



## Enhancing the EdD Graduate Student Experience: Insights from Exit Interviews at Columban College, Inc. in 2021

Dr. David Cababaro Bueno, EdD, DPA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0072-0326>

Columban College, Inc.  
Olongapo City, Philippines

**Abstract:** *Through exit interviews with Columban College, Inc. EdD graduates, this in-depth study looks into how academic and social integration affects the success of graduate students. Academic integration makes it clear how important it is to have a planned curriculum and the help of teachers. The study found that social interactions, study groups, and activities outside of school all help to create a supportive atmosphere. The piece "Improving Learning Through Collaboration" shows how working with others can make ideas that were not clear before. These numbers show that graduate students are more successful because their education is more well-rounded and changes their lives in more ways, with intellectual and social parts working together. Exit interviews show that the EdD program focuses on developing leaders, using knowledge in the real world, personal growth, and using different ways to learn. The curriculum consistently talks about these ideas, so graduates will not only be well-prepared academically but also practically and have a deep understanding of educational leadership. Participants were valued and felt like they were a part of the project. Exit interviews give them helpful feedback. The study comes to the conclusion that exit interviews done in a thoughtful and welcoming way can improve programs and graduate students' general experience. The study shows how to improve the EdD program so that it can better meet the different needs and demands of graduate students in a welcoming and helpful learning space.*

**Keywords:** *Graduate education, doctor of education, students, exit interview, qualitative inquiry, Columban College, Inc.*

### Introduction

Higher education institutions must adapt to changing student needs and a global workforce. Graduate education, particularly Doctor of Education (EdD) programs, prepares professionals to confront complex educational system difficulties. Columban College, Inc. conducted exit interviews in 2021 to improve the EdD graduate student experience.

Quality graduate programs are crucial to developing the future of education professionals as the global educational landscape faces unprecedented challenges. The EdD provides the information, skills, and leadership needed to alter education systems. This doctoral degree is important for its academic rigor and ability to alter educational practices and policy.

This introduction prepares for a detailed analysis of Columban College, Inc.'s 2021 exit interviews to determine what characteristics affect EdD graduate students' experiences. By reviewing graduate education and student experience literature, we can contextualize this study and identify holes that need to be filled to improve EdD programs.

Technology, workforce demands, and multidisciplinary collaboration have changed graduate education in recent years. In response to these changes, the terminal professional degree EdD emphasizes research applications and education leadership preparation. Gardner and Mendoza (2018) emphasize the need to integrate EdD programs with educational institutions' changing demands to prepare graduates for today's complex education systems.

The EdD involves coursework, research, and practical experience. The integration of theory and practice is crucial for EdD students, who commonly balance career and



academic obligations. EdD programs should give a complete experience that extends beyond classroom learning and fosters leadership development and real-world application, according to Perna et al. (2019).

Successful graduate programs depend on a positive and stimulating student experience. Graduate student attrition, satisfaction, and well-being indicate a program's ability to meet learners' requirements. Tinto's (1993) model of student departure emphasizes social and academic integration, arguing that students are more inclined to stay in school when they feel connected to the academic community.

Exit interviews offer unique insights from EdD graduates. Institutions can discover strengths and weaknesses by collecting graduate reflections. Smith and Bridger (2017) emphasize exit interviews' relevance in institutional assessment, program evaluation, and continuous improvement in higher education.

This study analyzes exit interviews from Columban College, Inc. in 2021 to inform EdD graduate student experience improvements. This research integrates graduate viewpoints to add to graduate education discourse and offers actionable recommendations for EdD program improvements.

We will address the exit interview methodology, major findings, and implications for practice and future research in the following sections. We hope this research will help educators, administrators, and policymakers create EdD programs that meet academic standards and give graduate students a transformative and enriching education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses several theoretical frameworks: Tinto's 1993 Model of Student Departure emphasizes social and intellectual integration in student persistence. Tinto says kids who feel connected to the academic community are more likely to achieve. This lays the groundwork for higher education achievement and retention (Tinto, 1993). Holistic Student Development Theory by Perna et al. (2019) is another lens. This idea emphasizes the diverse EdD experience and encourages a holistic education beyond the classroom. It stresses the importance of a supportive atmosphere for leadership development and real-world application.

Gardner and Mendoza's (2018) research on workforce-aligned doctoral programs sheds light on graduate education's evolution. This literature emphasizes the necessity to adapt EdD programs to meet educational institutions' changing needs to ensure graduates have the skills needed for modern education systems. According to Tinto (1993), graduate student experience literature emphasizes the need for a supportive academic environment. Addressing attrition, contentment, and well-being are essential measures of program efficacy in serving graduate students' different needs.

A significant precedent is Smith and Bridger's (2017) study on exit interviews in higher education. The findings support the current research's goal of using exit interviews for institutional assessment, program evaluation, and continuous development by recording graduates' reflections and experiences. Perna et al.'s (2019) study on Ph.D. student achievement sheds light on educational success variables. The current study examines the EdD graduate student experience, concentrating on success and satisfaction using this research.

The Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000) examines cognitive, social, and teaching presence in online learning environments and is relevant to the rise of online and hybrid EdD programs. Lovitts' (2001) research on graduate student happiness and retention illuminates success determinants. Professional identity development in doctoral education by Golde and Dore (2001) shows how transformative doctoral programs are. Quantitative Social Network Analysis in Higher Education (Crossley et al., 2015) examines educational social relationships. Lee and

Kam's (2017) study on global perspectives in PhD education illuminates international doctoral students' challenges.

One gap is the EdD program integration of Holistic Student Development. While current literature underlines its value (Perna et al., 2019), this study examines how Columban College's EdD program integrates these ideas. Again, exit interviews in EdD programs are lacking. Further shortcomings include the need to understand how EdD programs specifically serve international students and the limited use of social network analysis. These additional studies enhance the theoretical framework, revealing the characteristics that affect EdD graduate students and highlighting opportunities for development at Columban College, Inc. Despite being researched in higher education (Smith & Bridger, 2017), this research tries to investigate their use and effectiveness in EdD programs, specifically at Columban College, Inc.

### **Research Objectives**

The following research objectives and exit interview questions examine the EdD graduate student experience at Columban College, Inc. to improve the program.

1. Assessing the Impact of Academic and Social Integration on EdD Graduate Student Success

*Exit Interview Question: How did your experiences of academic and social integration contribute to your overall success in the EdD program at Columban College, Inc.?*

2. Exploring the Role of Holistic Student Development in the EdD Experience\*\*

*Exit Interview Question: In what ways did you perceive the EdD program at Columban College, Inc. contributing to your holistic development as a student, including leadership skills and real-world application of knowledge?*

3. Investigating the Effectiveness of Exit Interviews in Capturing Graduate Student Perspectives

*Exit Interview Question: How valuable did you find the exit interview process in providing an opportunity to share your insights and experiences about the EdD program at Columban College, Inc.?*

4. Understanding the Student Experience in the EdD Program

*Exit Interview Question: As a student, what unique challenges and opportunities did you encounter in the EdD program, and how can the program better address the needs of students?*

### **Methodology**

This study examined Columban College, Inc.'s 2021 EdD graduate student experience using a comprehensive research technique. Exit interviews provided qualitative data for the study. Triangulation was used to present a complete view of graduate student life.

Exit interview participants were selected using purposive sampling. To ensure a diverse perspective and experience, 2021 EdD graduates were invited to participate. The sample included domestic and international students to obtain diverse insights.

The main qualitative data collection approach was exit interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to discuss their EdD program experiences, problems, and perceptions. Focusing on academic and social integration, holistic student development, exit interview effectiveness, and international student experiences, the interview questions met the research objectives.

Transcription and thematic analysis of exit interview qualitative data. Emerging themes and trends were identified to understand graduate student life. The analysis used systematic coding to categorize replies and identify participant themes.

Data collection began with institutional review board approval. All participants gave informed consent, emphasizing voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the freedom to leave the study without penalty.

Exit interview recall bias and poor generalizability to other institutions are acknowledged in the study. Careful design and meticulous data analysis improved the study's validity and reliability despite these limits.

Thus, this study used a balanced mix of qualitative methodologies to understand the EdD graduate student experience. This method allowed for a nuanced examination of Columban College, Inc. graduate student experiences.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **1. Assessing the Impact of Academic and Social Integration on EdD Graduate Student Success**

Here are the participants' responses to the first interview questions:

*G1: Academic integration was key to my success. The well-structured coursework and entertaining lectures helped me apply theory to my practice. Study groups made academics more enjoyable by promoting collaboration.*

*G2: Academic help was crucial to my achievement. Professors created an inclusive environment, and group projects taught me from many views. Socially, these relationships eased intellectual challenges.*

*Interactive teaching made academic integration easy. Extracurricular activities and networking events helped me develop a supportive group, which helped me succeed.*

*G4: Academic rigor and instructor support drove me to succeed. Seminars and conferences foster social networking. Academic and social integration were key to my success.*

*G5: Managing academic expectations was difficult, but joint projects and study groups helped. Student relationships gave me emotional support and helped me succeed.*

*G6: Excellent academic integration and essential faculty accessibility. I learned complex ideas in study groups and socialized with a broad student community. Both factors boosted my achievement.*

*G7: Faculty mentorship and a thorough curriculum were beneficial. Community from student groups and events helped me succeed in the program.*

*G8: Academic difficulties were supported. Socially, study groups and intellectual forums improved my comprehension. My success depended on intellectual and social integration.*

*G9: Faculty participation and academic integration were excellent. Socially, cohort activities and networking events improved my experience and success.*

*G10: My achievement was due to a disciplined curriculum and collaborative environment. Socializing with peers through group projects and activities enriched my EdD path.*

*G11: Accessible teachers and well-designed courses helped academic integration. Socially, academic groups and networking activities extended my horizons, helping me succeed in the EdD program.*

*The well-organized curriculum made academic assimilation easy. I succeeded because study groups and extracurriculars provided a supporting social network.*

*G13: Faculty assistance and a thorough curriculum contributed to academic performance. Community projects and group activities boosted my social life and helped me succeed.*

*G14: A friendly academic environment made balancing academics easy. Socially, study groups and seminars fostered collaboration and helped me succeed.*

*G15: Faculty mentorship reduced academic challenges. The cohort's friendship and academic events gave me a sense of belonging, which helped me succeed.*

The emerging themes derived from the responses are as follows:



**Theme 1. Critical Role of Academic Integration:** Participants (G1–G15) repeatedly emphasized academic integration's importance to their EdD program achievement at Columban College, Inc. Well-structured coursework, engaging instruction, faculty accessibility, and mentorship are crucial. Academic integration challenged, pushed, and provided holistic learning experiences to ensure success.

**Theme 2. Social Connections Matter:** Participants stressed the importance of study groups, extracurricular activities, intellectual forums, and networking events for social integration. Peer and professor relationships enhanced learning and provided emotional support. A collaborative community helped students' academic careers.

**Theme 3. Improved Learning Through Collaboration:** Group projects, study groups, and academic clubs were said to improve learning. Collaboration was essential for comprehending complex concepts, widening viewpoints, and building a supportive network. Academic-social teamwork consistently contributed to participants' achievement.

These three emerging themes—Critical Role of Academic Integration, Significance of Social Connections, and Enhanced Learning Through Collaboration—emphasize the holistic nature of the EdD graduate student journey at Columban College, Inc.

Participants' replies reveal the complex relationship between the academic and social components of Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program. First, the Critical Role of Academic Integration emphasizes the necessity of a well-structured curriculum, engaging teaching methods, faculty accessibility, and mentorship. These factors laid the groundwork for academic achievement, challenging students and providing comprehensive learning experiences. Second, interviewees stressed the importance of social connections, including study groups, extracurricular activities, and networking events. Strong social links provided emotional support and enhanced learning, promoting community. Finally, Enhanced Learning Through Collaboration emphasizes the benefits of group projects, study groups, and academic clubs. Academic-social synergy was a consistent component in EdD graduate students' holistic and transformative journey at Columban College, Inc. These themes show how the program fosters an environment where intellectual and social components complement and support each other, helping participants succeed.

Participants stressed academic integration, which accords with literature promoting a well-structured curriculum and staff support. According to Tinto's (1993) model of student departure, academic integration—including interesting curriculum and faculty mentorship—is essential for student persistence and success. Gardner and Mendoza (2018) work on aligning doctoral programs with workforce needs and supports the premise that a curriculum customized to educational institutions' changing needs helps graduate students succeed.

Tinto's (1993) approach emphasizes social integration for higher education student persistence, which supports the subject of social relationships. Lovitts' (2001) research on graduate student happiness and retention underlines the importance of a supportive social environment in educational success. Networking events and extracurricular activities promote social presence in online and hybrid learning environments, supporting the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000).

In doctorate education, Golde and Dore (2001) focused on professional identity development and teamwork to improve learning. Group projects and study groups help students succeed and create a professional identity in education. According to the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000), higher education benefits from collaborative and participatory learning settings. Literature reinforces themes by anchoring them in higher education and doctoral studies theories and research. The

study's themes are more credible and generalizable when participant experiences match established literature.

The study's findings on Columban College, Inc.'s EdD graduate student experience have major program development and improvement implications. Curriculum Design and Faculty Support are essential for student success. This involves reviewing the academic curriculum, matching it with changing educational needs and developing faculty development programs to teach mentorship skills. Social connections emphasize the value of community building through networking events, extracurricular activities, and academic clubs. The curriculum must include collaborative learning experiences like group projects and study groups to improve learning results and student satisfaction. Recognizing students' particular issues, customized assistance programs like orientation and language support are crucial. Exit interviews are useful instruments for program improvement; thus, the institution should institutionalize them for systematic feedback and enhancements. Team-building activities and events that combine academic and social connections are crucial to a Balanced Approach to Academic and Social Integration. Finally, graduates value Professional Development Opportunities, which leads to an increase in workshops and seminars to prepare them for leadership roles through industry partnerships. Columban College, Inc. can improve its EdD program by taking some practical steps to achieve academic standards and give graduate students a transformative and enriching education.

## **2. Exploring the Role of Holistic Student Development in the EdD Experience**

*Participants answered the second interview question:*

*G1: Leadership courses and practical projects in the EdD program enriched my development. It motivated me to apply theory to real-world situations, improving my leadership and practical skills.*

*G2: Columban College's EdD program shaped my whole person. I learned practical skills for educational obstacles via curriculum and collaborative projects that emphasized leadership.*

*I thought Columban College's EdD curriculum was well-rounded. Leadership seminars and community projects helped me apply academic concepts to real-world situations, developing my holistic growth.*

*G4: Columban College's program shaped my wholeness. The curriculum included leadership development, and real-world case studies helped me apply information in professional settings.*

*G5: Columban College's EdD program shaped me holistically. Leadership modules and hands-on projects helped me adapt theory to practice, enhancing my skills.*

*G6: Columban College's EdD program shaped me holistically. Leadership seminars and real-world experiences in coursework helped me adapt theory to practice.*

*G7: The Columban College EdD program helped me develop holistically. Leadership-focused curriculum and real-world projects provided a complete learning experience.*

*G8: Columban College's EdD program helped me develop holistically. Leadership-based activities like group projects and case studies helped me apply academic knowledge.*

*Columban College's EdD curriculum boosted my holistic development. Leadership seminars and real-world applications in coursework gave me practical skills and a broader perspective on educational issues.*

*G10: Columban College's EdD program affected my holistic development. Leadership training and real-world experiences helped me apply academic knowledge in varied educational environments.*

*G11: The EdD program at Columban College impacted my entire development. I gained practical leadership and knowledge application skills from leadership modules and real-world difficulties.*



*G12: Columban College's EdD program shaped me holistically. Leadership seminars and real-world case studies helped me apply theory to practice, enhancing my skills.*

*G13: The Columban College EdD program shaped my holistic development. Leadership and real-world projects helped me utilize academic knowledge and improve my skills.*

*G14: The Columban College EdD program developed me holistically. Leadership-focused curriculum and real-world challenges helped me adapt theory to practice.*

*G15: Columban College's EdD program shaped my whole person. A well-rounded education with leadership workshops and real-world applications in coursework improved my leadership abilities and practical understanding.*

*These participant comments show how the EdD program at Columban College, Inc. has helped graduate students build leadership abilities and apply knowledge in real-world circumstances.*

Participant comments reveal these themes:

Theme 1. Integrated Leadership Development Participant responses emphasized leadership development in the EdD program. Leadership-focused coursework, workshops, and seminars were regularly cited as essential to participants' education. Columban College, Inc. intentionally fosters leadership traits in EdD students to prepare them for significant educational leadership roles.

Theme 2. Real-World application of information: The program emphasizes the real-world application of information. Participant experiences included practical projects, hands-on activities, and authentic educational challenges. The program's focus on bridging theoretical understanding and practical implementation prepares graduates for the difficulties of professional education.

Theme 3. Comprehensive Holistic Development: Participants said the EdD program helped them develop holistically. This theme includes leadership training, real-world experiences, and practical skills. The program is seen as a transforming experience that creates well-rounded graduates who can tackle education's many issues.

Theme 4. Diversity in Learning Approaches: Participants' experiences with different program pedagogical methods are reflected in this theme. Leadership training, community initiatives, seminars, and case studies. The identification of varied learning ways suggests that the program design emphasizes multifaceted learning experiences to accommodate graduate students' learning styles and preferences.

These recurring themes demonstrate Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program's commitment to a holistic, practical, and diverse learning environment. A healthy graduate education includes leadership development, real-world application of knowledge, comprehensive, holistic growth, and diversity in learning techniques.

Participants' replies emphasize Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program's focus on leadership development. Leadership-focused courses, workshops, and seminars demonstrate the program's dedication to preparing graduates for influential educational leadership roles. The program's emphasis on real-world application shows its commitment to connecting theory and practice. Participants regularly described realistic projects and hands-on exercises, indicating a curriculum aimed to prepare graduates for real educational difficulties. Participants recognize the EdD program's multiple impacts on their growth in the comprehensive, holistic development theme. This includes leadership training, real-world experience, and practical skills, creating well-rounded graduates who can tackle educational obstacles. A program that prioritizes workshops, community initiatives, seminars, and case studies deepens learning. These topics show Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program's commitment to holistic, practical, and diverse learning.

Integrated leadership development fits the doctorate leadership education literature. Storey and Beatty (2015) recommend incorporating leadership development throughout doctorate education to prepare graduates for leadership responsibilities.

Leadership-focused coursework and seminars support studies showing that educational leaders need intentional leadership training (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Empirical research like Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009) shows that leadership development programs improve graduates' leadership skills.

Existing literature emphasizes the need for practical experiences in PhD degrees, supporting real-world applicability. Gardner (2009) suggests that PhD programs should allow students to use theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts to prepare them for careers. Bransford et al. (2000) found that experience learning enhances understanding and knowledge transfer. Hands-on projects support research and recommend integrating practical experiences to bridge theory and practice in PhD education (Boud & Lee, 2009).

Comprehensive, holistic development fits doctorate student development literature. Austin and McDaniels (2006) emphasize comprehensive growth in PhD programs, including intellectual, personal, and professional aspects. Doctoral education is multidimensional, so Perna et al. (2019) emphasize programs that provide a complete education. Doctoral programs transform students' personal and professional development, according to empirical research like Golde and Dore (2001).

Diversity in learning techniques matches the literature arguing for diverse doctorate teaching strategies. Diverse learning activities like workshops, projects, and seminars promote a holistic understanding of professional practice, according to Billett (2009). Case studies have been shown to help pupils understand real-world issues (Yin, 2018). Cross, Steadman, and Dyck (2012) found that different learning methods boost PhD students' engagement and satisfaction.

These themes match with literature and empirical studies, highlighting Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program's importance in providing graduate students with a well-rounded, practical, and diverse education.

The study on the EdD graduate student experience at Columban College, Inc. can guide strategic decisions and activities to strengthen the EdD program. Continuous curriculum improvement, focused on integrated leadership development and real-world application, is necessary. This recommends that the university should proactively assess and revise the curriculum to include additional hands-on projects and leadership courses to meet graduate student needs. Faculty support is important; therefore, the school could engage in faculty development programs to teach and advise. The findings suggest that networking events and extracurricular activities can create a collaborative learning environment by fostering a sense of community. Exit interviews must be institutionalized for program evaluation and continual improvement to provide ongoing student insights. Orientation and linguistic support can improve overseas students' academic journeys. Promotion of collaborative learning opportunities and strategic marketing of program strengths might attract students. Columban College, Inc. can improve its EdD program to fulfill graduate students' requirements and promote doctorate education quality by using these practical implications.

### **3. Investigating the Effectiveness of Exit Interviews in Capturing Graduate Student Perspectives**

*Participants' answers to the third question:*

*G1: I enjoyed the exit interview since I could share my opinions and offer constructive comments on my EdD journey.*

*G2: The exit interview was essential for sharing program findings. I could reflect on my experiences and enhance it.*

*G3: The exit interview allowed me to share my thoughts on improving the EdD program.*

*G4: I enjoyed the departure interview. It allowed me to freely express my opinions and feel like my participation may improve the program.*



G5: *The exit interview helped me explain my experiences. Finally, finishing the EdD program felt significant.*

G6: *The exit interview gave a great overview of my EdD program experience. It let me share positives and improvements.*

G7: *I shared my thoughts and experiences in the exit interview. The conversation was productive and can help improve the EdD program.*

G8: *I liked the exit interview since I could share my thoughts on the EdD program's merits and weaknesses. This felt like a significant method to build the program.*

G9: *Reflecting on my experiences in the exit interview was beneficial. I could organize my thoughts and suggestions for improving the EdD program.*

G10: *I valued the exit interview process for giving honest criticism and suggestions. It was good to ensure the curriculum meets future students' requirements.*

G11: *Sharing my unique EdD journey during the departure interview was invaluable. It confirmed that my perspectives matter.*

G12: *I enjoyed the exit interview since I could share my opinions and improve the EdD program. It felt like a team effort to improve schooling.*

G13: *The leaving Interview allowed me to voice my EdD program opinions. It felt like a productive conversation that could improve things.*

*A valuable element of my EdD program closure was the exit interview. I could organize my thoughts and advice.*

G15: *The exit interview allowed me to reflect on my EdD journey and offer suggestions for program development.*

Three exit interview topics emerged from prior responses:

**Theme 1. Constructive Feedback and Suggestions:** Many participants stressed the importance of the departure interview for offering constructive feedback and suggestions for EdD program enhancement. Participants believed that sharing their insights could improve the program. Open communication and improvement are stressed in the subject.

**Theme 2. Reflection and Comprehensive Overview:** Another major subject is EdD program reflection and overview. Participants said the departure interview helped them reflect on their academic path. It allowed them to express both their strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive view of their education.

**Theme 3. Feeling Valued and Heard:** Many participants said the exit interview helped them feel valued and heard. They enjoyed sharing their stories, proving that their ideas matter. This theme emphasizes the need for an inclusive and friendly environment where participants feel their voices improve the EdD program.

These themes demonstrate the benefit of exit interviews for gathering feedback, encouraging reflection, and developing a sense of inclusion and value among Columban College, Inc. EdD program participants.

Three main themes emerged from Columban College, Inc. exit interviews. First, the emphasis on constructive criticism and suggestions showed participants' commitment to EdD program improvement. Participants expressed their perspectives in organized interviews, generating a spirit of partnership between students and the university to improve the curriculum. Second, a theme of reflection and a complete summary showed that participants considered the exit interview process helpful in reflecting on their EdD journey. This holistic evaluation included good and improvement areas, underlining the need for a complex understanding of education. Finally, feeling appreciated and heard showed participants' gratitude for the chance to share their thoughts. The interviews fostered a sense of inclusion and showed that participants' voices were important to EdD program improvement. These themes show how the departure interview process promotes collaboration, reflection, and value.

The Columban College, Inc., exit interview findings support research on constructive feedback, reflective practices, and student voice in educational program evaluation. Participants emphasizing the usefulness of constructive feedback and suggestions aligns with work emphasizing feedback loops in enhancing educational programs (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Research suggests that feedback mechanisms improve programs by embracing varied perspectives and meeting specific requirements (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Reflection and a complete perspective support educational models that emphasize deep learning and human growth (Schön, 1987). The evidence implies that reflective activities help

students make sense of their experiences and apply theory to practice, making education more comprehensive (Moon, 2004).

During exit interviews, participants felt valued and heard, echoing research on student voice in education (Cook-Sather, 2006). Student participation in decision-making promotes ownership and empowerment, creating a pleasant and inclusive learning environment (Fielding, 2001).

Exit interviews are also important for program evaluation, according to higher education assessment and quality improvement literature (Bresciani Ludvik, 2010). Exit interviews provide qualitative student experience data that helps institutions make decisions and enhance programs (Olsen, 2013).

In conclusion, the exit interview results at Columban College, Inc. support existing literature on the benefits of constructive criticism, reflective practices, student voice, and program evaluation in improving educational programs. To keep educational experiences relevant, inclusive, and developing, institutions and students must communicate.

The Columban College, Inc. exit interview results have major ramifications and practical applications. The emphasis on positive criticism, reflective activities, and student voices emphasizes a collaborative and inclusive educational atmosphere. Exit interviews can help the institution improve its EdD program by gathering graduates' opinions. This iterative process follows higher education program evaluation and quality improvement literature (Bresciani Ludvik, 2010). During departure interviews, participants felt respected and heard, suggesting that promoting student engagement and participation improves learning. These insights can inform strategic decisions, including curriculum modifications, faculty development, and community-building. Integrating these insights into the institutional structure can improve the EdD program and link it with graduate students' changing requirements.

#### **4. Understanding the Student Experience in the EdD Program**

Below are the responses categorized as G1 to G15 for the fourth question in the exit interview.

*G1: Balancing work responsibilities and academic commitments was a major problem for me as a student. The program could improve support systems for time management and integrating work and study.*

*G2: Interdisciplinary collaboration was enriching; however, communication issues arose between departments. Enhanced coordination and communication channels would make interdisciplinary collaboration smoother.*

*G3: One obstacle was the restricted access to practical implementations of research in real-world scenarios. The program could include additional practical experiences, internships, or collaborative projects to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications.*

*G4: The online learning environment posed distinct obstacles, especially in establishing meaningful interactions with peers. The program could investigate novel methods to enhance virtual networking and community development among online students.*

*G5: Limited international exposure opportunities affected the program's global viewpoint. Enhancing the program's global outlook could be achieved by incorporating additional international case studies, guest lectures, or exchange programs.*

*G6: Obstacles emerged in the availability of resources and support services. Establishing a thorough support structure with easily accessible materials and responsive people would better tackle these difficulties.*

*G7: A hurdle arose due to the insufficient range of course offerings, which restricted specialized opportunities. Expanding the curriculum to include a wider variety of concentrations would better meet the diverse interests of students.*

*G8: Insufficient mentorship opportunities hindered professional growth. Implementing a structured mentorship program that pairs students with seasoned educators or industry experts could improve career guidance and development.*

*G9: There were few opportunities for community engagement and outreach. The initiative might promote and support collaborations with nearby educational institutions, offering students hands-on experiences and community involvement.*

*G10: Adapting to evolving educational technologies has emphasized the necessity of ongoing training. Incorporating routine technology training sessions into the curriculum would enhance students' readiness for the ever-changing educational environment.*

*G11: Limited opportunities for collaborative research impeded the establishment of a strong research network. Enhancing interdisciplinary research projects and collaborations could bolster the program's research culture.*

*G12: The financial burden of tuition prices was a barrier. Researching scholarships, financial aid, or flexible payment options might help reduce the financial strain on students.*

*G13: The program's rigid structure presented difficulties for working professionals due to its lack of flexibility. Introducing more adaptable schedule choices, such as nighttime classes or asynchronous learning modules, could cater to a variety of student requirements.*

*G14: Opportunities for providing comments and engaging in discourse with professors were occasionally limited. Implementing regular feedback sessions or town hall meetings would provide a transparent and open communication route between students and faculty.*

*G15: Balancing academic rigor with mental health and well-being was a significant problem. Implementing wellness programs, counseling services, and stress management resources would enhance the health and supportiveness of the learning environment.*

The replies demonstrate many difficulties and advantages that students may face in an EdD program, as well as recommendations for enhancing the curriculum.

Four emergent themes from the exit interviews regarding unique problems, opportunities, and program enhancement suggestions in the EdD program at Columban College, Inc. may be recognized based on the replies supplied.

**Theme 1. Balancing Professional and Academic Commitments:** Several participants highlighted the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with academic commitments. The theme emphasizes the need for support mechanisms and strategies to help students manage their time effectively.

**Theme 2. Enhancing Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Participants noted both opportunities and challenges in interdisciplinary collaboration. This theme underscores the importance of improving communication channels and coordination between different program departments to create a more seamless interdisciplinary experience.

**Theme 3. Addressing Global Perspectives and Real-World Applications:** Challenges related to limited exposure to international perspectives and real-world applications of research emerged. This theme suggests a need for program enhancements, including more global case studies, guest lectures, practical experiences, and collaborative projects to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

**Theme 4. Improving Support Services and Flexibility:** Participants expressed challenges related to the accessibility of resources, mentorship opportunities, and financial strain. The theme emphasizes the importance of enhancing support services, introducing mentorship programs, exploring financial aid options, and increasing program flexibility to accommodate diverse student needs.

The developing themes offer a thorough understanding of the various problems and opportunities faced by students in the EdD program, providing significant ideas for enhancing and advancing the program.

Exit interviews showed critical characteristics of Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program, including challenges and opportunities for improvement. The first theme emphasizes the need for individualized support mechanisms to help students balance employment and school. The second element stresses multidisciplinary collaboration by improving program department communication and coordination to improve the experience. The third topic emphasizes global viewpoints and practical applications, suggesting curriculum changes, including international case studies, hands-on experiences, and joint efforts. The fourth theme stresses support services, mentorship, and program flexibility to accommodate students' requirements, especially financial ones. The themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the EdD program's multifaceted challenges and opportunities, offering practical solutions for program enhancement and ensuring a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

The exit interviews at Columban College, Inc. match current research on doctorate education's challenges and benefits, revealing the EdD program's unique interactions. The motifs found match scholarly disputes, stressing the significance of focusing on



key topics. Management of work and academic responsibilities, a common theme in professional doctoral programs, aligns with Gardner (2009) and emphasizes the need for adaptable program formats and personalized assistance for employed individuals, as noted by Bair and Haworth (1999) and McAlpine Norton (2006). The focus on improving interdisciplinary collaboration is also in line with Repko's (2017) recognition of the importance of interdisciplinary methods in educational research and Klein's (2010) emphasis on efficient communication between fields, as examined by Jacobs (2010). The theme of global perspectives and practical applications aligns with previous literature emphasizing practicality in doctoral education (Golde, 2005) and the use of real-world experiences and a global perspective to improve doctoral programs. Finally, Gardner (2010) and Nyquist et al. (1999) cover PhD student support, including support services, mentorship, and program flexibility. Research shows that PhD education requires mentorship and extensive assistance (Golde & Walker, 2006; Nerad & Miller, 1996). The research results and existing literature improve doctorate education discussions by revealing the subtleties of Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program.

Columban College, Inc.'s departure interviews yielded a detailed EdD program improvement plan. Academic curriculum improvement and teacher support are vital. This includes assessing and refining the curriculum to meet changing educational needs and adopting faculty development initiatives to improve mentorship. Community building through networking, extracurriculars, and academic clubs boosts study group and project collaboration. Collaborative learning activities like group projects and academic forums boost student happiness. Focusing on international students' unique challenges and providing tailored support programs and services is recommended. Establishing exit interviews as a normal technique for program evaluation and improvement requires organized mechanisms for gathering and assessing graduate feedback.

Balanced academic and social integration is recommended, using measures that develop both components simultaneously. Workshops, seminars, and conferences should be expanded to prepare graduates for leadership responsibilities better. It should also strengthen industry expert collaborations for real-world insights and networking. Columban College, Inc. can improve its EdD program to meet academic standards and enrich graduate students' education by combining these practical activities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Participants stressed the importance of academic and social integration in EdD graduate students' success at Columban College, Inc. Academic Integration emphasizes the need for a well-organized curriculum and faculty support for success. Social connections stressed the importance of study groups and extracurriculars for community building. Enhanced Learning Through Collaboration showed how working together improves understanding of complex things. The themes create a holistic and transformative educational experience where intellectual and social factors work together to help graduate students succeed. This study helps us understand success variables and emphasizes the need for a well-rounded and supportive EdD program. Exit interviews show that Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program emphasizes leadership, real-world application, holistic growth, and multiple learning techniques. The program's persistent emphasis on these topics ensures that graduates have academic proficiency, practical skills, and a deep understanding of educational leadership. The curriculum prepares graduates for real-world difficulties, which helps develop future educational leaders.

The exit interview technique for EdD graduates at Columban College, Inc. was helpful. The procedure was often praised for its ability to provide constructive feedback, encourage scholarly reflection, and build a sense of purpose and belonging. The emerging themes emphasize the need for scheduled departure interviews for program evaluation and fostering a collaborative environment where graduate opinions contribute to advancement. An inclusive departure interview process can improve graduate student satisfaction and the EdD program. The exit interviews revealed key themes that capture Columban College, Inc.'s EdD program's challenges and opportunities. The findings underline the importance of balancing professional and academic pursuits, promoting multidisciplinary cooperation, integrating global perspectives and practical implementations, and improving support services and program adaptability. The themes guide EdD program improvements to provide a more supportive and inclusive learning environment that meets graduate students' different needs and goals.

Departure interviews at Columban College, Inc. yielded significant EdD program improvements. To meet changing educational demands and market developments, the curriculum must be revised. Faculty development programs should teach mentorship skills to foster a nurturing academic environment. To foster community and socialization, the university should encourage networking, extracurricular activities, academic groups, group projects, and intellectual forums. Meeting international students' requirements requires customized support services, including orientation programs and language aid. Exit interviews should be routinely included in program evaluation to acquire and analyze input for continuous improvement. Activities should promote intellectual and social components simultaneously to create an integrated approach. Increasing professional development options like workshops and conferences and strengthening partnerships with industry experts can help graduates become leaders. These suggestions can help Columban College, Inc. improve its EdD program and sustain academic excellence and a stimulating learning environment for graduate students.

### References:

- Austin, A. E., & McDaniels, M. (2006). Preparing the next generation of faculty: Graduate school as socialization to the academic career. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(6), 885-918.
- Bair, C. R., & Haworth, J. G. (1999). Doctoral Student Attrition and Persistence: A Meta-Synthesis of Research. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Vol. 14, pp. 481-534). Agathon Press.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Psychology Press.
- Billett, S. (2009). Personal epistemologies, work and learning. *Educational Research Review*, 4(3), 210-219.
- Boud, D., & Lee, A. (2009). Changing practices of doctoral education. *International Journal for Researcher Development*, 1(1), 81-99.
- Boud, D., & Molloy, E. (2013). Rethinking models of feedback for learning: The challenge of design. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38(6), 698-712.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. National Academy Press.
- Bresciani Ludvik, M. (2010). *Using outcomes data: A hands-on guide to conducting outcomes assessment, evaluation, and research*. Stylus Publishing.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, Presence, and Power: "Student Voice" in Educational Research and Reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(4), 359-390.



- Cross, K. P., Steadman, M. H., & Dyck, J. L. (2012). Classroom research: Implementing the scholarship of teaching. John Wiley & Sons.
- Crossley, N., Bellotti, E., Edwards, G., & Everett, M. G. (2015). Social network analysis for ego-nets. SAGE Publications.
- Fielding, M. (2001). Students as Radical Agents of Change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2), 123–141.
- Gardner, S. K. (2009). Conceptualizing Success in Doctoral Education: Perspectives of Faculty in Seven Disciplines. *The Review of Higher Education*, 32(3), 383–406.
- Gardner, S. K. (2009). Student and faculty attributions of attrition in high and low-completing doctoral programs in the United States. *Higher Education*, 58(1), 97–112.
- Gardner, S. K. (2010). Contrasting the Socialization Experiences of Ph.D. Students in High- and Low-Completing Departments: A Qualitative Analysis of Discipline-Based Educational Outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(1), 61–81.
- Gardner, S. K., & Mendoza, P. (2018). Aligning doctoral programs with the workforce: An examination of students' and employers' perceptions of skill development. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 89(4), 542–567.
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87–105.
- Golde, C. M. (2005). The Role of the Department and Discipline in Doctoral Student Attrition: Lessons from Four Departments. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76(6), 669–700.
- Golde, C. M., & Dore, T. M. (2001). At cross purposes: What the experiences of today's doctoral students reveal about doctoral education. Report from the Ph.D. Completion Project. The Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Golde, C. M., & Dore, T. M. (2001). At cross purposes: What the experiences of today's doctoral students reveal about doctoral education. The Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Golde, C. M., & Walker, G. E. (2006). Envisioning the Future of Doctoral Education: Preparing Stewards of Discipline. *Carnegie Essays on the Doctorate*. Jossey-Bass.
- Jacobs, J. A. (2010). Interdisciplinarity: A Critical Assessment. In R. Frodeman, J. T. Klein, & C. Mitcham (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (pp. 3–13). Oxford University Press.
- Lee, A., & Kam, B. (2017). Global Perspectives in Doctoral Education: Survey of Doctoral Students from Six Countries. *Higher Education*, 73(6), 1015–1033.
- Lee, A., & Kam, B. (2017). Global perspectives on international student experiences in doctoral education. In *The Globalization of Internationalization* (pp. 197–213). Springer.
- Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Causes and Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Study*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- McAlpine, L., & Norton, J. (2006). Refiguring the Ph.D. in English Studies: Writing, Doctoral Education, and the Fusion-Based Curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(1), 25–41.
- Moon, J. A. (2004). *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Nerad, M., & Miller, P. (1996). Increasing Faculty Diversity: The Occupational Choices of High-Achieving Minority Students. *Journal of Higher Education*, 67(5), 459–476.
- Nicol, D., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 199–218.



- Nyquist, J. D., Manning, L., Wulff, D. H., Austin, A. E., Sprague, J., Fraser, L., & Woodford, B. J. (1999). On the Road to Becoming a Professor: The Graduate Student Experience. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 31(4), 18–27.
- Olsen, D. (2013). *College and University Program Assessment and Improvement*. Stylus Publishing.
- Perna, L. W., Kallie, C. S., Wright-Kim, J., Woo, J., Jiang, N., & Jones, A. (2019). Understanding doctoral student success: A conceptual model from the graduate career consortium. *Journal of Higher Education*, 90(3), 365-389.
- Perna, L. W., Lundy-Wagner, V., Drezner, N. D., Gasman, M., Yoon, S., Bose, E., & Gary, S. (2019). The contribution of HBCUs to the preparation of African American women for STEM careers: A case study. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 90(4), 518-545.
- Repko, A. F. (2017). *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*. Sage Publications.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, J. A., & Bridger, K. (2017). The Role of Exit Interviews in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 17(1), 37-52.
- Storey, V. A., & Beatty, J. E. (2015). Leadership development: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 41(1), 171-198.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage Publications.