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**JOBS OF
THE WEEK**

Having trouble finishing graduate school? You're not alone. Many students, especially in the United States, drag out their postgraduate education for up to ten years. Arguably, these extended stays waste not only the time and energy of students, but also the resources of universities and funding bodies.

This week the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), based in Washington DC, released data for attrition and completion rates in 316 doctoral programmes at 29 colleges and universities in the United States. The results, part of an ongoing multi-year project, tell an interesting tale. Completion rates aren't as bad as some had feared: 57% of PhD students get their degree by their tenth year. Many had assumed that this number would be about 50% on the basis of older studies. And in the social sciences and humanities, unlike science and engineering, the proportion actually rises from years 7 to 10. This has implications for how universities run their programmes. "Draconian policies that say 'finish by year 7 or you're out' are probably not a wise move," says CGS president Debra Stewart.

In a separate CGS survey of 1,358 students who had completed their PhD, 80% said that financial support was an important factor in helping them to finish their degree and 63% said mentoring or advising. And most respondents said that the best advice they received from their mentors was related to their research rather than career guidance or teaching. Stewart says that some of the PhD programmes participating in the multi-year project are already attempting to reduce the long stays in graduate school. They have introduced measures such as selecting students who are more likely to finish, offering stipends without teaching obligations after a student's first few years and finding better ways to cater for women who are balancing work and family.

But finding the right intervention will be a difficult, case-by-case endeavour based mostly on anecdotal evidence. Colleges and universities will need to use the data as a guide to find specific courses of action that benefit both them and their students.

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