



Personal study planning in doctoral education

Katja Lahenius and Miia Martinsuo

Helsinki University of Technology
Department of Industrial Engineering and Management
Finland



Introduction



- European and Nordic doctoral programs are traditionally research-driven without an emphasis on structured courses
- Universities have emphasized high flexibility for doctoral students in choosing their studies (60 credits).
- In Europe: degree completion age is increasing
- Professors have more doctoral students to supervise

->

How to support students with their individualized and personalized studies?

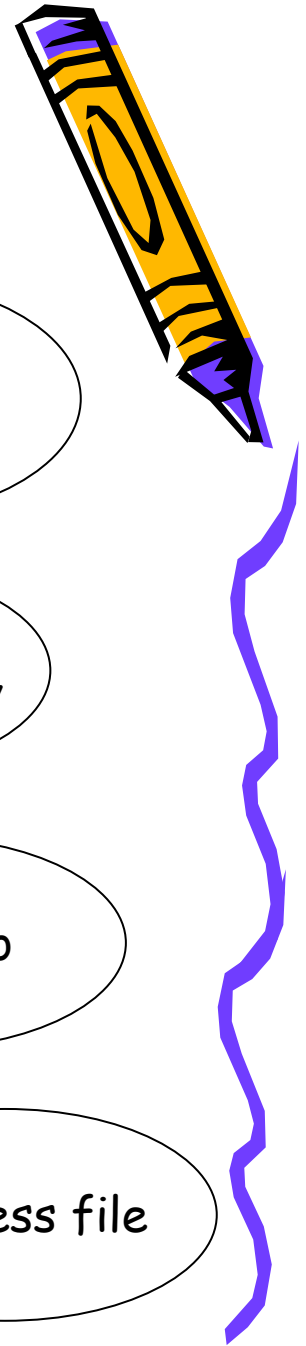


Background

- Personal study planning has been considered as one possible solution to help students in selecting and scheduling their studies, and in achieving shorter study times.
- Universities may implement PSP for various reasons:
 - based on **educational policy**: study plans are used to help students to formulate their own individual and personalized studies and, thereby, finish their degrees rapidly.
 - **pedagogical aspects**: such as improving the students' own learning through reflection and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning.



Personal study planning



Personal study plan

Personal development plan, PDP

Personal learning plan

Individual study plan

Individual education plan, IEP

Open-ended PSP

Narrow PSP

Portfolio

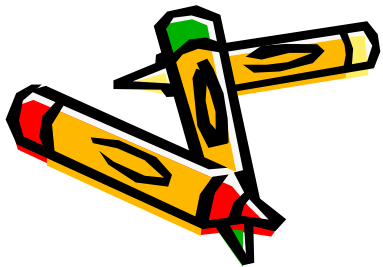
Technical PSP

Wide-ranging PSP

Progress file

Academic PSP

Learning journal



From narrow PSP towards the open-ended PSP

(Ansela, Haapaniemi and Pirttimäki 2006)

ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

- Personal study plan
- Individual study plan
- Narrow PSP
- Technical PSP
- Personal learning plan

Self-directiveness

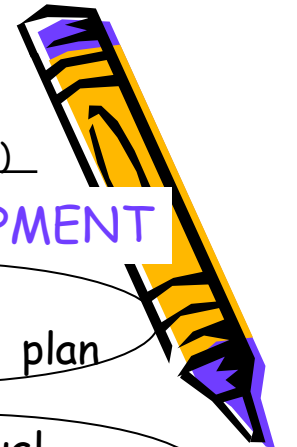
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

- Personal development plan
- Individual education plan
- Wide-ranging PSP
- Open-ended PSP
- Portfolio
- Progress file
- Learning journal

PERSONAL STUDY PLAN

PSP - plan for teaching and teaching arrangements

PSP - student's studying and learning

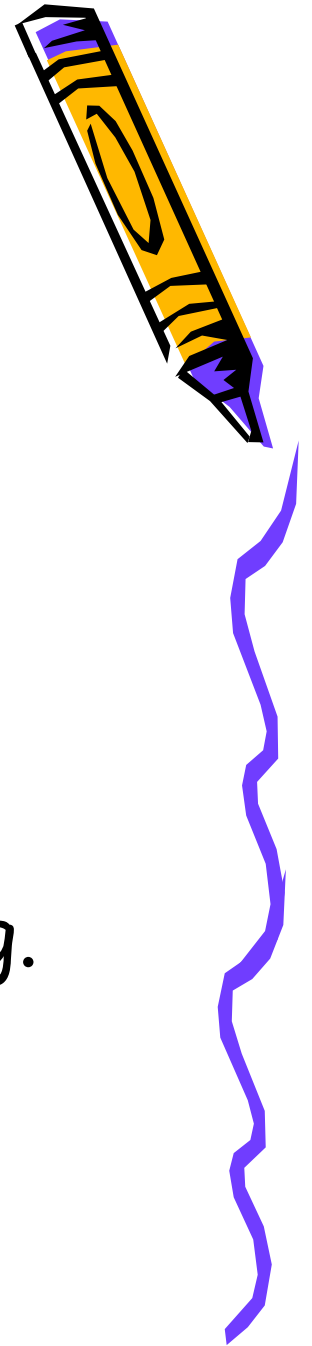


Personal study planning

is here defined:

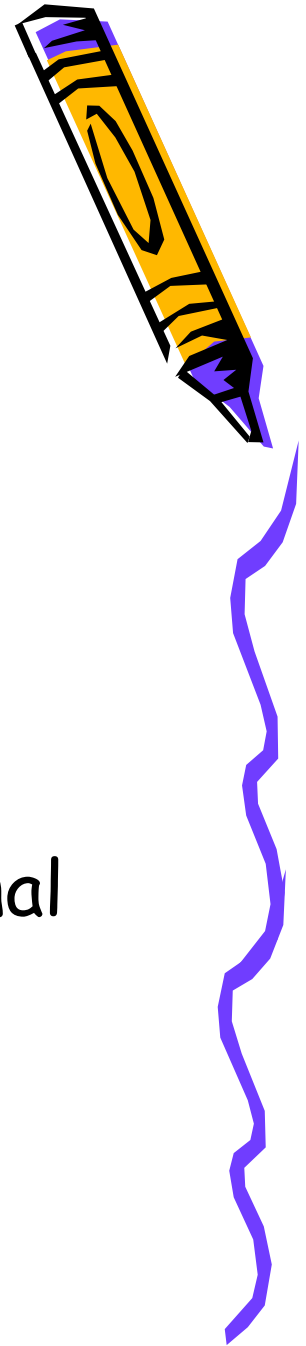
ongoing process during which the students can accumulate various study planning documents for themselves or for study counseling.

(Ansela and Haapaniemi and Pirttimäki 2006)



Personal study planning in higher education

- In higher education: UK, Sweden
- In Finland since 2006 - master's level
 - in doctoral education ??
- In Finland: Systematic research on adopting, using and experiencing personal study planning is missing, particularly in doctoral education.



The Study

The focus in the empirical research is on two primary research questions:

1. How do doctoral students use and experience personal study planning?
2. How do doctoral student groups differ from each other in their experience of personal study planning and study satisfaction?
 - How do part-time and full-time doctoral students differ from each other in their study planning experiences and study satisfaction?
 - How do the newcomers and old-timers in doctoral education differ from each other in study planning experiences and study satisfaction?
 - How do average and advanced study planners differ from each other in their study planning experiences and study satisfaction?



The Department



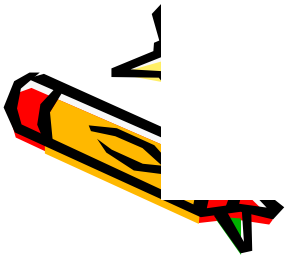
15 professors

Over 200 active doctoral students,
(400 bachelor's and master's students)

Full-time doctoral students 30%

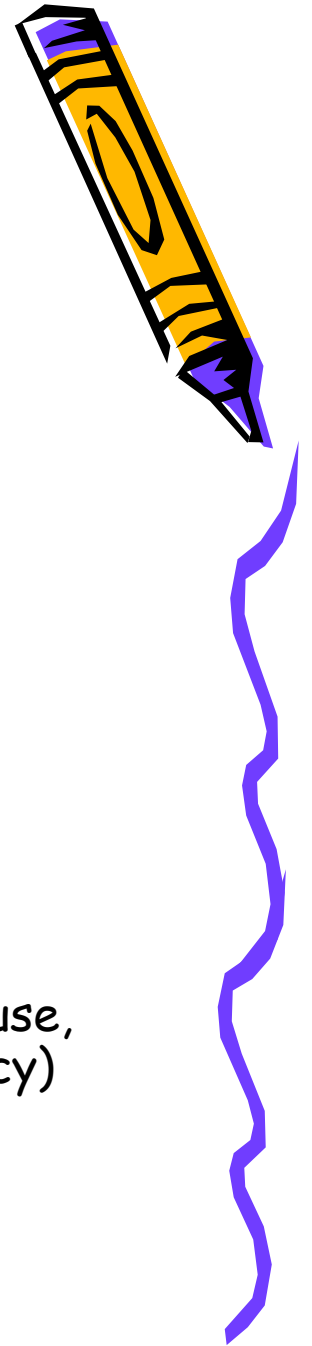
Part-time doctoral students 70%

- Doctoral studies: 60 credits of studies and a dissertation thesis.
- The department offers about 10-15 doctoral courses yearly
 - Research methodology and advanced courses in selected research fields.
 - Only two courses are compulsory (totaling 8-10 credits).
 - The rest of the studies are agreed between the student and professor, and each student has an individually designed study package.



Research design and material

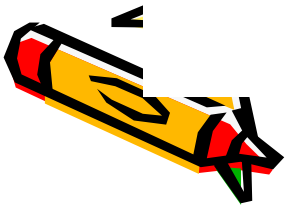
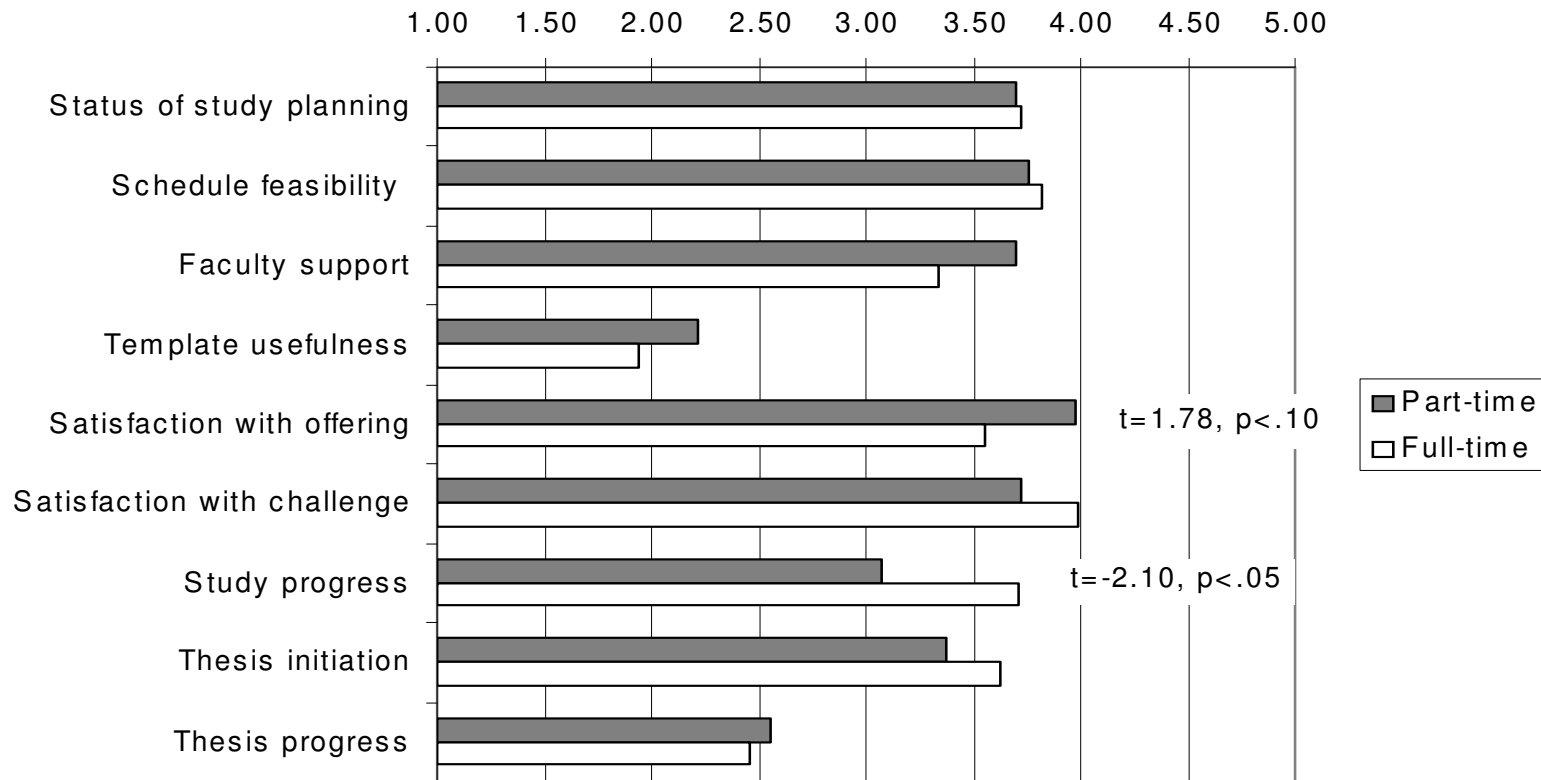
- A questionnaire study in the fall 2008
 - experiences with personal study planning and study progress
 - all active doctoral students at the Department (208 doctoral students) -> the electronic questionnaire
 - 64 respondents (a response rate of 30.8%)
- Returned PSPs of doctoral students
 - submitted by 27 doctoral students
 - were analyzed using quantitative content analysis:
 - evaluated by using the following categories: template use, scheduling, and planning quality (feasibility and accuracy)





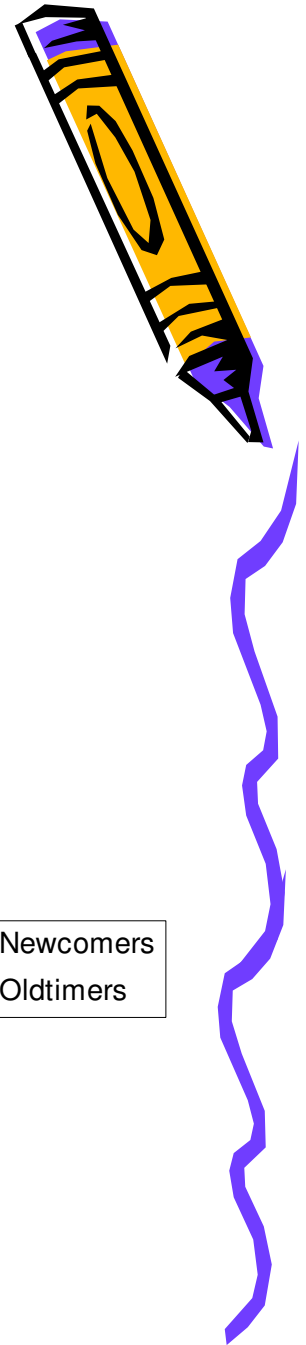
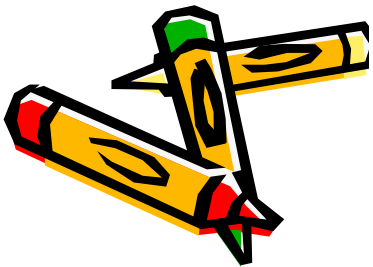
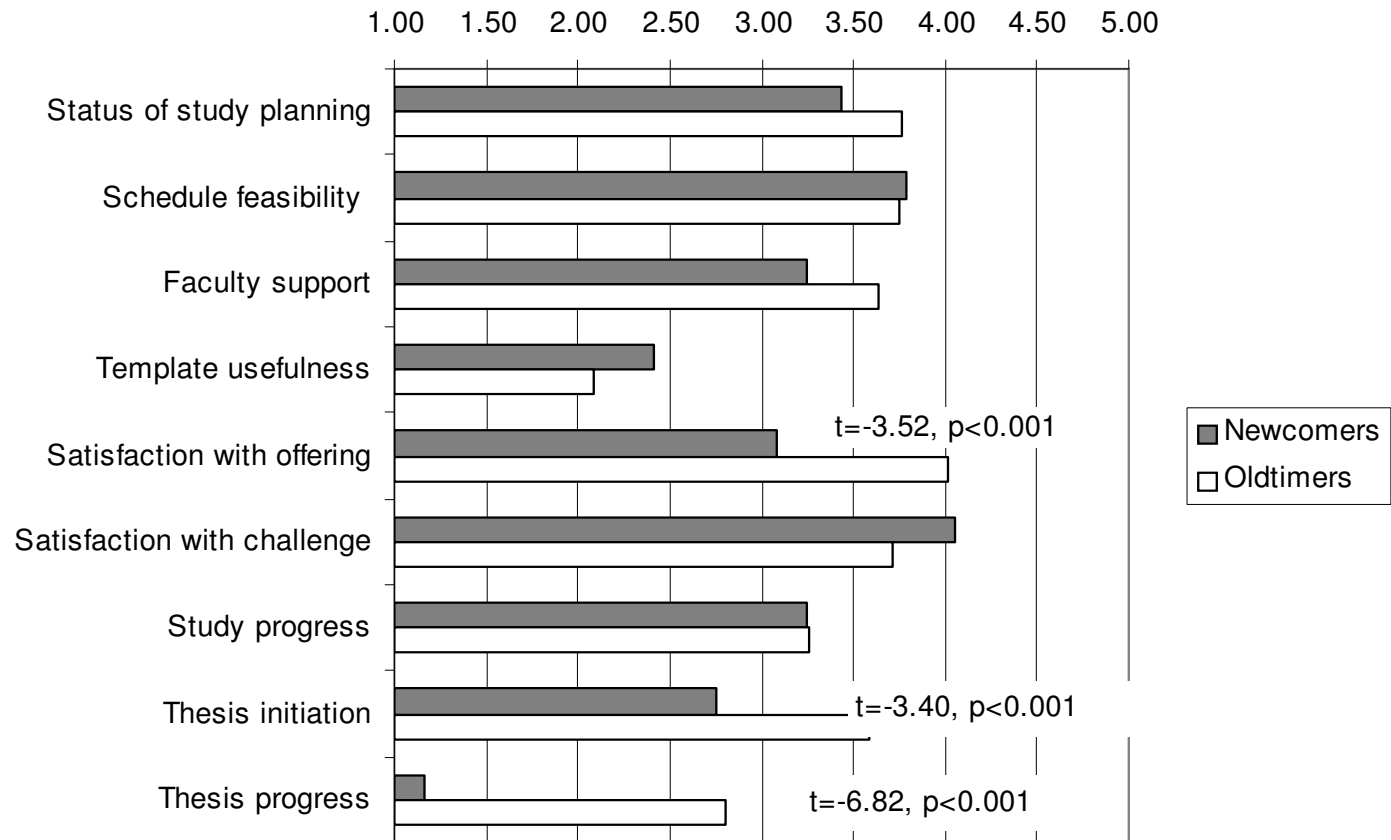
Results:

Experiences with study planning, studies and thesis progress of part-time (n=45) and full-time (n=19) doctoral students.

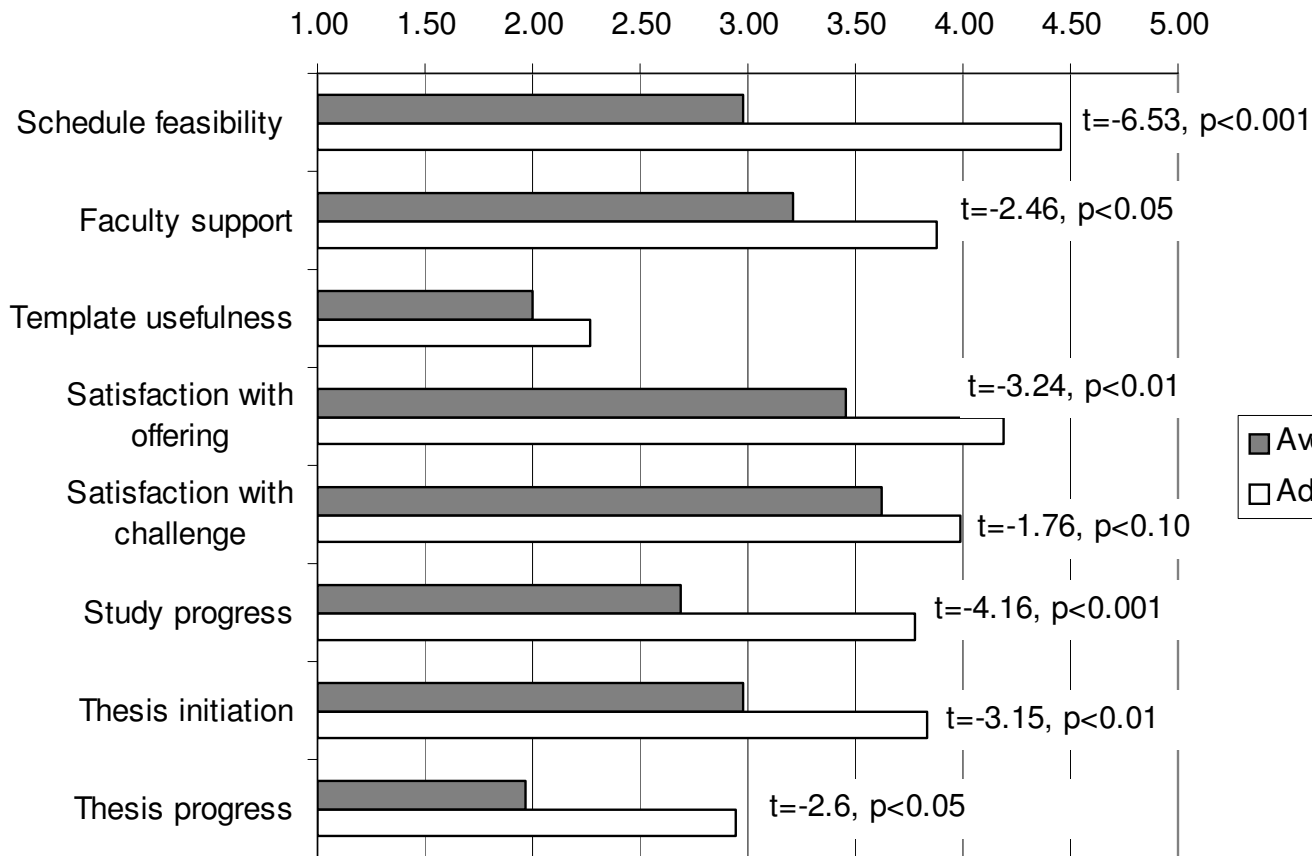
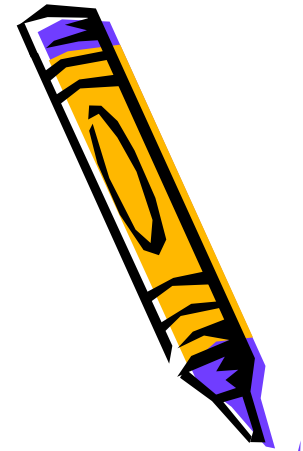


Results:

Experiences with study planning, studies and thesis progress of newcomers (n=12) and old-timers (n=51)

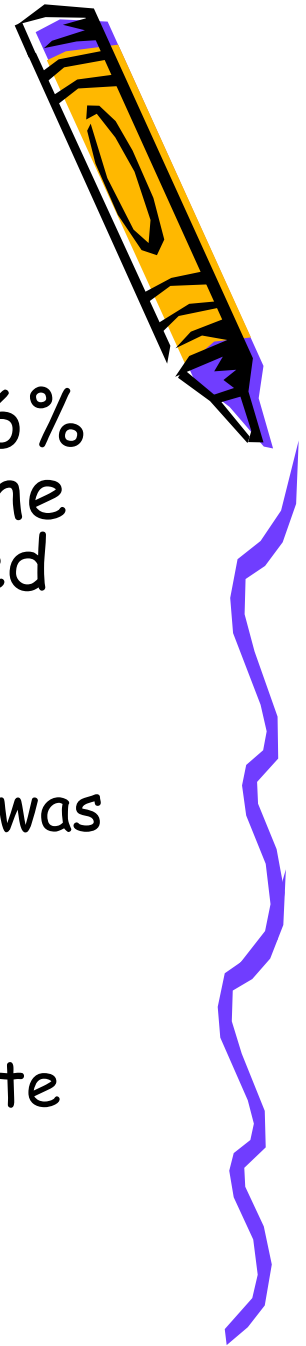


Results: Experiences with study planning, studies, and thesis progress of average (n=29) and advanced (n=34) study planners



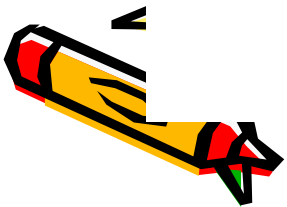
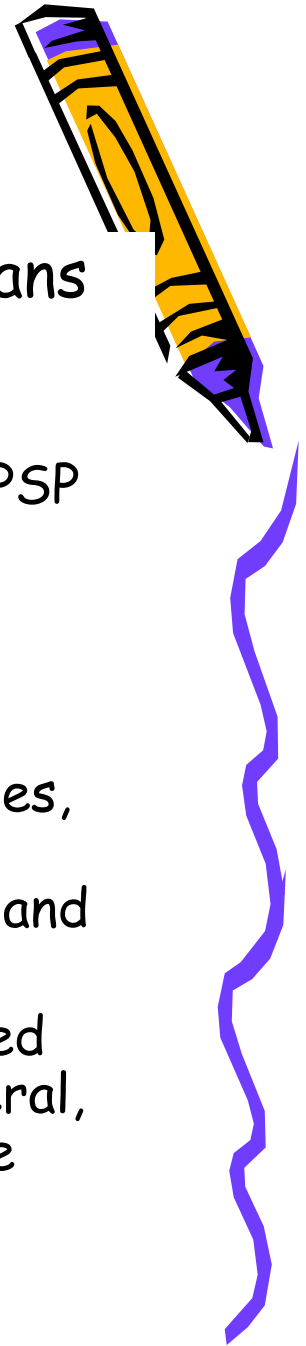
Results: Returned PSP forms

- Of the 208 active doctoral students, 16% returned their personal study plan to the department -> 25 % had already finished their studies
- Analysis of the returned study plans:
 - The template offered by the Department was used, many edited the template
 - 68% had stated some kind of a schedule to cover the forthcoming studies completely
 - 53% of the students had made very accurate plans
 - The feasibility of the plans varied



Discussion

- Experiences with and use of personal study plans
 - the overall experience positive
 - progressed modestly and slowly
 - Further efforts are needed to encourage adopting PSP
- Differences in study planning and study satisfaction
 - Despite different backgrounds and study experiences, differences in study planning were not discovered between full-time and part-time doctoral students, and between newcomers and old-timers.
 - Advanced study planners tended to be more satisfied with most aspects of study planning, studies in general, and thesis initiation and progress than were average study planners.



Conclusions

- The results show evidence that personal study planning is useful and well appreciated in doctoral education.
- Consistent implementation in and across departments will require time and effort in order to change the culture of individualized studies.
- This study has highlighted the fact that change always takes time.
- Practical implications for department development include improving guidance and communication of personal study plan in all directions.

