

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Discussion

In this study we have investigated (1) the causes of graduate students not finishing their studies on time, (2) the satisfaction of graduate students with their studies, (3) the relationship between time taken by the student to complete their degree, their satisfaction with the study program, and other relevant determinants. There were 733 of the graduate students who finished their Masters Degree and gave permission to attend the graduation ceremony in 2002 at Prince of Songkla University who were selected to participate in this study. There were 307 completed questionnaires. This questionnaire was developed by the Graduate School, Prince of Songkla University.

The data for this study include one continuous outcome (time taken to complete the degree) and 39 ordinal outcomes (satisfaction scores coded on a five-point scale), and 13 student-based determinants. Three steps of analysis are used. First, factor analysis is used to reduce the dimensionality of the ordinal outcomes. Second, univariate analysis is used to investigate associations between the determinants and the outcomes. The statistical methods used are t-tests and analysis of variance. Finally, multiple regression analysis is used for fitting models, with backward elimination to derive reduced models.

5.1 Conclusions

The results are as follows. The time taken to complete the degree is related to the area of study (graduate's major) and determination on thesis completion. Eleven factors arise from the factor analysis: (1) *friendly classmates*, (2) *expert teacher*, (3) *well known institute*, (4) *good facilities*, (5) *good technology*, (6) *good management*, (7) *good curriculum*, (8) *practical program*, (9) *friendly teacher*, (10) *good teaching*, and (11) *good environment*. Factors 2, 3, 4 and 9 are correlated with the graduate's major, and factor 4 is correlated with both the program (requiring a thesis or not requiring a thesis) and determination on thesis completion (continuously or interrupted).

New graduate students would benefit if they knew in advance that their choice of area of study is an important predictor of the time it takes them to complete the degree and the satisfaction they get from doing the degree. The university should provide a better

environment for graduate students, especially with respect to its facilities for study and the expertise and friendliness of the teachers.

5.2 Discussion

The causes of graduate students not finishing their studies on time. It is not surprising that the main determinant of this outcome is the major area of study, usually synonymous with the department. The department is the administrative unit that has the most influence on a student's well-being. If a department has a philosophy of wanting to help the students finish on time, the students will usually complete their degree on time, irrespective of other factors. With respect to the other determinant found to be related to the time to completion, namely the mode of doing the thesis, our study confirms that not being required to do a thesis saves a lot of time (almost one year), and that for those students who are required to do a thesis, those who work on it continuously finish fastest. These results are as expected.

From the results we found that there is no association between age and time to completion of degree. This is due to the fact that the area of study of the younger student is science, which requires a thesis and there is a determination by students on thesis completion whereas the older students generally do not enrol in science, but rather enrol in programs such as education or MBA, MPA programs, which do not require a thesis. We found that program of study is associated with time to completion of degree, graduate students who enrol in programs that do not require a thesis take less time to complete their degree. Nearly all students in plan B have full time work and take less time to complete a degree.

The area of graduate study is associated with time for completion of degree, it was found that the MPA, MBA and nursing students take less time to complete their degree than those doing humanities, natural resources, and other miscellaneous majors because most of them study by not requiring a thesis program and full time work but humanities majors take longer than all other graduate students because as requiring a thesis program, and depend on research methodology they get, study design, and descriptive or document research are affected to the time for completed of degree.

Graduate students who have full time work while doing a thesis take less time for completion of degree than those who have part time work or who are unemployed.

Because they realise that they have a limited time for study before they have to go back to work, and they don't worry about not being able to employment on completion of their degree. Graduates who are unemployed have family or parents to support them, they may not alert.

Graduates who answered "good" or "not confident" in English search skill take less time to completed their degrees than those the graduates who answer "very good" because most of graduates who answer "very good" study as requiring a thesis program. They have to search articles in English because most of majors lack off articles in Thai or don't have articles in Thai. Most of graduates who answered "good" or "not confident" in English search skill study as not requiring a thesis. They take less time for completed of degree.

The satisfaction of graduate students with their studies is divided into a number of dimensions. Among these dimensions, the teachers' expertise, the institute's recognition rating, the quality of its facilities, and the friendliness of its teachers are all correlated with the graduate's choice of major. This result is not surprising and is consistent with findings of The Graduate School, Prince of Songkla University (2004) that the following roles of the supervisor or lecturer were important: to provide students with understanding, care and kindness, and to give advice appropriately when students do something wrong in their thesis. This study is also consistent with findings of Pongpullponsak et al (2004) that a good characteristic of the lecturer is a good relationship between lecturer and students, and library resources, computer service sufficiency and laboratory equipment are important for student satisfaction, and with a finding of Vanitsuppavong (2003) that the factors most affecting decisions to enrol in the Master's Degree Programs in Education at Prince of Songkla University is the teachers' expertise.

5.3 Study Limitations

This study is incomplete analysis. We investigated the time to completion of degree and satisfaction of their studies on the student-base determinants only. Other variables included in the questionnaire, such as the characteristics of the advisor, the curriculum, and the institute, and an open-ended question aimed at getting some idea of the feelings of the graduates about their experiences, expressed in their own words, are omitted from

consideration because they could not adequately be dealt with the time available.

A serious limitation of the study is the questionnaire instrument itself. The questionnaire is much too long and should be shortened considerably, focusing on the most important items of information rather than attempting completeness. As a result, fewer than half of the graduates who were invited to complete the questionnaire actually completed it, and this could have resulted in selection bias.