Time to Completion PhD Student Survey

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All PhD students (~1200) received an invitation from Dean Brouwer to answer several questions on the topic of PhD degree completion times. Answers were to be submitted by November 15.
The Questions (developed with the cooperation of the SGPS.)

1. Describe changes to your PhD program that would increase the likelihood of completing your degree on time.

2. In the space provided, what would be a good incentive, financial or otherwise, that would be effective in encouraging you to complete your PhD program on time?

3. What are some challenges that may impede your ability to complete your PhD degree on time?

4. What has helped you to stay on track and complete milestones to increase the likelihood that you complete your PhD degree on time?
The Questions (*developed with the cooperation of the SGPS.*)

We also asked for year of study and whether the respondent wished to be entered in a draw.

4 winners have been selected by a random draw.
1st prize $200 gift card
2nd, 3rd, 4th prize $100 gift card
### Year of study statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Chart</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="First" /></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Second" /></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Third" /></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Fourth" /></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>110</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fifth or more</td>
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<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td><img src="chart" alt="Total" /></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>461</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Describe changes to your PhD program that would increase the likelihood of completing your degree on time.
In the space provided, what would be a good incentive, financial or otherwise, that would be effective in encouraging you to complete your PhD program on time?
What are some challenges that may impede your ability to complete your PhD degree on time?
What has helped you to stay on track and complete milestones to increase the likelihood that you complete your PhD degree on time?
What would increase the likelihood of completing your degree on time.

- most think more money would help, some think less would
- some think 4 years (or less) is sufficient time, others don’t
- some want more professional development, others less
- and so on ...
What would increase the likelihood of completing your degree on time.

- pre-dissertation requirements (courses, comps, field exams, etc.) are viewed as excessive and of questionable value
- adequate equipment is faulty or missing
- provide adequate work space and equipment
- too much time is spent on teaching, or TA duties
  - these are issues that with reasonable effort can be rectified
Challenges that may impede your ability to complete your PhD degree on time

- external demands (personal, family, health)
- weak job market, no job to go to
- lack of community, sense of isolation
Supervision

- great supervision key to successful and timely completion
- great lab dynamic, conducive to everyone’s success
Supervision

- Poor supervision can have a detrimental effect on progress
  - neglect, lack of mentoring, slow turn around, lack of meaningful feedback
  - interpersonal disfunction
  - direction unclear
What the students said.
I feel like my program is already organized in such a way as to allow me to complete it in 4 years. Personally, the knowledge that my funding is complete after 4 years motivates me to ensure that I complete my degree on time.
• Currently I am on time for finishing in four years.
• I think the load on students is OK, and they can finish on time
• I believe my PhD program is appropriately designed to promote a speedy completion.
• I don't think there are any aspects of my program that would prevent me from completing my degree on time.
• Extending the completion duration to 4.5 years.
• better availability and faster responsiveness from my supervisor
• Students need guidance during the summer months. Currently, many supervisors are simply unavailable from May to September.
• Perhaps a kind of "best practices" standard concerning the frequency of prof-student meetings
• More supervisor accountability amongst faculty members
• By improving the student and supervisor relationships. The program has to design in a way that a PhD student should be able to interact frequently with her supervisor(s)
• Clear, specific guidelines for what a PhD thesis must contain in order to be considered complete.
• Concrete deliverables for thesis writing.
• I feel that a clear outline of what is expected of a PhD candidate in each department would facilitate students finishing on time.
• I do think there could be greater emphasis on realistic expectations. As they say, "It's a PhD, not a Nobel Prize."
• Stricter and more explicit guidelines to required/recommended graduate courses, project completion dates etc.
• Greater funding so that I don't have to do other teaching, and TAing to pay for my living expenses
• Increased funding, reduced TA hours.
• Money. A higher salary would give me more encouragement to be more productive as it would take some stress away from figuring out how I'll be able to pay for next month's rent and also allow for stress relief.
• [impose] a disincentive - cut off funding at the 4 - 4 1/2 year mark, with very limited exceptions.
• if my supervisor had been available to read my work during years 3 and 4 of my PhD I would have been more productive. Her unavailability and disinterest was very detrimental to my progress. (I have just switched supervisors).
• If I felt more confident that I would be able to secure a job after completing my PhD that would be an enormous incentive. Dealing with the stress of trying to complete a PhD is already difficult, the added stress of worrying about being unemployed after and constantly being in financial crisis during the phd takes a serious toll.
Conclusions

• the impetus for focus on improving PhD completion times may be considered to be the provincial “putting students first” act, and accompanying discussion paper.
• students are individuals and their needs vary widely
• it is imperative that all initiatives for improving TTC statistics be motivated in the first instance by students best interest.