

# Integration into a PhD Program: An Arts-Based Research Approach to Examine the Experiences of Doctoral Students

İnci Yılmazlı Trout

University of the Incarnate Word  
Email: [yilmazli-trout@outlook.com](mailto:yilmazli-trout@outlook.com)

**Abstract.** *This article explores the experiences of twelve doctoral students during their processes of integrating into a doctoral program. In this qualitative study, by using a participatory, arts-based research design, twelve participants were asked to create collages and write narratives depicting their collages representative of their integration experiences. The research question this study addressed is the following: how have the students experienced integrating into their doctoral program? The gathered data revealed that academic and social factors play important roles in shaping and impacting the doctoral journey of a student.*

**Keywords:** *doctoral experiences, academic integration, social integration, arts-based research.*

## Introduction

Embarking on a doctoral journey is a highly competitive and challenging process. The attrition rates of doctoral degrees are around 50%, which varies between disciplines (Cochran, Campbell, Baker, & Leeds 2014; Bagaka's, Badillo, Bransteter, & Rispinto 2015; Jones 2013), and many students drop out in their first year (Jairam & Kahl 2012; Lott, Gardner, & Powers 2010). In a study conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools, 330 doctoral programs across multiple disciplines were investigated, and it was shown that the completion of a doctoral degree was within 10 years for only 57% of the students (Sowell 2008). Among the factors that lead to student dropout are stress (Jairam & Kahl 2012) social isolation, the lack of an advisor/mentor-student re-

lationship (Ali & Kohun 2007) as well as the lack of interaction between peers. The first-year experiences can be particularly challenging for doctoral students in terms of integrating and adapting to a new learning environment, the expectations of other students and the rigor of the doctoral program (Wao & Onwuegbuzie 2011; Witte & James 1998). These challenges are not necessarily all related to the rigor of their programs. Adaptation to the new academic environment, age, background, expectations are some of the factors that are involved in the process. While trying to adapt to a new environment, it is not uncommon for students to re-evaluate their decisions to enroll in a doctoral program because of their first-year experiences (Byers et al. 2014; Lott, Gardner & Powers 2010).

Due to the first-year attrition rates among doctoral students, the purpose of

this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of doctoral students during their integration into a PhD program. By gaining insight into the integration experiences of doctoral students, university leaders, program directors and professors can design and implement strategies for minimizing these issues in doctoral programs.

## **Background**

Doctoral programs are structured differently from masters' or undergraduate programs; therefore, the requirements, culture, environment, student expectations and even the challenges that lie ahead of doctoral students are all different. Doctoral students, while still in their first years of studying, do not know what a doctoral journey entails from the academic and social standpoints. Not knowing or having partial knowledge of what is expected of them while trying to integrate into the new phase of their lives, doctoral students might doubt themselves regarding whether they fit in the new culture. It should also be noted that not all students enter the programs with specific goals; thus, they begin identifying their new roles during the first year (Hockey 2004; Viczeko & Wright 2010). If no systematic program is in place to help students with their integration, it is then the students' responsibility to make the integration process better (Ali et al. 2007; Hawley 2003).

Experiences of students in an academic environment vary depending on what stage they are in the journey, as each stage has its own challenges and demands (Callary, Werthner & Trudel 2012; Braxton & Baird 2001). During the first year,

students start developing a new identity as doctoral students and begin adjusting to this new role, which may bring difficulties (Sweitzer 2009; Pifer & Baker 2016). With guidance and support, the integration experiences of students become less challenging, which would reduce the risk of attrition (Bagaka's, Badillo, Bransteter & Rispinto 2015). These forms of support and guidance, which the students require during their integration phase, can come from multiple channels, such as their peers, family, friends and professors, and in multiple forms. Students who receive social support experience less stress, less health and emotional problems (Wao & Onwuegbuzie 2011) and have better success rates (Hodgson & Simoni 1995).

Through social integration, students have access to different support systems, which reduce their stress levels and make integrating into the program easier (Tinto 2012; Rayle & Chung 2007). Having relationships with peers allow students to access information about the program and the institution they are in, which increases their attachment to the institution and increases the likelihood of them staying enrolled (Tinto 2012; Karp, Hughes & O'Gara 2010). When working under pressure and against tight deadlines, doctoral students can feel overwhelmed, stressed and discouraged. Being in the same program and experiencing the same or similar challenges makes peer support invaluable. Emotional support from peers is shown to be a significant factor in the professional development of students (Singh & Shifflette 1996). Jairam & Kahl (2012) found in their study that students receive support from peers in the forms of encour-

agement, empathy and enjoyment. Peers can also be supportive in accomplishing academic requirements, for example, with research, assistance and by providing feedback in writing.

Due to the nature of doctoral studies, students also need support from faculty members. The role of the advisor that faculty members play is particularly important during the integration phase for doctoral students, as advisors are the holders of knowledge. Communicating what students should expect from the program and what is expected of them would not only help with the smooth integration but also eliminate potential confusion or misunderstandings that may lead students to doubt themselves regarding their presence in the doctoral program and them not being able to complete the program (Pifer & Baker 2016; Bagaka's et al. 2015; Ali & Kohun 2006).

As they are adapting to a new culture in the program and fulfilling their academic requirements, students have to attend to their family obligations, which necessitates a compartmentalization of their roles as both students and family members. Therefore, within the student's network, family and friends are considered among the support providers. Support from family and friends comes in emotional and practical ways. Either in times of joy, celebration of achievements or stress, frustration and the need for encouragement, students turn to their families. In addition to emotional support, families also provide practical support, such as taking care of chores, which gives the time and space that doctoral students require (Schaefer et al. 1981). Byers et al. (2014) showed that

students seek support from their families and peer cohorts as a coping mechanism.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study, focusing on doctoral student experiences in their first year, is framed within Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence. Similar to the Theory of Integration (Tinto 1975), developed for undergraduate student attrition, his theory for doctoral persistence discusses that student persistence in a program is related to the individual's academic and social integration in the institution of higher education. Students have a level of commitment to the program when they enter, and this level of commitment is influenced by the academic and/or social aspects of integration later on. This aspect is similar for both the undergraduate and doctoral level students. Tinto (1993) suggests that, particularly for doctoral students, academic and social integration is crucial for degree completion. Doctoral students need to have a sense of belonging in the school, the program and the field that they are studying in. In comparison to undergraduate students, for doctoral students, the difference lies in having a sense of belonging in the field. Persistence at the doctoral level is also shaped by "the personal and intellectual interactions within and between students and faculty and the various communities of the university" (Tinto 1993, p. 231). Within the framework of this theory, persistence is divided into three stages: (1) transition, (2) leading to candidacy and (3) the dissertation phase. The transition phase refers to the first year of doctoral education, when students adapt to the culture of

the program, learn about what being a doctoral student entails and establish relationships within the academic and social communities in the school (Tinto 1993). In the second phase, students develop knowledge and skills to engage in research and take the comprehensive exam. After passing the comprehensive exam, students enter the dissertation phase. In the beginning of the doctoral education, integration is considered from both academic and social integration, while as students go through the second and third stages, the integration experiences center around professors and the dissertation committee, respectively. In this study, the focus is on the experiences of doctoral students related to the first phase.

## **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is both a concept and a process that requires a certain level of consciousness through constant reflection. The assertion of qualitative research approaches is that research is shaped by the social circumstances in which it is produced (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). Thus, the researcher must make the connection between herself or himself and the research explicit.

My relationship to this study is shaped by my position as an international doctoral student with research interests in doctoral education and doctoral student experiences. Having the privilege of working across programs and departments provides diverse perspectives of academia. My experience of leadership in graduate student organizations allows me to work closely with doctoral students and understand their experiences. Additionally, being en-

gaged in dialogues with doctoral students and faculty members in several universities in the US and in various countries, along with reading the relevant scientific literature, have set the stage for me to explore the integration processes of doctoral students.

## **Methodology**

Through an arts-based research, it is possible to reach new insights, make connections and interconnections, ask and answer new questions or approach the same questions with different approaches and reach broad audiences, even within non-academics. It allows people to see and think differently, to learn something new and, to build empathetic understandings. Collage creation, an arts-based method, was chosen as a tool, and the focus of this study was to explore the experiences of doctoral students in a PhD program. Collage creation is a projective technique defined as selecting and gathering imagery to create a focus for associations and connections that might otherwise remain unconscious (Chilton & Scotti 2014; Butler-Kisber 2008). Arts-based inquiries and writing provide access to embodied research through making new meanings and connections between written and visualized ideas (Simmons 2013). Leavy (2015) recommends collage as a medium for arts-based research as it involves gathering and selecting imagery, which would serve as data, analyzing, synthesizing and presenting the results of the creative process. Also, there is evidence in literature that putting equal importance on right-brain thinking (problem solving, creative expression, synthesis) as well as left-brain think-

**Table 1.** Participant information.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Year in the Program</b>	<b>Continent</b>	<b>Background</b>
Casey	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	America	Military
Bella	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	America	Education
Aria	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Europe	Business
Olivia	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Middle East	Education
Jack	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	America	Education
Chloe	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Asia	Law Enforcement
Susan	4 <sup>th</sup> year	America	Business
Michael	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	America	Education
Felix	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	America	Business
Camila	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	America	Arts
Sally	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Middle East	Education
David	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	America	Education

ing (analysis and logic) can establish a high level of engagement (Simmons 2013).

### ***Participants***

The participants of this study consist of students enrolled at a doctoral program in social sciences at a private university located in a large urban area in the south of the United States. A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit participants based on two criteria, which are the following: (1) to be enrolled in a PhD program and (2) to have been in the program for at least one year. Twelve students, including four international students who had met the criteria, volunteered to participate in this study. Information on the participants is presented in Table 1.

### ***Data Collection***

Considering the work schedules of the participants and the purpose of the methodological approach, the data collection process was designed as a single session.

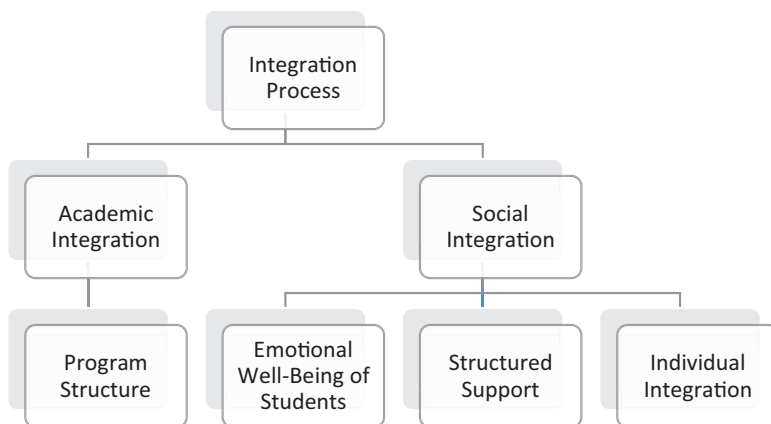
During the session, the participants were first given information on the collage and how it will be used in the study. Then, the participants were given fifteen minutes to share their experiences in integrating into the doctoral program with each other by answering the following questions: (1) What expectations did you have regarding integration when you entered the program? (2) Over time, have these expectations changed? How? Why? (3) What should the integration process look like? The purpose of this fifteen-minute exchange of experiences was to trigger the creative process through interaction between participants prior to creating collages. At the end of the fifteen-minute interaction, each participant started working on their collages individually. While I provided a variety of magazines that participants could use, there was no limitation on the materials and the platform for collages. Some participants chose to create their collages digitally – searching for visuals online and creating the collage

on a digital platform – while others chose the traditional way by sorting through magazines, cutting and pasting visuals on a poster board provided. In creation of the collages, participants were given two questions to consider: (1) How have you experienced integration into a PhD program? (2) What should integration look like? The participants had one hour to complete their collages and share what their products represented with the rest of the group. After the session, participants were given three days to complete and send their narratives by addressing the following questions: (1) Describe your collage. What does it represent? (2) What does each visual represent in the collage? The collages and the narratives were then used as artifacts for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data, the collages and the related narratives were analyzed simultaneously one by one to compare/contrast

and find underlying insights that were not presented in the narratives. While some participants described what their collage represent in detail, some described them in broader terms. In the latter cases especially, the themes represented through visuals were noted and included in the next steps of the data analysis. Some of the collages are not presented in the article to protect the confidentiality of the participants, as they included identifier components. For the analysis of narratives, first I completed a line-by-line initial coding described by Charmaz (2014) and noted first impression phrases. Then, by engaging in focused coding, I was able to identify themes emerged in the data by looking for the most significant codes and categorizing similar codes into themes. Per the theoretical framework used in this study, I categorized these themes under two dimensions: *academic integration* and *social integration*. The condensed and detailed code trees are presented in Figures 1 & 2, respectively.



**Figure 1.** Condensed code tree with main categories.

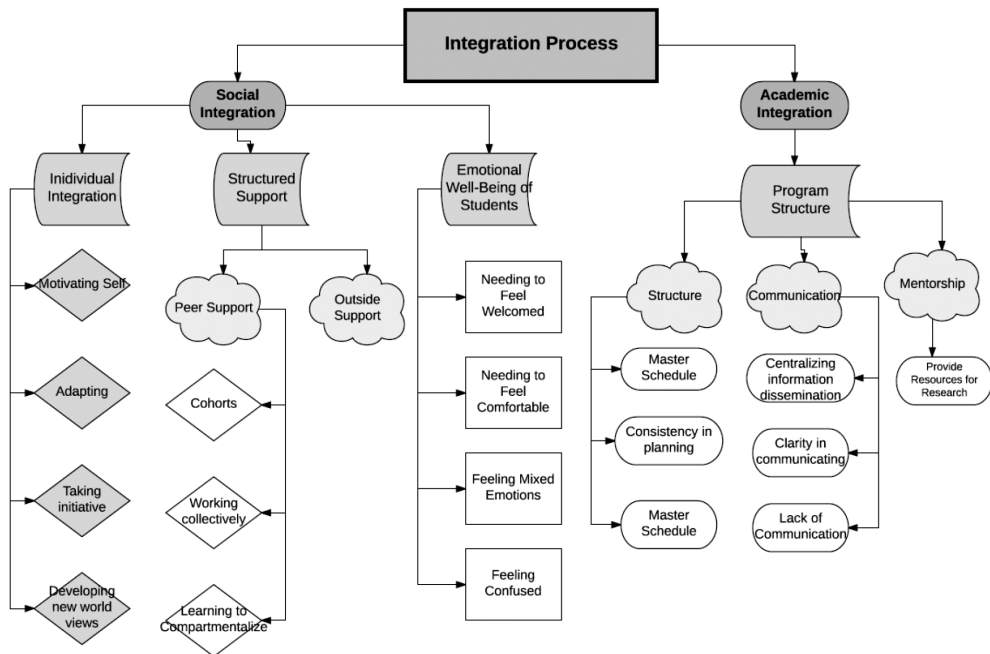


Figure 2. Detailed code tree.

## Results and Discussion

### *Academic Integration*

The academic integration category of the data focuses more on the program structure-related issues or concerns that the participants had. Academic integration refers to the integration to coursework and the institution, which is also referred as “formal integration” (Aypay, Sever & Demirhan 2012). Academic integration plays an important role toward achieving the shared goal of finishing the program. The relationships students seek to build with their peers and faculty members in the program during their first year foster their commitment to the degree completion. Although “finishing” did not come up frequently in the narrated data, it was prominent in the actual collages represented by visuals of

graduating students. The collage method helped in the emergence of this (hidden) theme.

Many respondents noted the lack of clear vision on what is expected of students. Olivia, for example, used three visuals in the center of her collage expressing the importance of having a clear vision (see Figure 3). “I put the visuals in the middle because I think they are the first vital steps in the integration process. It’s essential for each student to start the program with clear and enough information about the program’s content, requirements, and course rotation to avoid any confusion and frustration” (Olivia). Olivia is not the only one speaking on the lack of clarity that leads to confusion. Jack provides a good example of how this concept plays out in reality, speaking to the professors’



*Figure 3. Olivia's collage.*

roles as advisors: “[f]or example, a professor will require one course of study path while other professor will require a different course of study path, and the result is a confused group of classmates trying to take the required courses which causes problems for students [...]”

The doctoral journey itself is a long and challenging process, and the reduction of additional stress by providing clear information regarding the requirements is fundamental in the process, as a lack of clarity creates confusion, disappointment and a sense of disconnect among students. Stress has been shown to be one of the main factors in doctoral student attrition (Lovitts 2001). Additionally, Ali & Kohun (2006) suggest that confusion regarding a program’s requirements, expectations from students and miscommunication lead to a sense of social isolation, which is another factor associated with doctoral student attrition.

Communication issues were another theme that had emerged from the data – it is important to have a clear and direct method of communication within the program between faculty members and students. A lack of communication leads to a disconnect between the information holders and students. In Michael’s words, “until last night (the day of the collage making), I had no idea there was a master schedule.” Camila supports this fact in her words: “through this session I have had the insight of learning that there is a perceived major communication issue with the PhD program, as well as with some admission information, advising information, and business services related to the university.”

Problems with communicating the necessary information not only lead to confusion among students and create obstacles in navigating the program but also force students to make unforeseen adjustments to their degree plan and lead to delays.





*Figure 4. A detail of Felix's collage.*

Susan's insights speak to this aspect: "[m]any of us, myself included, found out things after the fact such as limitations of certain classes offered, dissertation restrictions, and qualifying exam coordination that impeded our timelines." Felix used the metaphor of a maze (Figure 4) to describe the confusion that others mentioned: "[t]he maze represents the confusion found in navigating some aspects of the program, specifically class scheduling in a way that minimizes the situation many of us find ourselves in, that the few classes we need to complete coursework and move on to dissertation won't be available again until next year."

While the doctoral journey entails some common challenges for all doctoral students, each individual's journey is still unique, as the level and type of challenges experienced can vary between individuals. These variations can be due to social and cultural backgrounds, personal goals or the

expectations of students. These differences are emphasized in Tinto's model of social and academic integration and are the fundamental determinants of the relationship established between students and the education as well as their expectations from the institution (Aypay et al. 2012). These differences make a(n) (effective) mentorship structure a part of the program. Chloe, an international student, addresses the lack of a mentor-student relationship with an example from her past experience. "In my home country, a PhD student would have a mentor upon entering the program. The 'mentor' would guide the student on how to do research and involve you and other students in research projects. But in this program, it seems like they don't have such system."

Chloe's collage had two main parts, and one of them was related to the mentor-student relationship. Faculty mentorship is an important part of the academic support

system, and mentorship can significantly impact the success of the student as long as an effective and healthy relationship is present (Brill et al. 2014). Sally, another international student, emphasized this aspect both in her collage and narrative by saying that “mentorship between faculty members and students is very important. They can work together on projects, papers, etc. [...]. An academic advisor can make a real change for doctoral students. It is kind of communication on three levels; mentorship, leadership, and exchanging experiences.” In a mentor-student relationship, shared goals and mutual respect are involved (Mullen 2007), and the relationship can be geared toward but not limited to integration into the academic program, research and publication or professional development and preparation for post-doctoral life (Brill, Balconof, Lend, Gogerty & Turner 2014). Studies have shown that mentorship acts as a helpful relationship in which a mentor consistently supports, encourages and coaches the student, resulting in interaction and socialization between the students and the institution, and therefore in student success (Holley & Caldwell 2012; Ali & Kohun 2006).

Peer mentoring is another factor that can impact student experiences. Peer-mentoring can be conducted through formal peer-mentoring programs implemented by institutions or informal cohorts created by students (Brill et al. 2014). This form of mentoring includes emotional support, where peers get together to talk about and help each other to cope with the challenges they experience or confusions they may have encountered that are related to the program (Hadijoannou et al.

2007; Holley & Caldwell 2012). Studies have shown that peer mentoring increases the motivation for learning by creating an environment that promotes team building, learning and socializing (Mullen 2011; Holley & Caldwell 2012).

### ***Social Integration***

The social integration category revolves around support systems, the emotional well-being of participants and individual efforts for integration. Social integration refers to establishing relationships with peers or cohorts regarding education (Aypay et al. 2012). Three categories emerged in this data that speak to the social aspect of the integration process with the themes of the support system, emotional well-being and individual integration. According to Tinto (1993), social integration is more closely tied to academic integration at the doctoral level rather than the undergraduate level.

Many respondents noted the need for support systems, particularly in regard to two sub-themes, which are peer-support and outside support. Each collage had at least one picture representing a sense of togetherness (see Figure 5). One of the support structures that was mentioned repeatedly was the cohort system. While both a formal and informal cohort structure was mentioned, the emphasis was on the informal cohort system, as students were drawing from their own experiences. Susan speaks on the value of the informal cohort by stating that “the informal cohorts are valuable as they ensure no man is left behind.” Sally, in her narrative, approaches the value of peer relationships from an op-



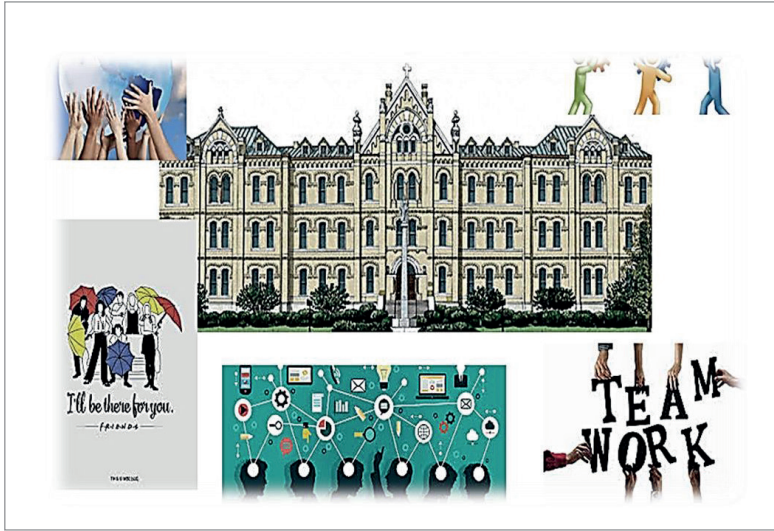
*Figure 5. A collage of collages representing a sense of togetherness.*

timistic perspective: “if doctoral students work as a team in this journey, they will learn more and enjoy more. Teamwork, in my opinion, can make our path valuable.”

Susan also spoke about other support structures, which are provided by family and friends. Although the support received from friends and family may seem more related to the emotional well-being of students, it is also related to the practical aspects of support, such as assistance with housework, time and space to do work and children (Jairam & Kahl 2012), which implies that the support required by doctoral students should not come from only one channel, as both emotional and practical aspects are connected. The themes that emerged in the data are interwoven with each other and have their roles in creating an environment for successful integration. For example, Casey wrote that “we [the students] need help from our peers, professors, family and friends,” which indicates that there are different resources to receive support from, but they cannot be separated

from each other – although they do address the different needs of doctoral students. In his collage presented in Figure 6, Casey presents a collective environment, where he used visuals of groups of people surrounding the center image of a university. This particular collage was especially interesting to study, as it is different than other collages presented in terms of not having a visual or text representing the “self.” In other words, Casey’s collage indicates that he is heavily reliant on others around him. In other collages, it is seen that team work or support from others is present along with a sense of the self. While Casey presents a comprehensive support structure without specifying roles, David specifically highlights the importance that peer support holds for him. “There have been times where due to personal and professional reasons I had wanted to leave. However, the friendships and support I have received in this program keep me coming back year after year.”

Having a support system is especially important as students are trying to ad-



*Figure 6. Casey's collage.*

apt to a new phase in their lives. Most of the students have full-time jobs and other commitments they are responsible for, and these require them to learn how to compartmentalize their lives. In Jack's collage, the two pictures, representing his time with family and friends and working with others in his informal cohort, were placed separately from each other. He noted his struggle in the integration process by saying that he "had to learn how to balance my personal life with my education." The words "had to" in his statement not only speak to the reality of the challenges of a doctoral program but also to the importance of a support system that would lift some of the added stress and allow for a smoother integration. Learning to compartmentalize or balance time with family and friends would be easier with the support received from both peers who had similar experiences and families who are understanding. Byers et al. (2014) found in

their research that the majority of doctoral students are challenged with multiple roles that they have to play in their lives, such as family commitments, social relationships and work responsibilities.

Social support takes many forms, such as support from peers, faculty members, family and friends (Jairam & Kahl 2012). Students who receive some sort of support have less stress and emotional problems, and students who receive support from their advisors would be more successful in the completion their degrees (Wao & Onwegbuzie 2011). Susan, who is in her fourth year in the program, noted that "a more active, advocate role of the advisor would have mitigated many of the challenges I faced to complete this program within the four years anticipated."

The support aspect of integration is related to the emotional well-being of students as they experience positive and negative feelings throughout. A range of



*Figure 7. Bella's collage.*

emotions, from frustration to happiness, emerged from the data. Michael's collage in particular represented "a mixture of emotions." Through the visual of a football player, Michael compared his doctoral journey to a football game: "For me, football was an emotional game. I was angry in the sense of beating the heck out of the other team, yet I was happy because I loved to play football. So, for me, the program is like the other team, it's either going to beat you or vice versa."

While Michael's comments capture the emotions ranging from two opposite ends, some participants expressed their emotions from one end of the spectrum, like Camila, where she stated the following: "I believe that the university does a good job of providing baseline necessary information to create a smooth integration process which results in happy students." Her statement is in alignment with Felix and Casey's comments: "[this picture] represents the way that we were made to feel welcome with our families during the PhD orientation" (Felix). "The integration process should be a welcoming process

where new students feel comfortable" (Casey).

One of the visuals that Bella has used (see Figure 7) "symbolized support from the whole university community in order for student to succeed because feeling supported and included in all campus activities will aid in doctoral student success."

In their study, Jairam & Kahl (2012) suggest the three following types of social support: emotional, practical and professional. The scholars conclude that each social group that the student is in, such as academia, friends, family and faculty, provide emotional support to some degree.

While the findings point out a collaborative effort in providing support to doctoral students, it is also important to note that individual efforts should not be disregarded. Taking individual responsibility so as to improve the integration process had emerged from the data multiple times.

"I'm a very goal-oriented person and I believe that to achieve it I need to take initiatives. I wanted to represent the image of how we, as students, should be more in-



*Figure 8. Aria's collage.*

volved in the integration process and not only rely on others to come to us” (Aria, see Figure 8). Bella and Olivia addressed the same belief in terms of the student being more active, both in their collages and narratives.

“As PhD students, we should not expect anyone to hold our hand at every step. As for me, the shift from structured nature of education to the self-direction presents a challenge, but I’m trying to use new techniques, expand my skills, and learn from my failures” (Olivia). “We can’t always rely on the faculty because they do have a lot going on. Students need to take the responsibility for looking up the requirements and procedures within the program” (Bella).

These statements speak about the actions that can be taken by individuals, which indicates self-motivation. Taking the initial steps and not completely relying on others for everything, getting out of the comfort zone are all parts of the integration phase that lead to successful integration as

PhD students enter a new phase in their lives. Students’ interactions with peers and faculty during the integration phase are shaped by individual commitments and goals, and as they move through the stages, these interactions will take on different forms depending on the necessities of each stage, such as the mentor-mentee relationship during the acquisition of research skills leading to the candidacy phase. Having healthy and meaningful interactions with peers and particularly with faculty members in each stage positively shapes the experiences of students, which would contribute to degree completion (Tinto 1993). It is, then, to a degree the student’s own responsibility of initiating or taking the initial steps to initiate these relationships with others in the program.

## Conclusions

Integration plays an important role in students’ engagement within the doctoral pro-

gram. Experiences during this stage of the doctoral education play a significant role in attainment. This study revealed the positive and negative experiences of selected doctoral students in their academic and social integration process, and the factors that play mediator roles throughout. The experiences included a lack of communication, mentorship and support from faculty members as well as peer support, which resulted in challenges for students. As earning a doctoral degree can be a long and challenging process that induces stress, the integration phase can be used as a channel to create a supportive environment for helping students navigate the doctoral program smoothly.

While these findings are not sufficient enough to generalize, they still provide insights for faculty and staff members for finding ways to improve the integration processes of students. In finding ways, program coordinators can design a support system by taking student input and a combination of both social and academic elements into consideration. This could be done to lay the foundation of a successful process. Based on the multiple aspects of the integration process, collaborative efforts between the faculty, students and staff are

necessary. While efforts for improving the integration experiences of students require collaboration from different actors, the individual efforts of students should not be disregarded, as they are a crucial component of this equation. Without the individual efforts of the students, the implementation at hand would not be positioned for success.

This study is not without limitations. The sample size of the study is not representative of the doctoral program as a whole. This research can be replicated with more participants to be representative of the doctoral students enrolled in the program. Another limitation is that the data collected in this study consist of the reflections on participants' experiences during their first year, which may have been to some degree influenced by their lived experiences after the first year. Therefore, a study with first year students designed to explore their experiences as they go through the integration process would be beneficial. Additionally, each method of inquiry has its own limitations, and the creative process can have its own. One of the constraints would include the method not being in alignment with the participant's identity or ways of knowing (traditional vs. non-traditional), which might cause resistance.

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## INTEGRACIJA Į DOKTORANTŪROS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMĄ: MENU GRĮSTAS DOKTORANTŲ PATIRČIŲ TYRIMAS

İnci Yılmazlı Trout

S a n t r a u k a

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojama dvylikos doktorantūros studentų integracijos į doktorantūros programą patirtis. Pristatomas kokybinis tyrimas, kurį atliekant buvo naudotas menu grįstas tyrimo modelis: dvylikos tyrimo dalyvių buvo paprašyta sukurti koliažus ir parašyti istoriją, perteikiančią, kaip koliažas apibūdina jų integracijos patirtį. Šio tyrimo klausimas –

kaip studentai išgyvena integraciją į doktorantūros programą? Gauti duomenys parodė, kurie akademiniai ir socialiniai veiksniai svarbūs formuojant doktorantūros kelionę.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** doktorantūros patirtis, akademinė integracija, socialinė integracija, menu grįstas tyrimas.

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