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The Finish Line: Doctoral Students and the Great Race

Marilyn L. Grady

A book by A. J. Cronin was the source of my career inspiration. Cronin wrote novels set in the life of the university. The university and the work of the professor became my career ambition. It took a number of years to achieve my goal of being a university professor.

Today, a major portion of my university work is advising doctoral students. The national data on completion of doctoral programs are grim. I, like many of my colleagues, strive to assist students in completing their doctoral studies. However, despite my efforts to facilitate their studies, I am constantly reminded that the students face many hurdles in completing their doctoral programs.

More than 50 of my students have completed doctoral degrees. When I consider these individuals, I am reminded of the distinctive factors they brought to doctoral study such as:

- Family
- Distance
- Time
- Work
- Resistance
- Health issues
- Support

This list is not unique. However, as I approach another graduation ceremony at the university, I am reminded that having *ôsupportö* during the completion of the degree certainly makes the race swifter. In my contact with doctoral students, I have been aware of individuals who have had husbands, wives, or mates who cooked, cleaned, managed childcare, encouraged, chauffeured, or cheered along the course. Some students have had husbands, wives, or mates who had doctoral degrees, understood the race-course, and offered an extra dose of encouragement. Other students have had husbands, wives, or mates who were simply good friends and generous supporters.

The ideal would be for all students to have a support system to encourage them along the way. To those of us standing along the sidelines, the challenge is to be attentive to supporting others in their race to the finish line.