**ABSTRACT**

The success of any university is its ability to retain and promote its students from student admission to graduation. A grounded theory (GT) study was conducted investigating the experiences of new doctoral students at Walden University in 2013. The purpose of this study was to understand the new student experience which resulted in a (GT) that accounted for the main concerns of the doctoral student participants. The emergent core variable for the study was weighing in, a process that includes orienting, equipping, considering, and jumping in. Grounded action (GA) was applied using the explanatory theory of weighing in for mitigation related issues throughout the CIA/RLL programs. Several action initiatives and a strategic plan were developed to address these concerns using the theory of weighing in. The impact of this study will impact plan were developed to address these concerns using the initiatives, specialized training, and leadership teams have been implemented at Walden University in 2013. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of this study will impact the ability to extrapolate these findings to other academic populations.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The original GT study began only with the selection of an area of interest (Raffanti, 2006, p. 23) and a grand question, not with a set of research questions. The area of interest for this GT study came from recent efforts of Walden University to implement retention programs and initiatives without any certainty that they are resolving the main concerns of the students. This prompted the single grand-question study (Laffer, 2006; Maddy, 2008; Olson, 2007; Potter, 2004; Simmons & Gregory, 2003; Toscano, 2008):

*Would you talk about your experience in your Walden foundations course?*

**FINDINGS**

Weighing-in was the core variable for a GT study which accounted for the main concerns of participants (candidates) in a Walden University foundations course. Weighing-in is a process that includes the following 4 categories: Orienting, Equipping, Considering, and Jumping-in.

**EXPLANATORY THEORY**

Weighing-in was the core variable for the original GT study which accounted for the main concerns of participants (candidates) from a Walden University foundations course. Weighing-in is a process that includes Orienting, Equipping, Considering, and Jumping-in.

**EXPOSITORY THEORY**

Being responsive is the operational core variable that accounts for action that guides the operational theory in the Grumpy Action Theory. When an administration or faculty is being responsive, they are assessing needs, training and resourcing, listening, and journeying with.

**PROCEDURES**

- **Grounded action (GA; Simmons & Gregory, 2003)** is a research methodology that incorporates all stages of grounded theory (GT; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
- An explanatory theory is an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses and is the systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method (Glaser, 1969).
- GA begins once an explanatory theory is generated and addresses emergent problems around the core variable.
- The “action” of GA is intended to generate a practical, workable research plan that builds on the action that emerges as the researcher addresses the problems uncovered while discovering the explanatory theory.
- Once the explanatory theory has been fully developed by means of a grounded theory process, the operational theory is then generated (Simmons & Gregory, 2003, para. 31). GA looks at the underlying core variable and seeks to address the newly discovered action problems by generating solutions to support and drive students to a place where they can succeed if they continue to invest in the program.
- Orienting -- occurs as students embark into a program of study and begin to consider and sort out how they fit into the program. Students begin to realize their strengths and weaknesses and often as this stage make a decision to continue or not. This inventoring process often results in investing in further skill development. Many students begin to form impressions about their instructor, supportive resources, time management, and how to navigate their program.
- Equipping -- some students choose to supplement or sharpen their skills and/or dispositions in order to promote program success. Students either take advantage of these resources, refuse participation, or become discouraged and suspend participating in the program. Other students experience the affirmative or mitigating actions that they can count on to succeed if they continue to invest in the program.
- Considering -- students take inventory of their fears, time, resources, and fit within the program. This weighing in process involves the consideration of performance and personal beliefs that help guide their decision about whether to continue or withdraw from their studies.
- Jumping-in -- is how candidates weigh in on the final decision to either stay and invest or withdraw from the program while others continue even though they are not fully convinced they will succeed. Others enter the program of study only after gaining some understanding of one-they can support their decision in the program or that the timing wasn’t right.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data for the GA research were collected through surveys and participant interviews. As with GT, GA data analysis utilizes a constant comparative analysis process. The researcher must continuously ask how one set of data or information compares to other data already gathered. Surveys and face-to-face interviews were coded to get the researcher meaning of the words and exploring the relationship between the data and theory (Glaser, 1978). An operational theory and mitigating action emerge as analysis progressed.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study was to generate a theoretical description and understanding of an ever-evolving topic that addresses the main concerns and challenges (as identified in the explanatory theory) while navigating the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) program at Walden University.

**LIMITATIONS**

There were several limitations to this study that may impact the ability to extrapolate these findings to a larger academic population. As was identified in the original explanatory theory, interviews were only conducted with candidates who had recently completed a Walden foundations course. These interviews were only conducted with students who made themselves available and accessible. Several students would not even respond to email inquiries or make themselves available at all. As a result, many lower-performing students would not make themselves available for the study. The surveys and interviews analyzed for the GA portion of the study included only 10 participants (3 administration and 7 professors). While the interview data were not completely forced, this sample size may not represent the practice of all Walden leadership and faculty.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Weighing-in was the core variable in a GT study that sought to understand the main concerns of students navigating their first course in the Walden University CIA foundations program and became the explanatory theory that was used in generating grounded action.

There are five properties of a well-developed grounded theory: relevance, fit, grab, modifiability, and workability (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), each of which are also applicable in GA (Simmons & Gregory, 2003). Since GA is not about time, person, place, or things, this study may be useful as a starting point for understanding and providing mitigation action within other specializations throughout the university.

This study is an important first step in providing meaningful support to administration, advisors, faculty, students, or anyone who supports or works with Walden students.

**SOCIAL CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

This GA study provides important insight and action initiatives for candidates, faculty, advisors, and administration within an educational context. The explanatory theory provides a voice for these candidates and illustrates many of the problems, concerns, and fears that new students may encounter as they navigate their foundations course. The grounded action produced in this study may provide practical and mitigating solutions to support and drive students to a place where they can make appropriate decisions to resolve many of the problems, fears, and struggles students experience while supporting their educational endeavors.