again, through the current literature and
deployed using the GoToTraining communication platform. The orientation presentation
was then offered synchronously at Nova Southeastern University in the fully online
doctoral criminal justice (DCJ) program and offered to all newly admitted students in the
2017 student cohort.

To collect the necessary data associated with the orientation presentation, the
Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student
Orientation Survey was created by adapting questions from two established surveys,
namely, the GOAQ: Graduate Orientation Assessment Questionnaire (Poock, 2002) and
the OLRS: Online Learning Readiness Scale (Hung, Chou, Chen, & Own, 2010). The
survey consisted of 24 questions designed to collect demographic data and to assess three
primary areas associated with the topics presented in the orientation, including students’
programmatic and institutional perceived knowledge, their perception of the importance
of socialization, and their perceptions of their own levels of self-efficacy as students in
the DCJ program. The knowledge subscale functioned much like a quiz where answers
provided were either correct or incorrect. The socialization and self-efficacy scales were Likert-type scales ranging from not important/not confident (0) to very important/very confident (4). Prior to conducting research with human subjects, the research protocol was submitted to and approved by letter from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the ethical treatment of human subjects was ensured throughout the research process. In addition, approval to conduct the research within the DCJ program was provided by the Department Chair where the DCJ program resides.

The survey was provided to the 2017 cohort at pre and post-orientation intervals and the resultant data was gathered using the Survey Monkey software system and then analyzed and stored per the IRB approved protocol. The survey was deployed to the 2017 DCJ cohort one week prior to the orientation presentation that took place on August 15, 2017 and again less than two weeks after the presentation. A total of 22 (81%) pre-orientation surveys were returned and a total of 15 (56%) post-orientation surveys were returned. After matching the pre and post survey responses, a final total of (n=13) valid samples emerged for analyses.

Data analyses consisted of paired samples t-tests used to determine if there was a significant change in the mean pre and posttest scores of the survey information. All statistical tests used an alpha level of significance of 0.05. Included in the comparison data was the number of credits taken (to calculate a weighted GPA) and gender for additional data used to support the creation of an online doctoral student profile.

The data extracted from the survey and 2014 and 2017 cohort comparison were analyzed and provided the information needed to create recommendations for the development of a set of orientation standards. Significant results were found in the
knowledge subscale, but not in the socialization and self-efficacy subscales. The differences in the pre and post orientation perceived knowledge scale means revealed that students scored significantly higher post orientation regarding their levels of perceived knowledge. Closer inspection of the individual items within the knowledge scale revealed that students’ scores improved some dramatically, ranging from 8% to 350% in 14 of the 16 questions asked.

Much of the literature reviewed discussed the importance of connectivity, collaboration, and community among online students. This notion was supported through the findings in this study where students indicated they valued student-to-student and student-to-faculty academic relationships. Interestingly, students indicated they did not particularly value on-campus social activities, online social activities, or participating in NSU social media forums such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. These findings undergird the need for timely communications from instructors within the online classroom where students will spend a significant portion of their time in the program. Further, increased use of synchronous communication technologies such as those found in the GoToTraining platform that offer video and voice communications will further support the process of building a sense of community.

Additionally, the results revealed that students entered the doctoral program with a relative high degree of self-efficacy with post-survey mean scores showing only a slight increase in self-efficacy levels post-orientation. This notion was supported in the literature (e.g., Shen et al., 2013) which indicated that online students generally require a higher sense of self-efficacy to function in an online learning environment because they, typically, will not interact to the same degree as students in traditional classroom settings.
Only one item on the self-efficacy showed a slight decrease in perceived confidence and this involved students’ perceptions of their ability to persist despite personal or financial challenges. Knowing that nontraditional students often pursue online degrees because of personal or financial challenges and that socialization and self-efficacy are often linked it is crucial to support and encourage the interactions between students and their instructors.

In addition, a comparison of the end of first semester GPA and retention information was conducted, using the 2014 DCJ cohort, because this group did not have the opportunity of participating in a synchronous orientation. The historical 2014 information could then be compared to the same information from the 2017 cohort students that chose to participate in the orientation presentation. Further, within the 2017 cohort a comparison was made between those that did participate and those that did not. Interestingly, it was discovered that the overall GPA of the participating 2017 cohort was actually lower by about 7% than the overall GPA of the 2014 cohort who did not have the benefit of a synchronous orientation presentation, but that the rate of retention increased for the 2017 cohort by about 82% to 90%.

The profile developed from the demographic information gathered provided a profile that mirrored that of the nontraditional profile found in the literature. Future studies that gather additional types of demographic data, are recommended, to more concretely determine if online doctoral students are uniquely profiled versus that of the more encompassing nontraditional category of students. This information would be of great value to orientation designers and purveyors to effectively meet the orientation needs of the typical online doctoral student.
The investigation provided a baseline of the list of knowledge attributes that should be included, at a minimum, in an orientation presentation regardless of discipline. Future studies are needed which investigate additional knowledge items such as writing and research support services and scholarship opportunities that should be included as standard in an orientation. Further, more study is needed to determine if there are additional psychological factors/behaviors that are crucial to student success. Armed with this knowledge designers and facilitators can incorporate this information into an orientation presentation in order to support and encourage these factors/behaviors at the onset of the doctoral journey. Providing online doctoral students, who may not have the opportunity to set foot on-campus, with the requisite knowledge needed and/or to educate them on how to find the support needed to persist through their first semester should positively influence first-semester GPAs and attrition rates for this at-risk population.
Appendix A: Instrument Development Permission E-mails

From: Moon-Heum Cho [mailto:mhcho@kent.edu]
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2016 1:46 AM
To: Russell Garner <rgarner@nova.edu>
Subject: Re: Self-Efficacy Survey
Sure not a problem. Thank you for asking.
For further communication, please use my gmail account at moonheum.cho@gmail.com
On Thu, Nov 17, 2016 at 5:15 AM, Russell Garner <rgarner@nova.edu> wrote:
From: Tricia Fechter Gates [mailto:pfechter@acpa.nche.edu]
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2016 7:49 AM
To: Russell Garner <rgarner@nova.edu>
Subject: Re: [Research Inquiry] Survey Instrument Permission
Hi Russell -
Permission granted! Please cite appropriately.
Let me know if you need anything else, and good luck with your research!
Sincerely,
Tricia

Tricia Fechter Gates, Ph.D., CAE
she, her, hers
Deputy Executive Director

ACPA—College Student Educators International
One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC, 20036, USA
tel 1-202-759-4825 | fax 1-202-827-0601

JOIN ACPA  REGISTER FOR #ACPA17
Appendix B: Biographies of Three Contributing Experts

(Excerpts copied from the NSU online faculty page: http://cahss.nova.edu/faculty/index.html)

Marcelo Castro, Ph.D.
Marcelo Castro, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Justice and Human Services and also oversees day-to-day operations of the Ph.D. in Criminal Justice. Until 2014, Dr. Castro was a Director of Academic and Faculty Support overseeing the Applied Research Center research curriculum, among other responsibilities. He is also a licensed School Psychologist with expertise in assessment of emotional and behavioral disorders in children. He holds dual Master’s in Clinical Psychology and Mental Health Counseling along with a Ph.D. in Special Education. In addition to his responsibilities as a Director, Dr. Castro has been a program professor at the Nova Southeastern University—Abraham S. Fischler College of Education for the past 11 years. Prior to this, he was a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Miami for a period of 5 years. He has taught assessment and measurement, research design and methods, statistics and program evaluation throughout his work as a professor over the past 14 years. In addition, he has been Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) in several program evaluation and evaluation research projects.

Tammy Kushner, Psy.D.
Tammy Kushner, Psy.D., graduated from Nova Southeastern University with her Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology and completed her doctoral residency at Wilford Hall Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, TX. She later went on to complete the Management Development Program at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Dr. Kushner is the Executive Associate Dean for Department of Justice and Human Services within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at NSU and oversees the daily operations associated with each of the nine degree programs offered through the Department. She is also employed by the Broward County Sheriff’s Office where she serves as an Employee Assistance Program psychologist as well as a mental health consultant on the SWAT/HBT.
In addition to her role at NSU Dr. Kushner is in private practice, which consists of treatment for adults. She treats individuals as well as couples and her special interests are in the clinical areas depression, anxiety and marital therapy. Dr. Kushner is a former Major in the United States Air Force, where she served as the Commander of the Mental Health Flight as well as the chief mental health consultant of Hostage Negotiations.

Angela Yehl, Psy.D.
Angela Yehl, Psy.D., is an Assistant Professor for the Department of Justice and Human Services, within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at NSU. She is also a licensed psychologist. Dr. Yehl currently oversees the Bachelor of Science in Human Services Administration and teaches across programs within the Department of Justice and Human Services. Her research interests include qualitative research and program evaluation, and she has received grants and presented both locally and nationally on topics related to the evaluation of human services programs, and research in the areas of
developmental disabilities, child protection, and community-based systems of care for returning military veterans and their family members.
Appendix C: DCJ Department Chair Approval E-mail

From: Kimberly Durham
Sent: Tuesday, December 06, 2016 12:49 PM
To: Russell Garner <rgarner@nova.edu>
Subject: RE: New Doctoral Student Orientation 2017

Russell,
I think that is a wonderful idea. The information you receive will help us in the evaluation process of our newly launched online orientation. In addition, I can share your findings with the law school, who are also going through the beginning design of their online orientation program. We have been comparing notes over the last year.
Thanks,
Dr. Durham
Kimberly Durham, PSY.D.
Chair
Department of Justice and Human Services
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Nova Southeastern University
MEMORANDUM

To: Russell Garner
From: Ling Wang, Ph.D.,
    Center Representative, Institutional Review Board
Date: July 26, 2017
Re: IRB #: 2017-468; Title, “Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation”

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under 45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt Category 1). You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

1) CONSENT: If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.

2) ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS: The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and Ling Wang, Ph.D., respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.

3) AMENDMENTS: Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.


Cc: Gertrude Abramson, Ed.D.
    Ling Wang, Ph.D.
Appendix E: Participation Letter

Title of Study: Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation

Principal investigator/Degree Program: c/o Dr. Trudy Abramson (Dissertation Chair)
Russell Garner/Computing Tech in Ed. College of Engineering and Computing
Complete mailing address:
1600 SE 15th St.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
954-262-2070

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
Office of Grants and Contracts
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Description of Study: Russell Garner is a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University engaged in research for the purpose of satisfying a requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of this study is to establish a set of orientation standards for online doctoral students by investigating the value and effectiveness of an online orientation presentation for the newly admitted 2017 cohort of students entering the online PhD in Criminal Justice program. The intent of this study to provide a set of orientation standards which, at a minimum, support first term success in the form of increased GPA and rates of retention.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an electronic survey by clicking on the link below. This questionnaire will help the student researcher identify those factors that, at minimum, should be included in a set of orientation standards. The survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete.

Risks/Benefits to the Participant: There may be minimal risk involved in participating in this study. There are no direct benefits for agreeing to be in this study. Please understand that although you may not benefit directly from participation in this study, you have the opportunity to enhance the knowledge, preparation, and success of future newly admitted online doctoral students. If you have any concerns about the risks/benefits of participating in this study, you can contact the investigators and/or the university’s human research oversight board (the Institutional Review Board or IRB) at the numbers listed above.

Cost and Payments to the Participant: There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and no payment will be provided.
Confidentiality: Information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All data will be secured in a password and firewall protected computer used by the student researcher. Your name will not be used in the reporting of information in publications or conference presentations.
Participant’s Right to Withdraw from the Study: You have the right to refuse to participate in this study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
I have read this letter and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily consent to participate. All of my questions concerning this research have been answered. If I have any questions in the future about this study they will be answered by the investigator listed above or his/her staff.
I understand that the completion of this questionnaire implies my consent to participate in this study.

To access the online survey please click on the following link: XXXX
Appendix F: Survey Instrument/Informed Consent – Final Version

Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation
SURVEY

Informed Consent

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation

Funding Source: None.
IRB protocol #: 
Principal investigator(s): Russell Garner, Computing Technology in Education
Complete mailing address:
Russell Garner
1600 SE 15th St.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316
954-262-7022

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790 IRB@nsu.nova.edu

What is the study about?
This study involves research into developing a set of orientation standards for fully online doctoral students. The purpose of the study is to identify the factors that should be included in an online orientation that help support first semester student success.

Why are you asking me?
Your voluntary participation in this study is needed because you were just admitted to a fully online doctoral program which will begin offering a synchronous online orientation. Approximately 22 students will be invited to participate in this study.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?
You will be asked to complete an online survey, via email, prior to and after participating in the online orientation presentation that takes place on August 15, 2017. Participating students are asked not to lookup the answers to the survey questions in order to provide the most accurate data possible. Participants can expect to spend 10-15 minutes completing the survey.

What are the dangers to me?
The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. The foreseeable risk or discomfort to participants includes the time involved in completing the survey.
If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:
Dr. Trudy Abramson
Nova Southeastern University
College of Engineering and Computing
3301 College Ave
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.
Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?
There are no direct benefits.

Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation SURVEY

Informed Consent (continued)

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will I keep my information private?**
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Only the IRB, the Primary Investigator: Russell Garner, and/or his dissertation chair, Dr. Trudy Abramson may review research records. Research records will be kept on the computer of the Primary Investigator. The computer is protected by login/password and utilizes a firewall security protocol.

**Use of Student/Academic Information:**
GPA and rates of retention data for the fall 2017 class will be collected from education records. This information will not include any identifiable student information. In other words, I will simply be receiving a list of all the grades for everyone in the fall 2017 class at the end of the first semester (fall 2017 grades). I will also be receiving the total number of students admitted and the total numbers who dropped out of the program. There will be no way to connect you with the grades I receive or your enrollment status.

**What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?**
You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

**Other Considerations:**
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

**IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY PLEASE CLICK ON THE “NEXT” BUTTON BELOW TO BEGIN:**

Development, Implementation, and Assessment of an Online Doctoral Student Orientation SURVEY

Are you male or female?
Male
Female
I prefer not to answer.
What is your age?
18-20
21-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60 or older
I prefer not to answer.
Are you White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or some other race?
White
Black or African-American
American Indian or Alaskan Native
Asian
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
From multiple races
I prefer not to answer.
Some other race (please specify)

* 4. Prior to this program, how long has it been since you were enrolled in college/university?

Have you taken an online course or completed an online degree program prior to this program?
Yes
No
Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

- Management Occupations
- Business and Financial Operations Occupations
- Computer and Mathematical Occupations
- Architecture and Engineering Occupations
- Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
- Community and Social Service Occupations
- Legal Occupations
- Education, Training, and Library Occupations
- Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
- Healthcare Support Occupations
- Protective Service Occupations
- Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
- Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
- Personal Care and Service Occupations
- Sales and Related Occupations
- Office and Administrative Support Occupations
- Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations
- Construction and Extraction Occupations
- Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
- Production Occupations
- Transportation and Materials Moving Occupations
- Student
- Other

[ ] Other
There are a total of ________ credit hours required in the Criminal Justice Doctoral Program?
☐ 46
☐ 60
☐ 120
☐ 72
☐ I don't know.

8. I have _______ years to complete the Criminal Justice Doctoral Program?
☐ 7
☐ 5
☐ 10
☐ 8
☐ I don't know.

9. To send an e-mail within your Blackboard course you must use which of the following? Select one:
☐ Discussion Board
☐ Course Content
☐ Announcements  ☐ Course Messages
☐ I don't know.

10. Within the Blackboard classroom where can I find the grading scale and assignment due dates? Select one:
☐ Course Content
☐ Announcements
☐ Course Syllabus  ☐ Course Messages
☐ I don't know.

11. In order to register for classes each semester I can use which of the following programs? Select one:
☐ Webstar
☐ NSU E-mail
☐ Blackboard
☐ I don't know?

12. Where can I find the academic calendar for the Criminal Justice Doctoral Program? Select one:
☐ Financial Aid website
☐ Webstar
☐ In Sharklink on the DJHS tab
☐ Blackboard
☐ I don't know.

13. All official e-mail communications are sent using which of the following systems? Select one:
☐ Yahoo
☐ G-Mail
My NSU student email (xxxxx@mynsu.nova.edu)
- Hotmail
- I don't know.

Where can students find the grade appeal process?
- By calling the Registrar's Office
- College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Catalog
- In the Student Enrollment Agreement (SEA)
- I don't know.

If a personal or academic issue arises during a course(s) that could negatively affect my academic performance what is the first action I should take?
- Immediately communicate with my professor to see if accommodations can or need to be made.
- Do nothing and hope for the best.
- Wait until the course is over to discuss my options.
- I don't know.

To access an online journal article in our Alvin Sherman Library, I can search by name or by subject.
Select one:
- True
- False
- I don't know.

17. If I need help using the Alvin Sherman Library to conduct academic research I can call or e-mail the staff at the? Select one:
- The Financial Aid Office
- The Admissions Office
- The Library Reference Desk
- The University Center
- I don't know.

18. To find information about developing a dissertation, choosing a dissertation chair/committee, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process I should review which of the following? Select one:
- University phone directory
- Dissertation Guidelines
- Graduate Student Handbook
- None of the above
- I don't know.

19. When should my Idea Paper be completed according to the Course of Study Guidelines? Select one:
- At the end of my first semester in the program
- At the end of my second semester
- I don't have to submit an Idea Paper
- Just before I defend my dissertation
- I don't know.

20. If I am not ready to defend my dissertation by the end of the last dissertation course (CJI 9003 Dissertation IV) what am I required to do? Select one:
☐ Nothing, but stay in touch with my Chair
☐ Register for the Continuing Services courses (CJI 9004/CJI 9005) until I am cleared by my Chair to defend
☐ Take a leave of absence
☐ Start the program over ☐ I don't know.

21. According to the Financial Aid Office, all University students must continually meet the four Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) criteria to remain eligible for financial aid? Select one:
☐ True
☐ False
☐ I don't know.

22. Where can students who are U.S. military Veterans connect with other Veteran students on-campus?
Select one:
☐ Veterans Resource Center (VRC)
☐ Shark Camo Club
☐ Student Center
☐ There are no resources for student Veterans!
☐ I don't know

23. How important are the following activities to you? Indicate the level of importance of each of the following activities to you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On-campus social activities</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online social activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing academic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing academic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating on NSU Social</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 24. Please indicate your level of confidence in completing each of the following activities:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not Confident</th>
<th>Somewhat Confident</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very Confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete an online Doctoral course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete and defend My dissertation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abilities to use Blackboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keep up with the Doctoral course schedule</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Recommended three Courses per semester)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt my learning style to course/instructor expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persisting in the program Despite personal or Financial challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Orientation Presentation

NOVA Southeastern University
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Justice and Human Services
PhD in Criminal Justice
Orientation
Fall 2017

Overview of the CAHSS
Dean Dr. Honggang Yang

- Departments:
  - Department of Conflict Resolution Studies
  - Department of Family Therapy
  - Department of History and Political Science
  - Department of Justice and Human Services
  - Department of Literature and Modern Languages
  - Department of Multidisciplinary Studies
  - Department of Performing and Visual Arts
  - Department of Writing and Communication

PhD in Criminal Justice Curriculum
- 7 years to complete the program
- 60 Credit Program
- Core Courses (33 Credits)
  - CJS 701: Theories of Crime (3 credits)
  - CJS 702: The Police and Society (3 credits)
  - CJS 703: Criminal Law (3 credits)
  - CJS 704: Criminal Investigation (3 credits)
  - CJS 705: Qualitative Methods (3 credits)
  - CJS 706: Research Methods I (3 credits)
  - CJS 707: Research Methods II (3 credits)
  - CJS 708: Program Evaluation I (3 credits)
  - CJS 709: Program Evaluation II (3 credits)
  - CJS 720: Data Analysis and Interpretation (3 credits)
- Concentration Courses (15 Credits)
  - Choose one concentration (5 courses in each concentration)
- Dissertation Courses (12 Credits)
  - CJS 8000: Dissertation I (3 credits)
  - CJS 8001: Dissertation II (3 credits)
  - CJS 8002: Dissertation III (3 credits)
  - CJS 8003: Dissertation IV (3 credits)
  - CJS 8004: Continuing Services I (1 credit)
  - CJS 8005: Continuing Services II (1 credit)

Academic Policies & Registration
- Students need to locate and familiarize themselves with the Student Handbook:
  - Found in Blackboard/DUSHS tab
    - Academic Calendar
    - Registration Guidelines
- Three terms per year: fall, winter, summer
  - Students must be in continual registration
  - Students register themselves in Blackboard/Webster for all courses except dissertation courses
- Know the important DATES (found in Student Handbook):
  - Add/drop/withdrawal periods
  - Refund periods
  - Seven years to complete program
  - Grade Appeals (30 days after grade is posted to appeal grade)
- Financial Aid
  - Satisfactory Academic Progress (3.00 GPA, qualitative (annual 66.7%), max timeframe (150% rules), pace (66.7% attempted/completed within academic degree)

Department of Justice and Human Services
Chair Dr. Kimberly Durham

- Degree Programs:
  - PhD in Criminal Justice
  - M.S. in Criminal Justice
  - B.S. in Criminal Justice
  - M.S. in Developmental Disabilities
  - M.A. in Gerontology
  - Master of Human Services in Child Protection
  - B.S. in Human Services
  - B.S. in Recreational Therapy
  - B.S. in Paralegal Services
Steps in Dissertation

1. Idea paper developed in CJJ 706
2. Idea paper brought to Chair for discussion, refinement and ultimate approval
3. Develop Dissertation Proposal
4. Proposal (Chapters 1, 2 & 3) brought to Chair for discussion, refinement and ultimate approval by Dissertation Committee
5. Schedule Proposal meeting with Dissertation Committee & submit proposal for Program Review

Steps in Dissertation (Cont.)

5.(cont) Proposal Program Review (ciphdproposal@nova.edu)

- The main purpose of this review is to provide students additional feedback on proposal's quality
- Proposal is submitted to Turnitin.com for plagiarism assessment prior to review
- Proposal is reviewed using the Proposal Review Checklist by a professor in the program
- As stated above, the primary expected outcome of this review is to strengthen the quality of the study. Recommendations are made and directed to the student and the Committee Chair

Steps in Dissertation (Cont.)

6. Student (Primary Investigator, PI) submits IRB Protocol for review:

- If CJJ course has not been completed already, students must create an account on: https://www.cjjteachers.org/ and complete the respective modules associated with the PI course in Criminal Justice under NSU
- Doctoral students are responsible for completing IRB Protocol in: https://nova.edu/irbreview/login.aspx For more information visit: www.nova.edu/irb
- If study is Exempt, student will receive notification from NSU IRB College Representative
- If study is Expedited or requires a Full Review (i.e., vulnerable populations are used, recordings are made, etc.), after initial review, College IRB Representative forwards complete protocol to NSU IRB office for further review and final approval (for additional details of this process, please see: www.nova.edu/irbreview/process.html)
- After the Board conducts this review, the PI will be notified of the final disposition by an IRB representative

IMPORTANT: Only after PI receives IRB approval, data collection may proceed.

Steps in Dissertation (Cont.)

7. Student collects data, proceeds with analyses and writes Chapters 4 & 5 of final manuscript in consultation with Dissertation Committee until Committee grants final approval and indicates that student is ready to defend

8. Doctoral student revises Chapters 1-3 (updates the Literature Review if necessary and changes future tense to past tense) and ensures that all dissertation chapters are in compliance with style and format requirements

9. Dissertation committee reviews and approves final manuscript

10. Student completes Defense Approval Form (signed by Chair) and schedules the defense of the dissertation

Skills & Competencies of PhD Students

- Instructor expectations:
  - If a student already has some online education experience, what would you expect them to know upon entering your course?
  - What are the top problem areas that students have encountered?
- Findings:
  - Technology skills, interaction skills, time commitment
  - Poor technology skills, poor time management, poor online research skills

Skills & Competencies of PhD Students

- Student expectations:
  - If you could have learned something about online learning prior to beginning an online course, what would have been helpful?
  - What is the most difficult aspect of online learning?

- Findings:
  - Instructor expectations, discussion posting, chats, feedback
  - Time management, instructor inaccessibility, postings, readings, timed tests, lack of interaction

Skills & Competencies: Summary

- Learn course expectations early in the semester
- Technology preparedness (hardware, software and website familiarity);
  - Example, GoToTraining used for synchronous course discussions
- Communicate with your instructor early and often when issues arise
- Library (website, research); Always cite your sources!!
- Time management
- Independent and inter-dependent work (Community of Inquiry—COI)

My Courses: Where do I start?

Find books, search for articles, request items, get help, all from the home page.
Contact us for assistance, or set up
an individual consultation with a librarian

Need help? An NSU Librarian is online
right now!

• Dissertations from around the U.S. and international
• Dissertations from NSU students

Database for NSU patrons

Browse by database name

Browse by subject

Accounting & Taxation
Arts & Humanities
Business Administration
Computer Information & Systems
Computer Science
Economics
Education
Engineering
Health & Medicine
Law
Libraries
Mathematics
Natural Science
Psychology & Behavioral Sciences
Public Administration
Social Science

Browse by type of academic

Architecture
Business
Communications
Computer Information & Systems
Economics
Education
Health & Medicine
Law
Libraries
Natural Science
Psychology & Behavioral Sciences
Public Administration
Social Science

Questions?

Social Engagement Opportunities

– Veteran’s Resource Center (VRC)
  • Veteran’s Benefits Assistance through our Financial Aid Office
  • Connect with other student Veterans at the VRC located in 810
    218, Rosenzweig Building!

– On-campus/Off-Campus social activities
  • Volunteer through our Student Leadership and Civic Engagement
    Office 954-262-7179 or slice@nova.edu
  • Student Government Association – great way to develop
    relationships with students, faculty, and administration
    – Social Media – Connect with NSU!
      http://www.nova.edu/social/index.html
  • Join the online honor society, Omega Tau (local chapter of Alpha Phi Sigma)
    Info in Shrinklink
  • Get to know your fellow students, faculty, and program staff
    – Collaboration supports student success!

– Final Thoughts: Believe in yourself and your
abilities to complete the program!

• Remembering past successes to help propel you forward!
• Watching, listening, and learning when others experience
success can help increase your confidence in your abilities
achieve the same level (or greater levels) of success.
• Seek out constructive feedback from fellow students and
faculty and allow that feedback to help you build not allow
it to tear you down! (This skill is critical for a future leader.)
• Know yourself! What stresses you out?: What motivates
you?: What discourages you?: What excites you about
learning? Learning to deal with these strong emotions can
have a significant impact on your belief in your abilities to
be a successful doctoral student! Our mood influence
how we feel about ourselves at any given moment.

motivated. Journal of Management, 39, 9-44.
References


Deshpande, A. (2016). A qualitative examination of challenges influencing doctoral students in an online doctoral program, International Education Studies, 9(6), 139-149.


