

Irvine Fellows and Graduate Student Socialization:
Reframing the Learning Context

by C. Dean Campbell and William G. Tierney

Traditional attempts to explain the attrition and dissatisfaction minority graduate students encounter in the academy focus on pipeline initiatives, well-used recruiting and retention interventions based on affirmative action philosophies and policies. Robert A. Ibarra¹ recently published a book in which he explains the perils Latino doctoral students encounter in the graduate study as a consequence of cultural conflict. He proposes a model of *multicontextuality* an organizational change as a way to improve how minorities get socialized into the academy.

In the idea of *multicontextuality*, context is the “information that surrounds a [cultural process] and is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event. Individuals get sorted into populations based on how they perceive and communicate with one another. The relationship is between the information surrounding a particular cultural process. Those from high context cultures make meaning and learn using “multiple streams of information which surround an event, situation, or interaction.” Those from low context cultures “filter out conditions surrounding an event and focus on words and objective facts” (p. 53).

Latinos in Ibarra’s study describe graduate study as “entry into the professoriate as a metamorphosis into a dominant ethnic group rather than a transition into a profession,” (p. 18) underscoring the friction between competing cultural paradigms. The dominant low-context and field-independent culture of department faculty goes unaltered and accommodates minority students sparingly. Students of color, on the other hand, must develop “scripts” (p. 100) which have repertoires of high context cultural behaviors and field-sensitive cognitive styles. Students use the scripts to learn to adapt to graduate school culture while enduring the difficult process of becoming low context, field-independent learners. These scripts reflect the idea of *bicognition*, or “coping behaviors and adaptive strategies [used] to resolve life’s problems” (p. 58). The graduate experience, Ibarra argues, is an identify transforming experience wherein minority students “subordinate, rather than culturally blend, one set of identities for another in order to succeed in academia,” (p. 82) only to find future dismay in a profession that defers to linear, sequential, low-context thinking.

Ibarra maintains a cultural imbalance exists, the low context pedagogical culture works to the exclusion of other legitimate learning modes and styles (p. 17). Ibarra proposes that departments and institutions reframe their contexts and cultures to ensure the success of minority students. The intent is to create a more balanced institutional environment wherein individuals with different learning orientations can work and learn together successfully.

¹ Ibarra, R.A.(2001). *Beyond affirmative action: Reframing the context of higher education*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

With regard to reforming graduate education, Ibarra argues for change in departmental practices, the center of faculty-student interactions. Ibarra develops an organizational learning-and-effectiveness model that rewards faculty work differently, particularly research, the quest for new knowledge, and teaching. He states, “critical knowledge areas are often associated with individuals or groups that have been marginalized in their organizational activities;” (p. 225) generating new knowledge taps into the marginalized who “lie dormant [within] our academic institutions” (p. 226). The use of high context teaching practices and the development of interdisciplinary studies exemplify reforms Ibarra suggests. These practices create a learning context more suitable for minority doctoral students; moreover, faculty benefit from the creating of new knowledge by tapping into previously overlooked resources. With regard to the goals of the Irvine project, Ibarra (p. 250-251) offers a sketch for structural and cultural changes within the academic department:

Irvine Project Goal	Suggestions for Altering Departmental Culture
<p>Enhance the climate for faculty of color to engage in sustained intellectual dialogues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify academic departments in low context fields (e.g., physics and mathematics) with potential for introducing high-context pilot projects. • Recruit entrepreneurial department, programs, and faculty willing to rethink traditional practices such as tenure review, teaching and learning styles and curriculum content, and research. • Create or adapt successful high-context-oriented projects and implement them in appropriate academic departments. • Establish contact with discipline-focused minority organizations to coordinate collaborative initiatives with academic departments (e.g., Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers, American Sociological Association). • Use ethnic studies programs and student service programs as learning resources, or use program directors as collaborators with departments to introduce <i>multicontextual</i> awareness and needs. • Have a professional facilitator from the university’s quality improvement office help the department determine what high-context activities they can develop.

**Irvine Fellows and Graduate Student Socialization:
Practices for Structural Improvement**
by Dean Campbell and William G. Tierney

Barbara E. Lovitts¹ has recently published a book on the causes of early departure from doctoral study. In what follows we offer a sketch of the model Lovitts proposes and how it will inform good practice for the administration of the Irvine Fellowship program.

Three arguments persist throughout the book:

1. It is not the background characteristics doctoral students bring with them to the university that affect their persistence outcomes; it is what happens to them after they arrive.
2. Doctoral student attrition is a function of the *distribution of structures* and opportunities for integration and *cognitive map* development.
3. The causes of attrition are deeply embedded in the organizational culture of graduate school and the structure and process of graduate education.

The *distribution of structures* refers to a model of contexts that work together to integrate doctoral students into the graduate school experience. The contexts of graduate education combined are institutional, disciplinary, interdepartmental, intradepartmental, and external student factors (health, family, finances). The *cognitive map* is a mental model that helps students make sense of what they are experiencing, provides a conceptual understanding of the environment, a plan of action, and a platform for informed decision making. The more opportunities for cognitive map development a department has, the better the quality of students' cognitive maps; and the more opportunities for integration the department has, the more integrated the students.

Lovitts asserts that student background experiences, entering academic characteristics, and other personal individual differences remain with the student during the graduate experience. Graduate programs better serve underrepresented students by providing structural support for these students. For example, students of color who are fully integrated into the distribution of structures with quality faculty advisement, financial assistance, and office space will persist better than those without these resources.

Students who do not become socialized eventually see themselves as outsiders, and ultimately under perform and/or withdraw from doctoral study. In Lovitts' ideal model, departments integrate students well and provide them with resources for persistence beyond their own personal resources. The following table outlines good departmental practices based on suggestions from the authors, and as appropriate for the three goals of the Irvine project:

¹ Lovitts, B. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of departure from doctoral study*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Irvine Project Goal	Suggestions for Good Departmental Practice
<p>Increase students of color who will go on to assume faculty positions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a staff of faculty members charged with helping pre-dissertation students through their programs until they have secured a chair. • Inform students there are no penalties for changing department-assigned advisors. • Hold special seminars for first year students at which faculty discuss their research. • Maintain records on faculty's Ph.D. productivity rates - reward and sanction accordingly. • Conduct exit evaluations by all completers and non-completers on quality of faculty advisers. • Create a mentorship program that matches advanced graduate students with first-year students. • Schedule a series of formal and informal departmental gatherings of faculty and students including brown bag lunches, colloquia, happy hours, etc.
<p>Enhance the climate for faculty of color to engage in sustained intellectual dialogues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold departmental research conference or regularly scheduled colloquia featuring faculty work.
<p>To enhance discussions of diversity on campus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to be purposeful in what they want to study and with whom. • Require applicant to visit campus; include funds for the visit in the fellowship. • Provide mandatory orientation for all new graduate students of color; require faculty to provide overview of first year classes they teach.

**Irvine Fellows and Graduate Students of Color Persistence:
Practical Approaches for Academic Success**
by Dean Campbell and William G. Tierney

Richard J. Light¹ wrote a book that synthesizes ten years of interviews of Harvard University seniors into practical approaches for academic and personal success in undergraduate study. Although the book relates to undergraduate education, we offer selected advice from the book useful for administration of the Irvine project.

Data from student interviews address two broad questions:

- (1) what choices can student themselves make to get the most out of college?; and
- (2) what are effective ways for faculty members and campus leaders to translate good intentions into practice?

Light identifies the following six themes from the interviews that are germane to the academic persistence for doctoral students of color:

1. Students care about improving their writing.
2. Students learn better in group work, not in individualized study.
3. Organized time around faculty-student interaction enhances student satisfaction with the learning experience.
4. Out-of-classroom experiences profoundly effect students' postgraduate and career life decisions.
5. Students expect campus diversity to include:
 - (a) a multicultural canon in the curriculum to advance diversity; and
 - (b) out-of-classroom experiences to enrich the overall academic experience on campus.
6. Senior-level institutional leadership collaborates with student ethnic organization leaders in administering diversity learning initiatives.

The following table outlines practical approaches based on suggestions from the author, and as appropriate for the three goals of the Irvine project:

Irvine Project Goal	Practical Approaches for Academic Success
Increase students of color who will go on to assume faculty positions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster out of classroom connections with community-based organizations to better inform student research interests and career decisions. • Suggest group study for graduate students of color. • Encourage writing activities shared between graduate and faculty of color.

¹ Light, R. (2001). *Making the most of college*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<p>Enhance the climate for faculty of color to engage in sustained intellectual dialogues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have faculty of color engage in on-going relationships with undergraduate ethnic groups, perhaps in advising capacity.• Have departments reward faculty service participation in student-run, campus-based speaker series.• Establish faculty of color seminars in which follow-on conversation from the classroom can continue informally.
<p>Enhance discussions of diversity on campus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have incoming students write an essay on diversity and how they will handle it before they come to campus.• Involve graduate and undergraduate ethnic organizations' group leaders in Center activities and research.• Create a space on campus for members of ethnic groups to gather, socialize, and promote academic and social events.

Irvine Fellows and Graduate Student Socialization: Exemplary Practices
by Dean Campbell and William G. Tierney

John Weidman, Darla Twale, and Elizabeth Stein¹ have recently published a monograph on the process of graduate student socialization. In what follows we offer a thumbnail sketch of this model and how it will inform good practice for the administration of the Irvine Fellowship Program at USC.

The authors define *graduate student socialization* as “the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills.” The authors develop a socialization model that consists of 5 conceptual elements:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prospective students (background, predispositions) 2. University (institutional culture - academic program and peer climate; socialization processes - interaction, integration, and learning) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Personal communities (family, friends, employers) 4. Novice professional practitioners (commitment, identity) 5. Professional communities (practitioners, associations) |
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Weidman and his colleagues argue this non-linear model accommodates graduate student socialization better than traditional linear models. In previous socialization models students uniformly experience the five conceptual elements in sequential format. Graduate students enter programs under rigid faculty admissions criteria, then they experience uniform departmental and university socialization, and finally they graduate into personal and professional communities beyond campus. Non-linear models differ; the conceptual elements have no boundaries or sequential limitations. Graduate students experience socialization with more simultaneous interaction across the five components.

The authors state, “it is incumbent upon faculty and practicing professionals to build academic programs that socialize graduate students through a continuous process from admission through entry into a professional role that is under constant review and modification.” The following table outlines good practices based on suggestions from the authors, and as appropriate for the three goals of the Irvine project:

Irvine Project Goal	Suggestions for Good Practice
Increase students of color who will go on to assume faculty positions.	<p>Student Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish collaborative learning communities or cohorts. ● Establish significant mentoring opportunities with faculty. ● Establish mentoring opportunities with advanced graduate students. ● Organize workshops for getting through the dissertation process. ● Develop transparent rules and procedures for qualifying

¹ Weidman, J., Twale, D., & Stein, E. (2001). *Socialization of graduate and professional students in higher education: A perilous passage?* San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

	<p>examinations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish and circulate an orientation manual. Make the orientation process less tacit. • Tighten standards for completion of degree - avoid prolonging student hood and delaying transition to professional status. <p>Professionalization of Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infuse professional and ethical norms into graduate programs. • Invite students to co-author articles and book chapters. • Sponsor student travel to professional association conferences.
<p>Enhance the climate for faculty of color to engage in sustained intellectual dialogues.</p>	<p>Faculty Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish collaborative, interdisciplinary learning communities to lessen feelings of isolation among faculty. • Establish professional development programs, particularly around improving the teaching assistant positions and student mentoring/advising. • Provide workshops on such topics as sexual harassment, diversity, and ethics. • Develop initiatives and efforts to address women’s issues in professional development. • Examine the academic program to determine whether it provides the student with the information necessary to perform professional roles. • Involve technology in the development of new pedagogy.
<p>To enhance discussions of diversity on campus.</p>	<p>Organizational Change – Conceptual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt new approaches to teaching and learning. • Embrace collaborative strategies for bringing together graduate and undergraduate students, faculty and staff. <p>Organizational Change – Instrumental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and secure “hard money” funding for campus-wide diversity programs. • Adopt formative and summative evaluations of cost and effectiveness of diversity programs. • Expand scope of diversity program beyond the departmental or center level. • Increase the number of faculty of color on campus with exemplary recruitment and retention programs on campus. • Engage in reflective process to determine whether students are ready to assume professional roles. • Adopt initiatives and efforts to address women’s issues in professional development.