

The Master's Dissertation Journey: Experiences of a Group of Part Time Students at One University Campus in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The postgraduate journey is often a lonely, difficult, frustrating and stressful experience for many part time students, more so for those who lack a strong foundation in research and academic writing skills. Consequently, many students tend to fall by the wayside or fail to complete the dissertation on time. A narrative inquiry was used to explore the experiences of a cohort of six 'pipeline' students enrolled for a Master's degree in Educational Management. The study sought to uncover factors which may have contributed to their 'pipeline status' and their subsequent slow progress once they had embarked on the dissertation. Qualitative data were collected over a period of three years through the students' personal written narratives, verbal reports and text messages, as well as a journal kept by the researcher. Factors which contributed to slow progress in the dissertation journey were mainly academic, personal, administrative, job-related, and financial. However, the journeys culminated in feelings of appreciation and a sense of academic and intellectual achievement. Institutions should provide supportive academic, financial and administrative structures to minimize the incidence of 'pipeline students'.