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# Effectively Managing Time to Degree: Best Practices for Doctoral Advising

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# Effectively Managing Time to Degree:

## Best Practices for Doctoral Advising

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in Collaboration with Marianne Di Pierro, Director, Graduate Center for Research and Retention



### Project Description

The intent of this project is to identify best practices in doctoral advising at WMU and in the professional literature. This project aims to support the goal of reducing the time to degree for graduate programs at WMU, which is identified as an indicator in the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan 2010. This project will focus on time to degree (TTD) for doctoral students at WMU.

#### Phase I: Data Gathering & Review of Key Literature

- Gather WMU data on doctoral programs
- Collect & review literature
- Academic Leadership Academy Poster Presentation

#### Phase II: Research Project

- Refine project and gain HSIRB approval
- Identify 2 WMU doctoral programs each in the: a) sciences, b) humanities, and c) social sciences
- Conduct focus groups and utilize electronic surveys with faculty doctoral advisors, advanced students and recent graduates
- Identify factors that facilitate and inhibit timely degree completion

#### Phase III: Distribution of Findings

- Develop & distribute a doctoral advising best practice info sheet
- Share results with key WMU stakeholders & administrators
- Conduct a workshop at WMU for doctoral advisors on TTD
- Submit manuscript for publication

### Desired Outcomes

#### Short-term:

1. Increase awareness of faculty of current data for time in degree for their doctoral program.
2. Identification of best practices for excellent programs at WMU.
3. Identification of best practices in the professional literature for effectively managing time to degree for doctoral studies.
3. Identification of barriers or obstacles that lead to longer time in degree.
5. Develop and distribute to doctoral program faculty and chairs an informational sheet on strategies for effectively managing time to degree and best practices for doctoral advising.

#### Long-term:

1. Reduce average time to degree for doctoral studies at WMU
2. Reduce time to degree for those programs that have especially long averages for time to degree.

### Measuring Time to Degree

**Elapsed TTD:** Time from entry into doctoral degree to the awarding of the degree (can be difficult to measure when master's is attained along way and lack of clear beginning of doctorate).

**Total TTD:** # of years between awarding of the baccalaureate and the attainment of the doctoral degree.

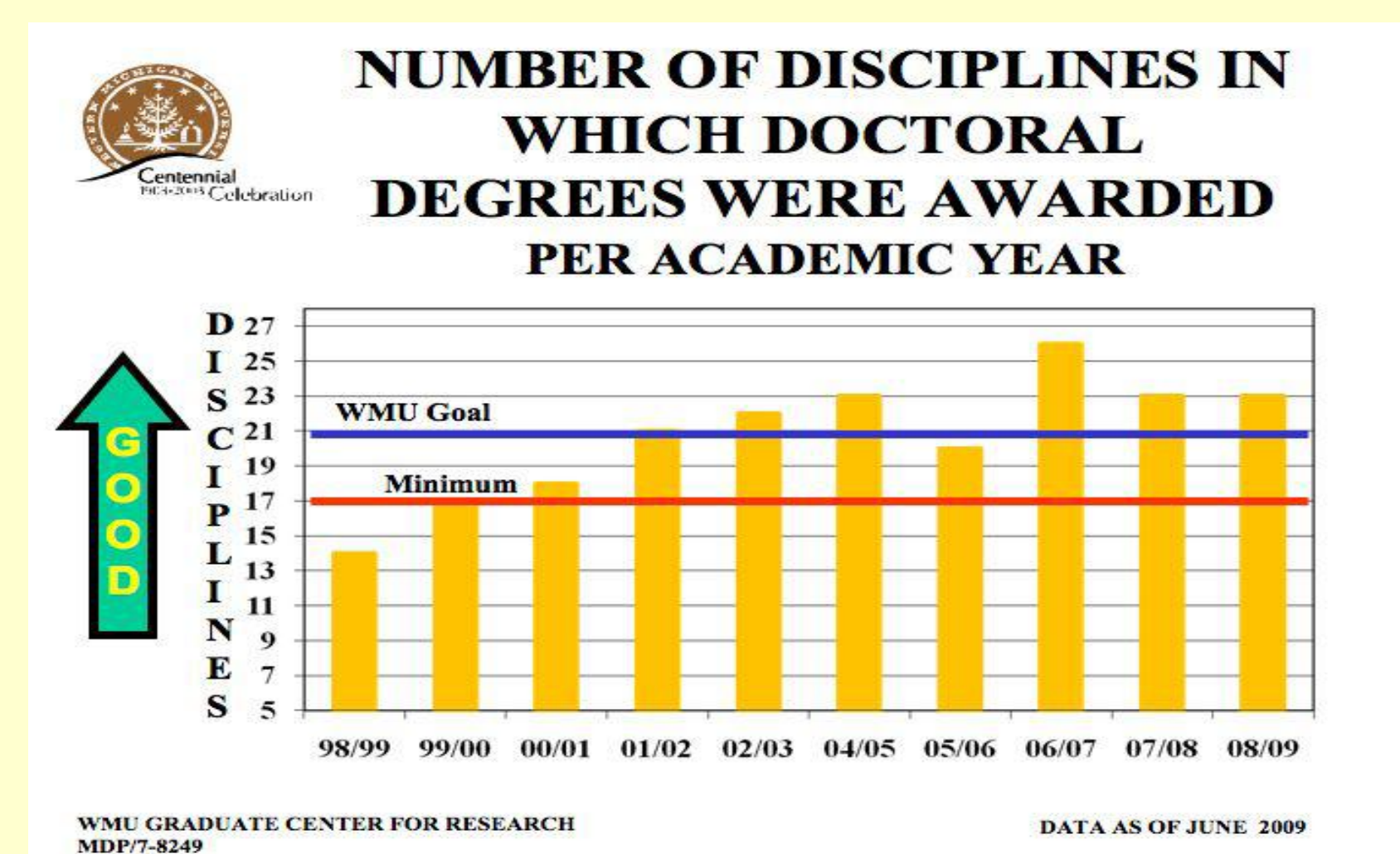
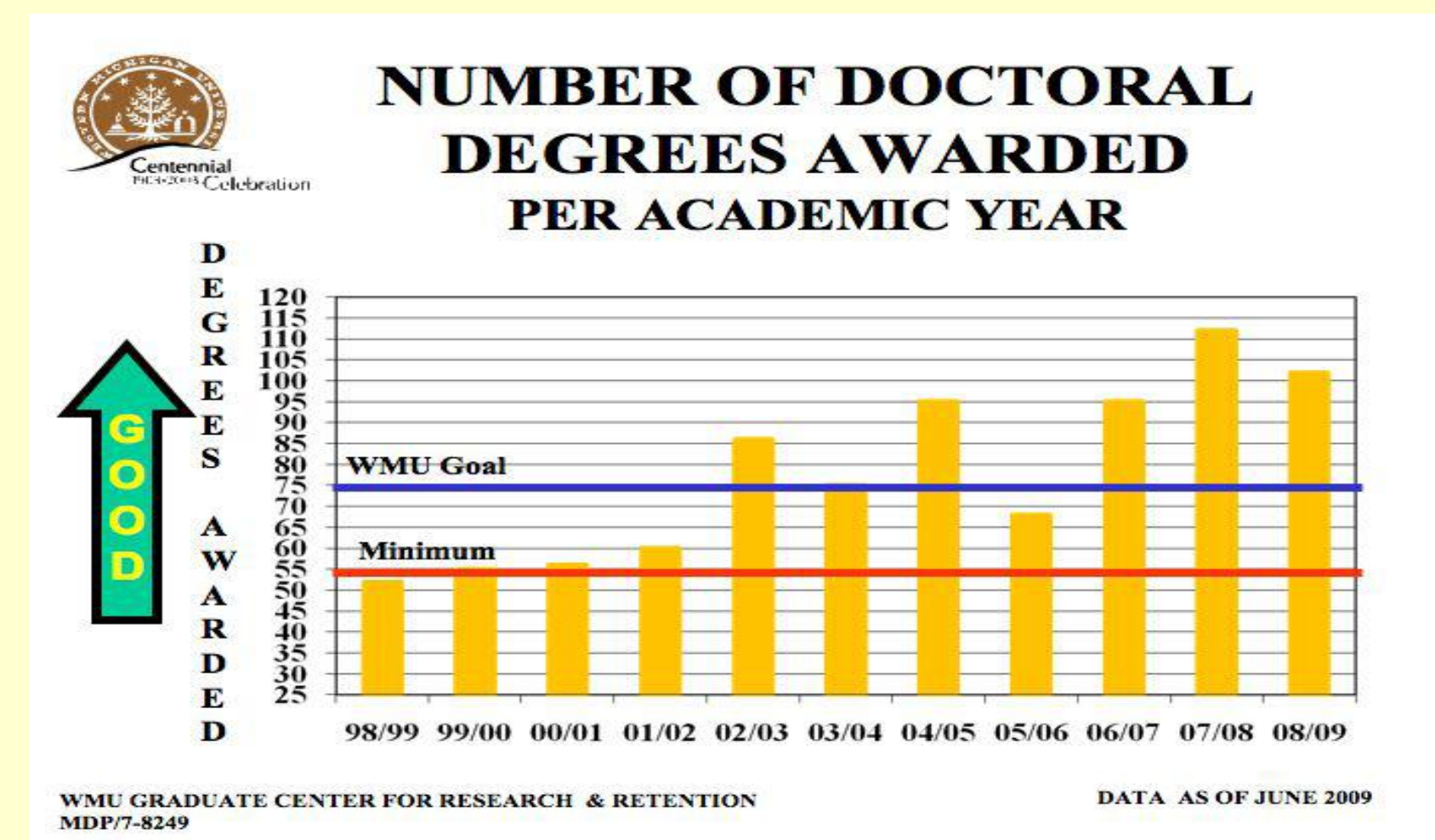
**Registered TTD:** Includes only when student is registered in graduate school, excluding time taken off.

### Doctoral Study at WMU

#### 31 Doctoral Programs

Doctor of Audiology  
Ed.D. in Special Education  
**Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.):**  
Applied Economics  
Biological Sciences  
Chemistry  
Computer Science  
Counseling Psychology  
Counselor Education  
Educational Leadership  
Electrical & Computer Engineer  
English  
Evaluation  
Evaluation, Measurement, & Research  
Geosciences  
History  
Industrial Engineering  
Interdisciplinary Health Sciences  
Mathematics  
Math Education (Collegiate option)  
Mechanical Engineering  
Paper & Imaging Sci & Engineer.  
Physics  
Political Science  
Psychology  
Public Administration  
Science Education  
Sociology  
Spanish  
Statistics

### WMU Doctoral Degrees in Last Decade

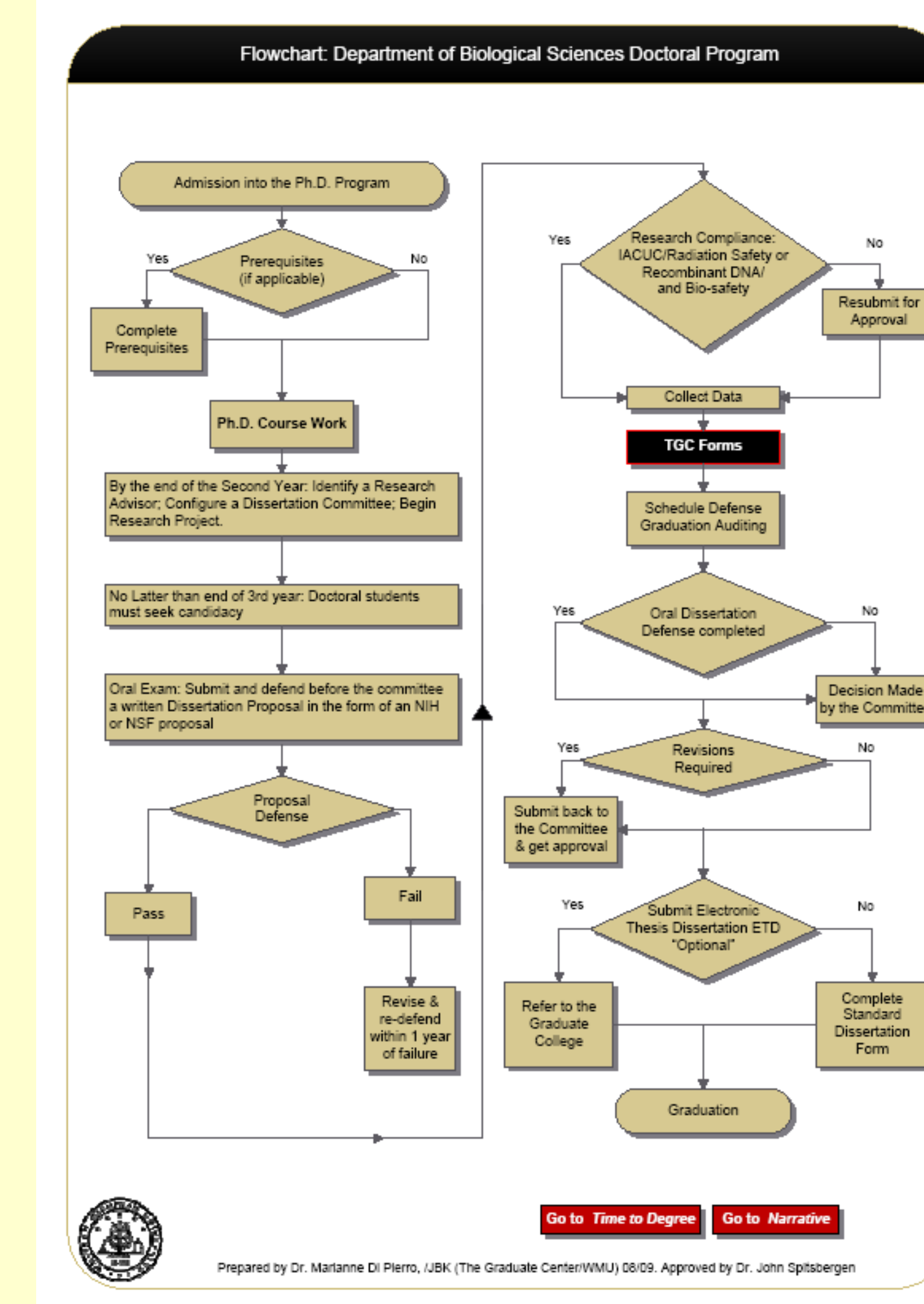


### WMU Time to Degree Data 2000-2006

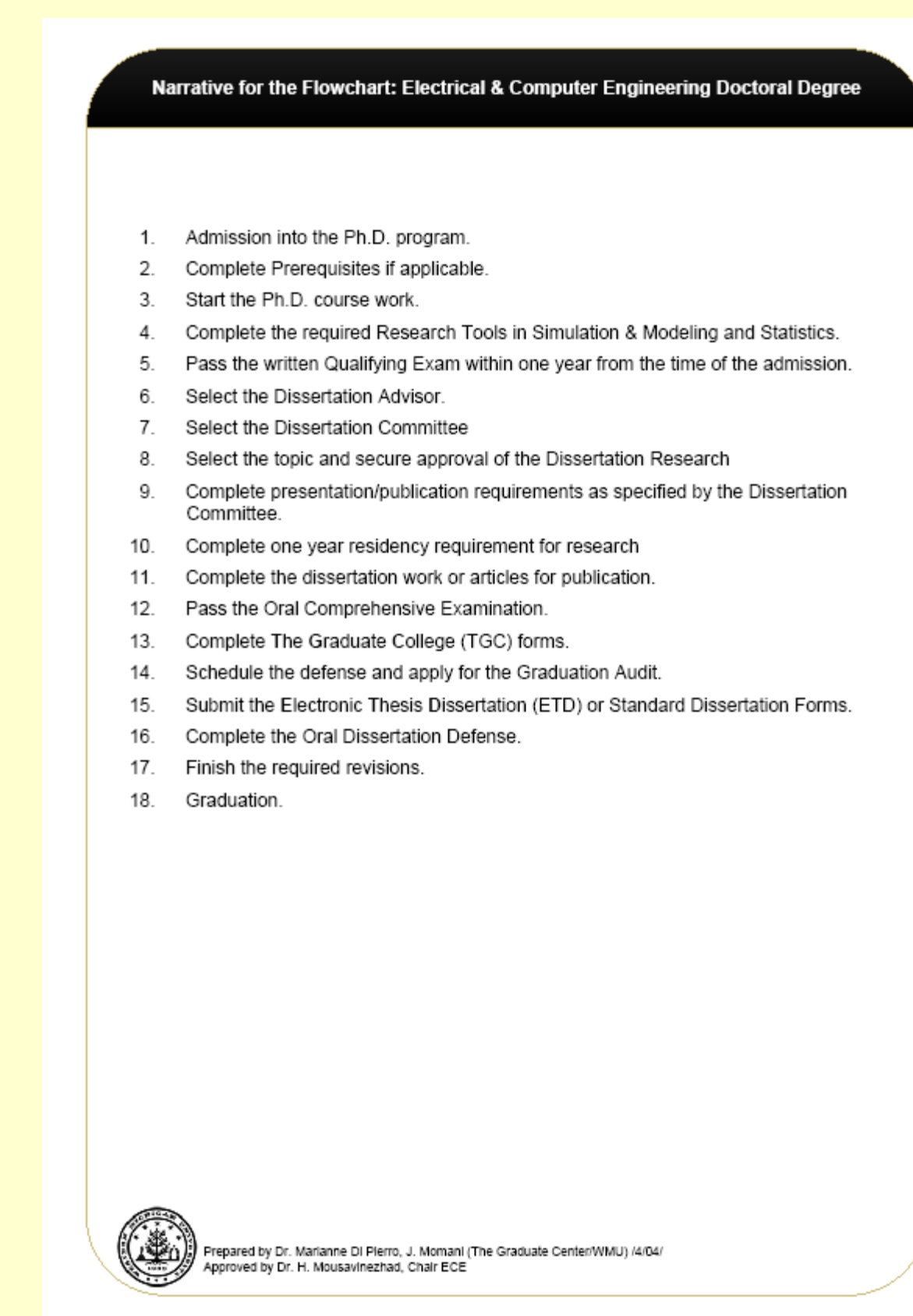
Total Number of Doctoral Degrees : 535

Elapsed Time to Degree:	Mean	Median
WMU overall:	5.76 yrs.	5.26 yrs.
College of Arts & Sciences	5.71	5.00
College of Education	6.23	5.92
College of Engineering	4.62	4.60
College of HHS (PhD)	4.75	---
College of HHS (Doctorate)	3.67	3.83
STEM Fields	5.25	4.93

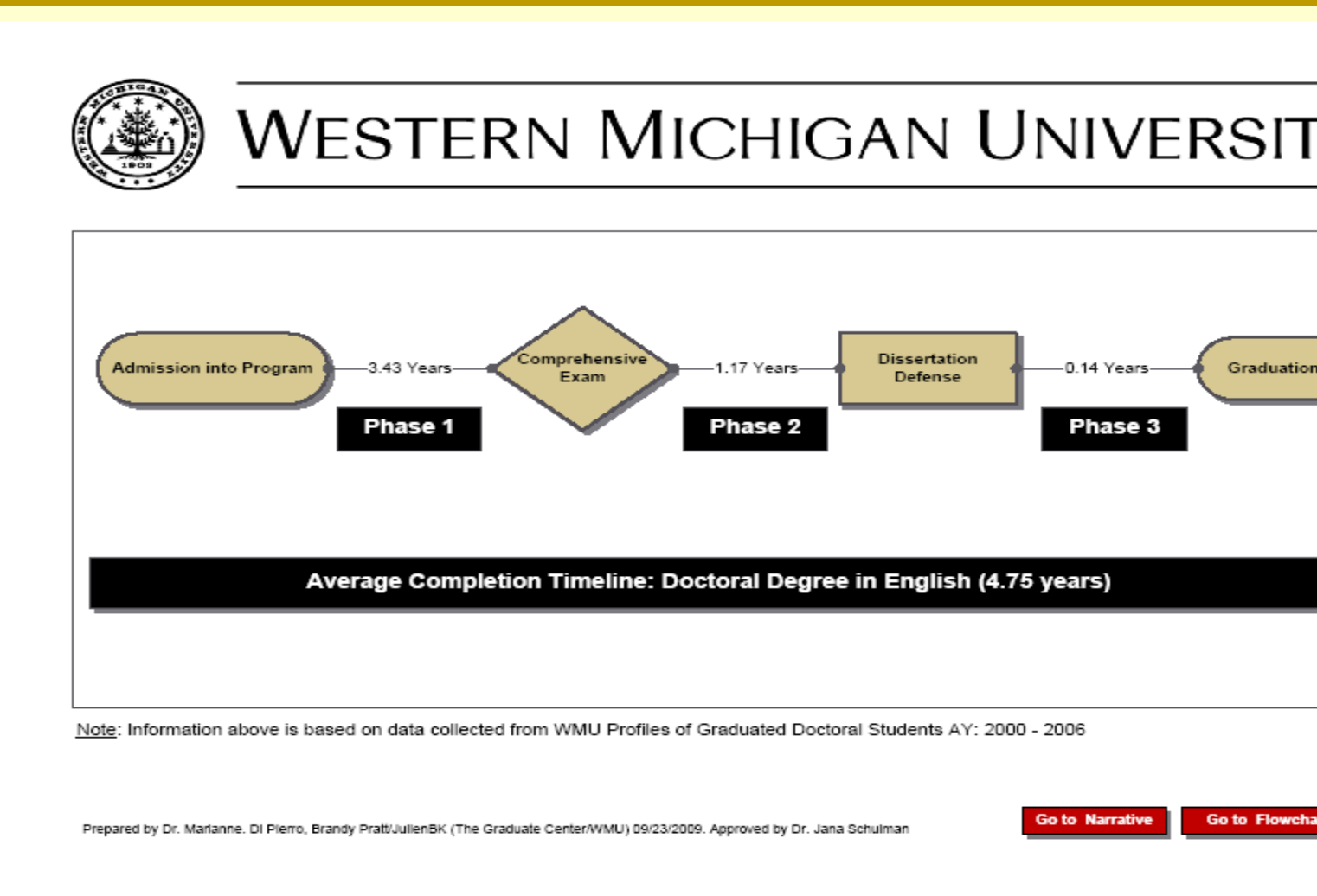
### Sample Flow Chart: Biological Sciences



### Sample Narrative: Electrical & Computer Engineering



### Sample Time to Degree Chart: English



### Selected Studies on Doctoral Education & TTD

#### Council of Graduate Schools:

##### Ph.D. Completion & Attrition Data

Entered doctoral program '92-93 to '94-95  
49,000 students in 5 major fields at 30 institutions

##### Ph.D. Completion Project

7-year, grant funded, focused on completion & attrition at  
29 US & Canadian major research universities  
25 additional partner institutions

#### Graduate Education Initiative: Humanities Doctorates

Mellon Foundation funded  
10 universities; 54 departments or programs  
Published in *Educating Scholars: Doctoral Education in the Humanities* (2010), by Ehrenberg et al.

#### 1996 Survey of over 9,000 Doctoral Students in 11 Disciplines from 21 Major Doctoral Granting Universities

Published in *Three Magic Letters: Getting to Ph.D.* (2006), by Nettles & Millett

### Factors Associated with Degree Completion & TTD

CGS identified 6 institutional and program characteristics as key factors influencing student outcomes that can ultimately affect the likelihood that a particular student will complete a Ph.D. program:

1. Selection/Matching
2. Mentoring & Advising
3. Financial Support & Structure
4. Program Environment
5. Research Experiences
6. Curricular & Administrative Processes & Procedures

**Gender:** Males complete at higher rates in Engineering, Math & Physical Sciences & Life Sciences; Females at higher rates for Social Sciences & Humanities.

#### Race/Ethnicity:

Whites overall completed at higher rates than African-American, Asian & Hispanic Students.

Whites & African-Americans had similarly higher completion rates for Life Sciences & Humanities.

Whites, Asians & Hispanics completed Math & Physical Sciences degrees at similar rates, with African-Americans significantly behind.

**Program Size:** Smaller programs completed students at higher rates.

### Contact Information

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Visit the website for the

**Graduate Center for Research and Retention:**  
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