

How Franklin University Gained More Doctoral Students with Reveal's Help

CASE STUDY



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Growth Consultants



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UNIVERSITY

Makes It Possible

About Franklin University

Franklin University is a private, nonprofit university that, for 120 years, has offered relevant and flexible degree programs to working adults. Today, it offers classes at its main campus in downtown Columbus, Ohio, several regional and nationwide locations, and online.

Franklin has a single-minded mission: to make education possible for the broadest community of learners. To support this mission, Franklin offers 35 bachelor's degree programs, 22 Master's degree programs, and 9 doctoral degree programs. It also provides an unusual level of support to help working adults balance their education with the rest of their lives.



> The Challenge

Although Franklin has been offering undergraduate programs online for 20 years and master's level programs online for over a decade, the doctorate online programs were only added recently. Adding masters level programs online was not difficult because the structure of a master's program is essentially the same as an undergraduate program. But doctorate programs presented some unique challenges due to the significant self-study and dissertation. The Franklin leadership team knew that they could not achieve their objectives for their doctorate programs through internal invention; they needed to hear directly from their adult learners to understand how to make improvements that mattered.

To better understand the doctoral students' experience, the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management launched an initiative to gain the Voice of the Doctoral Student. A similar effort had been completed for the undergraduate population which, with Reveal's help, had improved full funnel conversion in those programs. Because of the University's prior positive experience working with Urko and his team, along with the rigor of their Jobs-to-Be-Done (JTBD) approach, partnering with Urko was the natural choice for the doctorate program study.

> The Solution

After a couple of meetings, Franklin's leadership team and Urko agreed on the following three objectives for the doctoral student study:

1. Identify opportunities for improvement throughout the student journey.
2. Determine why students are leaving the program in three stages of the student journey:
 - ✓ After registering and before starting classes (to reduce the number of "balkers").
 - ✓ After starting classes and before completing three trimesters.
 - ✓ After completing their course work and before completing their dissertation.
3. Further the University's aspiration of being the premier doctorate institution in the country for making academic achievement possible for the broadest community of learners.

To accomplish these objectives, Urko collaborated with Franklin's Student Affairs and Enrollment Management team to recruit students for personal interviews. This enabled Reveal to interview a mix of prospective, current, and graduated students, as well as students who had dropped out.



> The Results

The findings revealed dozens of functional, emotional, and social “jobs” that doctoral students are trying to get done throughout the various stages of the student journey as well as barriers that led some students to drop out.

These findings revealed themes that informed the University in how to improve its conversion strategies in the “getting started” process as well as how to develop a new doctoral retention model to support student success during the self-study and dissertation phase of the program.

> One Key Finding and Franklin’s Response

For example, one key finding was that students were dropping out due to the unrelenting pace of the course work. The primary reason students were experiencing the course work as “unrelenting” was because they had to take two overlapping courses at the same time.

Historically, Franklin had scheduled classes over an 18-week period for the fall and spring. To complete the course work in two academic years as expected, students were required to take two courses every term. In the fall and spring term, students would start one course at the beginning of the term and then add a second course six weeks into the term. This meant students had to take one course for the first six weeks, then two courses overlapping for the second six weeks, with a single course for the final six weeks. The schedule looked like this:

Historical 18-Week Term (Fall and Spring)																		
Wks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
C1	█	█	█	█	█	█												
C2							█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

The summer 12-week term was even more “unrelenting” in that it required students to take two overlapping courses for the full 12 weeks. It looked like this:

Historical 12-Week Term (Summer)												
Wks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
C1	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
C2	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

One Key Finding and Franklin's Response (Cont.)

After some discussion, the Franklin team decided to change all the doctoral courses from twelve-weeks to eight-weeks. This eliminated all overlapping courses for the 18-week fall and winter terms and provided a two-week hiatus in-between. It also reduced the 12 weeks of overlapping classes in the summer term to just four weeks. Overall, the number of weeks of overlapping courses that a student has to take to complete all course work in Franklin's two-year schedule has been reduced from 48 weeks to only 8 weeks. The new schedules look like this:

New 18-Week Term (Fall and Spring)																		
Wks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
C1 & C2																		

New 12-Week Term (Summer)													
Wks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
C1													
C2													

Since these changes have been implemented, students have said that the pace of the courses is much easier to maintain. Because the course-overlap has been completely eliminated in the fall and spring terms, students can focus on taking just one course at a time and still complete two courses each term.

This new schedule has enabled students to complete the program faster. Before the changes, many students took only a single course during each term to avoid the stress of two overlapping courses. Today, because of the new format, most students are on a two-course per term schedule.



“We were pleased that the change to an eight-week course effectively addressed the students concerns about the pace of the course work while still maintaining academic quality and a robust curriculum.”

– WENDELL SEABORNE, Ph.D.
Dean of Doctoral Studies &
Academic Research

> Another Important Finding and Franklin's Response

Another important finding was that some students were dropping out due to self-doubt about their ability to complete the course work, self-study, and dissertation in the dissertation phase of the program (after the core course work). Originally, for the dissertation phase of the program, Franklin had required three courses of three-credit hours each, lasting for 12 weeks. The intensity of the course work along with the demands of self-study and writing the dissertation, however, were too much for some students. Understanding this led Franklin to examine the structure of its courses in the dissertation phase of the program to find a better solution for its candidates.

In response to this finding, Franklin developed a new course format for candidates in which they could select from 1 to 4 credit hours, which lasted for the entire term. This enabled candidates to identify what work they believed they could complete within the new structure and proceed with confidence. This new format also gave candidates an additional six weeks in the fall and spring terms for self-study and writing their dissertations. Where in the past candidates had struggled to meet all the requirements within the 12-week course requirements, now most candidates are able to complete their dissertation work within the slated three terms and complete their degree on schedule.

Students/candidates have expressed deep satisfaction with these two changes (and others). Franklin's faculty believes that students/candidates are performing better and seem to have higher engagement due to their greater satisfaction with the format and schedules of the programs now.



> The Impact

While it's impossible to determine the exact impact of the Reveal study alone since Franklin executed dozens of growth initiatives concurrently with the project, it's clear that Reveal had an important role in this success. Overall, the University has successfully increased the number of accepted and registered students as well as its full-funnel conversion rate. Retention is currently hovering around 86%, which is very strong. These encouraging results speak to the importance of understanding the student experience and working to ensure that any barriers or challenges are removed wherever possible.

> Client Testimonial

“When I think about the results that Urko and his team were able to deliver, I would categorize them in two ways. First, he provided actual recordings of conversations with students to us so that we could hear directly from them very pointed questions which helped us understand their experience. And that led to some very actionable outcomes. He both reinforced some things we knew we needed to address and change to make our student experience a little better. And then he also revealed new opportunities where we hadn't gotten there in our conversations with students yet, and they had some real concrete insights for us about some things we might do to make things better and improve. The quality of the work, the conversations he was having with our prospective students and now our current students was very, very helpful, insightful, and actionable.”

– LYNNE ROUZER, Ph.D.

Senior Vice President, Student Affairs & Enrollment Management

> About Reveal Growth Consultants, Inc.

We help organizations get game-changing customer insights, differentiate, and grow.

You know how hard it is for many companies to stand out from the competition?

That's often because they don't know which of their customers' needs remain unmet.

So, we use a breakthrough approach called [Jobs-to-Be-Done](#) (JTBD) that reveals customers' unmet needs including those needs that most people think are "latent and inarticulate" (i.e., needs that customers cannot tell us). Revealing these unmet needs enables our clients to create unique value, stand out, and grow in a reliable manner.

No more guesswork. Just clear, actionable, potentially game-changing customer insights.

Learn more at our [website](#) or [schedule some time](#) to talk with me.



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