

# Should I Stay or Should I Go? The ABD (“all but dissertation”) Phenomenon Among Special Education Faculty Members

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**Abstract:** *This within-stages mixed methods design study examined the views of special education faculty members regarding junior faculty members who are considered ABD (“all but dissertation”). Findings provide insight into the rarely-examined phenomenon in special education higher education of hiring faculty members who have yet to complete their terminal degree and the discussion provides direction for future research to better inform ABD junior faculty and special education doctoral programs.*

**Keywords:** *Special education, teacher preparation, ABD, dissertation, faculty*

The shortage of special education higher education faculty members has been widely documented, initially in a 2001 study by Smith, Pion, Tyler, Sindelar, and Rosenberg (updated in 2011 by Smith, Montrosse, Robb, Tyler, & Young). Smith et al. (2001) examined the number of special education doctoral graduates (both Ph.D. and Ed.D) in relation to their job choices following graduation. At that time, they found that the number of special education doctorates annually had been steadily dropping and that of those who did obtain special education doctorates, only about 50% chose to work in higher education. Despite the growth in Special Education Leadership Preparation grants funded by the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) over the subsequent years, Congress cites lack of sufficient numbers of qualified teacher preparation personnel in special education as an area of continued concern (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010).

West (2001) reported to the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) that, “A chronic and persistent shortage of special education faculty curtails the national capacity of colleges and universities to conduct research and prepare teachers, researchers, and other leadership personnel (n.p).” In the 10 years since West’s report, the situation seemingly has not improved. Evans et al. (2005) estimated that on average there were approximately 250 graduates with doctoral degrees in special education nationwide per year with only half going on to higher education positions. With an average of over 200 vacancies for junior faculty positions in special education each year, approximately one third of job searches in the field would fail.

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Now, in addition to the shortage of graduates, the field of special education higher education is facing the “graying”, or impending retirement of large numbers of the professoriate. In their 2011 report, Smith, Montrosse, Robb, Tyler, and Young found that despite the challenging economic times impacting higher education, demand continued to outpace supply in the area of special education faculty. Based on their survey of special education doctoral granting institutions, they forecasted that this situation would only worsen. While the study found that more individuals are graduating with doctorates than in past years, and more of those graduates are choosing to go into higher education, there is also a growing number of teacher education programs with a special education component, and one-half to one-third of current special education faculty at doctoral granting institutions plan on retiring in the next five years. Based on the work of Smith et al., it appears that the gap between supply and demand will continue to widen in the coming years.

Perhaps because of these well-known shortages, faculty position job announcements in special education will often state that applicants with earned doctorates are preferred, but ABD (“all but dissertation”) candidates will be considered. However, no documented research exists that examines the experiences of individuals who accept full-time positions while ABD, as this practice is less common in other academic fields where there tend to be more individuals holding a Ph.D. than there are available jobs. In one recent six-month time period, education job postings were reviewed in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In special education teacher education postings, “ABD considered” was posted for 50% of the positions, while only 18% of the postings in other teacher education fields (such as elementary education, literacy education, and TESOL) stated the search committee would consider ABD individuals. This also does not account for positions for which an ABD applicant may be considered (even though not posted as such) if no appropriate candidates with an earned doctorate apply. Both of the authors of the current study applied for and accepted their current positions while ABD, even though the positions were not posted as considering ABD applicants. This matched the experiences recounted by Horner, Pape, and O’Connor (2001) in their examination of the job search process in educational psychology, when they received some favorable responses after applying for positions stating an earned doctorate was required while they were ABD. In our review of research, we identified no studies that determined the number of individuals who accept faculty positions while ABD, but job postings would indicate it is likely much higher in the field of special education than in other fields.

#### **ISSUES RELATED TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ABD**

Previous research shows multiple factors leading to successful completion of doctorates in the education field (Kittell-Limerick, 2005). As the length of time in a program increases, the likelihood of the student completing the program decreases (Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Yeager, 2008). Additionally, advisor or chair involvement with the student also impacts likelihood of completion (Fletcher, 2009; Pauley, Cunningham, & Toth, 1999; Wasburn-Moses, 2008). When students take a position while ABD, they probably will have less time to work on their dissertations, and they likely will also be relocating, resulting in less contact with their advisor. This combination of factors may lead to problems completing the doctorate, but there are no studies studying completion rates of those who hold a faculty position while in ABD status.

Doctoral students receive mixed messages about the option of accepting a position while ABD. Some authors explicitly advise against it (Gray & Drew, 2008; Wright, 1991)

with Oldfield (1988, p. 273) stating, "Do not leave campus without it [the degree] - your incentive to complete the degree will decline upon leaving campus." However, in special education teacher education, programs actively recruit and hire ABD candidates for full-time faculty positions. Because this is not often done in other fields, there is very little information available to inform special education doctoral students who are considering taking a faculty position while ABD. The research tells them not to do it, while the field is actively recruiting them.

Another problem in examining the research on doctoral completion is the perception that there is an overabundance of Ph. D. candidates futilely searching for higher education jobs. A publicized article in *Nature* magazine went so far as to ask "Is it time to stop?" producing Ph.D. candidates (Cyranoski, Gilbert, Leford, Naya, & Yahla, 2011). While that may be the case in the hard sciences (as discussed in the previously mentioned article) or other fields, when reported by mainstream media such as *USA Today* (Weise, 2011), the distinction among fields of academia often goes unmentioned. Robb and Smith (2011) wrote a rebuttal to Weise, pointing out that the shortages in special education faculty, "stands in stark contrast to other fields, such as the sciences and humanities." However, the excess number of Ph.D.s in other fields makes it much less likely that research will be conducted on the experiences of ABD faculty members, because the phenomenon is limited to select fields of study.

#### ISSUES RELATED TO JUNIOR FACULTY MEMBERS

Whether a junior faculty member (we are defining *junior faculty member* as an individual who is a full-time faculty member working towards tenure) is ABD or holds the earned terminal degree, it is likely job expectations remain the same. Again, since there is no body of research that could be identified on the topic of ABD faculty members, it is unclear if they are regularly offered differentiated role descriptions or if they are expected to meet all the regular junior faculty roles while also working as a student to complete dissertation requirements. What is known through research is that the initial years in a teacher education program can be daunting for any junior faculty member. Finley (2000) examined the experiences of three junior faculty members and the struggle they faced in an education program that valued service and action research in professional development schools, while at the same time in a university that valued high numbers of publications (something the participants found unlikely when doing school-based research projects).

The peril of "publish or perish" is well-documented and the emphasis on turning not only one's research, but one's teaching, advising, and service activities into publishable material is often stressed to junior faculty (Lawhon, Ennis-Cole, & Ennis, 2004). Combining this traditional mindset with the professional imperative in teacher education programs to conduct meaningful research in preK-12 school settings (Finley, 2000) can lead to what Cole (2000) described as "perish *by* publishing," (p. 34).

New faculty members who are ABD are combining the difficulties of completing a dissertation while away from their home program with the challenges facing all new junior faculty members. The unique experiences and opportunities facing special education faculty who are ABD and the lack of current research on the topic, led us to examine this phenomenon. The purpose of this exploratory study was to 1) examine the experiences of individuals who accepted special education faculty positions while ABD, 2) examine the views colleagues hold toward ABD faculty members, and 3) develop suggested actions for students considering accepting positions while ABD.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In examining the ABD faculty experience, the authors found the theoretical perspective of liminality as described by Victor Turner (1979) particularly illuminating. He describes liminality as the state of being “betwixt and between,” and a state in which a rite of passage is required to move on to the next state. Turner examined the concept of liminality in anthropology and religion, but the theory has been used to examine changes in status in other disciplines (e.g., Bettis, 1996; Mahon-Daly & Andrews, 2002; Tempest & Starkey, 2004). In defining liminality, Turner could have been describing the process of doctoral studies, as he described the states one might move between as including, “such social constancies as legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree” (Turner, 1979, p. 234). In developing this study, we viewed the ABD faculty member as existing in a liminal phase; still gaining knowledge needed to fully participate in the next stage of life and having not yet participated in the rites of passage that grants one the role of “elder” (a.k.a., “Dr.”). Leatherman (2000) described ABD status as “the uneasy period in between finishing your course work and finally being handed your doctoral degree ... before the hoped-for ascension to Ph.D.,” (p. A14) a description that seems to echo Turner’s definition of liminality.

Turner identified both positive and negative characteristics of the liminal period, and those characteristics can be seen in the experiences of an ABD individual. In Turner’s description, some of the structurally negative characteristics of the liminal period are that neophytes or initiates are neither here nor there, they are not yet classified, and thus they are “invisible.” He went on to point out that liminal individuals have nothing, most importantly, no status. However, he also outlined some clear positive characteristics of the liminal period, most notably that the process of moving from one state to another yields, “growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns” (p. 237), all highly desirable characteristics in a novice researcher.

Turner noted a further component of the liminal phase as the inequity of power between the neophyte and elder. He stated neophytes have a passivity and a:

malleability, which is increased by submission to ordeal, their reduction to a uniform condition ... signs of the process by which they are ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life (p. 238).

This means ABD faculty members can find themselves in a unique position – that of both neophyte (in their role as ABD student) and elder (in their role as faculty member). We considered these perspectives on liminality as we examined the views of special education faculty regarding ABD faculty members.

## METHOD

To examine the ABD phenomenon, the researchers used within-stage mixed research design (see Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) because it can be analyzed using qualitative methods while using quantitative descriptive measures for filtering responses. The responses were analyzed simultaneously rather in separate phases, resulting a fully integrated single-phase mixed-model research study.

Because there is so little research on the phenomenon of working as a faculty member while ABD, the researchers designed the survey questions based on the experiences recounted by Horner, Pape, and O’Connor (2001) and the experiences of the authors

themselves as ABD faculty members. The survey was administered on the online survey site, Survey Monkey.

The survey was brief, consisting of six yes/no questions, primarily used to filter responses (see Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) for analysis of qualitative data. There were an additional six open-ended questions. The survey asked individuals who were ABD when accepting their first position to share their views of ABD faculty members, their experiences as an ABD faculty member, and whether they would make the same choice, knowing what they now know through their experience. Other faculty members who held a terminal degree when accepting their first position were asked to share their views regarding faculty who are ABD and advice they would provide their own students. Within the design of the survey on the online host site, question logic was used so that responses to yes/no questions automatically directed participants to the appropriate follow-up questions or skipped inappropriate questions (for example, participants who completed their degree prior to accepting a faculty position would not receive the question asking about experiences being ABD and holding faculty position). The full survey with all questions can be viewed in Appendix A. Because of the nature of skip logic in online surveys, not all participants answered all questions, as responses to previous questions determined what question would be offered next.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

An introductory email and link to the survey was sent to program representatives of the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE). HECSE members come from some of the most well known teacher preparation and research programs in special education, as well as from small programs consisting of only 2 or 3 faculty members. A list of representatives from HECSE institutions was available on the HECSE website. At the time of the survey, there were 59 HECSE member institutions. Since some programs have multiple representatives, the email was sent to the primary representative. If, for some reason, the email “bounced back” the other representative was contacted. There was an initial email request as well as a follow-up reminder. The program representatives were asked to disseminate the introductory email containing the link to the survey to all faculty in their special education programs.

A total of 41 participants answered the survey; however not all participants answered all questions that were applicable to them, skipping some questions. Eleven participants (26%) indicated they took their first position while ABD (referred to as ABD for the remainder of this article) and 28 (68%) indicated they had completed a terminal degree at the time they took their first position (referred to as Completers), while two skipped the question. While the response rate may seem low, that is a common characteristic of online survey procedures (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Since this was an exploratory study, designed to begin examination of a previously unstudied phenomenon, the researchers felt the response rate was sufficient for data analysis.

#### **RESULTS**

The initial question in the survey was the closed-choice question used to categorize individuals as ABD or Completers for the questions that followed. Five of the closed choice questions served only as question logic to direct individuals answering in a specific fashion to a follow-up question. For example, participants received the closed-choice question, “Do you view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with

completed doctoral degrees?" An answer of "no" led to the follow-up open-ended question, "Please explain how you view them differently," while an answer of yes led to the next open-ended question, "What advice would you give a doctoral student you are advising about accepting a position while ABD?" The results were analyzed simultaneously, examining the results of two of the closed-choice questions for difference between those who accepted a position while ABD (referred to as "ABD faculty") and those who held a terminal degree at the time they accepted their first position (referred to as "Completers"), while also analyzing the results of the open-ended questions. While these analyses were done simultaneously, the results will be presented here in two sections as quantitative and qualitative.

#### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

A quantitative statistical analysis was used to examine the results from two of the yes/no questions regarding perceptions of ABD faculty members. First, participants were asked "Do you view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with completed doctoral degrees?" Results were analyzed to examine for differences between the responders in the ABD faculty group and the Completers group. In the ABD faculty group, 4 of 10 respondents indicated they viewed ABD faculty similarly, while in the Completers group, 5 of 23 respondents they viewed ABD faculty in the same light. Utilizing Fisher's exact test (because of the small  $n$  in individual cells), there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in how ABD faculty were viewed ( $p= 0.21$ ). Both those who were ABD at the time of accepting their first faculty position and those who held a terminal degree were less likely to view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with completed degrees.

A second question examined differences between the two groups. Participants were asked, "Given two candidates with equal teaching and publication experience, would you view an ABD candidate for a position equally with a candidate who has completed his/her doctorate?" For this question, again 4 of 10 respondents in the ABD category indicated they would view the two candidates equally; however, only 1 of 25 respondents in the Completers category indicated they would. Fisher's exact test was again used for analysis due to the small sample size, and in this case there was a statistically significant difference ( $p= 0.0169$ ) between the two groups.

Examining the responses to the two questions by groups yielded an unexpected finding. Those in the Completer group seemed to have mixed feelings regarding the status of ABD faculty; it appeared that when hiring, those in the Completer group would not view ABD applicants favorably, but once hired, some of those in the Completers groups would then be willing to give the new ABD faculty member the benefit of the doubt and view them similarly to junior faculty colleagues with completed degrees. The views of those in the ABD group held static across questions, with the same number of respondents viewing ABD candidates equally during hiring decisions and once they are members of a faculty.

#### QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The open-ended survey questions served as the data for qualitative analysis. Initially the second author read and coded each response independently, searching for any ideas or issues they might suggest, no matter how varied and disparate (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Next, a constant comparison approach was used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2005) to determine initial themes that emerged from the first coding. She then compared

and contrasted themes and decisions were made to collapse or add new themes. Findings from this analysis were shared with the first author who read through the raw data to determine whether all data was being represented through analysis. Frequently returning to the data to constantly compare and reflect allowed us to ensure each viewpoint was heard and respected. In the following sections we discuss the themes that became apparent from this study. The themes (i.e., ABDs as colleagues and advice to potential ABDs) presented in the subsequent listings do not represent a particular hierarchy, or importance level. On the contrary, all themes were deemed noteworthy through researcher use of recursive sorting, discussion, and referencing raw data sources.

**ABDs as colleagues.** Over three-fourths of our sample indicated that they do not view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with completed doctoral degrees. Four domains were found within the theme of ABDs as colleagues: credential, job pressures, experience, and risk.

**Credential.** Overwhelmingly, respondents concentrated on the fact that ABD faculty are not fully qualified to fulfill a faculty position. Many responses were reflective of the “professional hazing” that is part of the dissertation process, yet others were indicative of expectations for faculty members. One respondent alleged, “They are not able to participate in doctoral dissertation work, and without the degree, we have to get a waiver for them to teach any graduate courses which require terminal degrees.” A similar comment reflected on the need to give “some accommodations regarding load and responsibilities of the job.” Yet another participant pointed out, “They probably do not have the same level of expertise related to the conduct of research that they will have AFTER [emphasis in original] completing their dissertation research.”

**Job pressures.** The pressure of splitting time between dissertation research and expectations for faculty members was another area of concern. One respondent succinctly stated “Faculty responsibilities make it often difficult for ABD faculty to complete their degrees in a timely way and meet the expectations of being a full time university faculty member.” Again, the matter of starting a research agenda was emphasized, “They have to complete their degrees and then start on their tenure portfolio....New people have to be ready to start their line of research vigorously.” Others indicated that they found their colleagues, “distracted” or “stressed.” Clearly the stressors of accepting a new position were multiplied by the demands of finishing the dissertation.

**May not finish.** Our respondents were also aware of the risk involved in hiring a faculty member who is ABD. They would be “gone if they are unsuccessful” and “are more at risk in their academic position because they have yet to complete their degree.” One participant responded:

Many people cannot juggle two sets of responsibilities and end up losing their job (because they did it poorly while concentrating on finishing, or because they did it well but failed to complete the dissertation which was a condition of employment).

A further concern was the investment placed in them by the academic institution. One respondent indicated, “They need more mentoring and support to complete their dissertation. They need some accommodations regarding load and responsibilities of the job so they can get their degree done.”

**Experience.** The overwhelming concern from our respondents regarding ABD colleagues was that in failing to complete their dissertations, they did not have the

scholarly experience that one would expect in a faculty position. One respondent questioned, "How can you guide someone else to completion if you can't do it yourself?" Another indicated, "Completion of a dissertation and a few refereed journal articles are a couple of success indicators for potential tenure track faculty at R1/AAU institutions." An additional concern had to do with how they are viewed in their new position, "They do not set good examples of other doctoral students in [our] programs." Yet when considering experience, one respondent provided a viewpoint that differed, "Often ABD faculty have a stronger practitioner background and make a different contribution to the university."

**Advice to doctoral students considering ABD.** The majority of participants' advice to a doctoral student considering accepting a position ABD was "don't do it." Many acknowledged that these recommendations are often based upon where the student is in the dissertation process. One participant indicated, "If at all possible, complete the dissertation prior to beginning the new position. If not possible, have data collected and analyzed before leaving." For another respondent, the indication was, "not to do it unless all data are collected and a COMPLETE [emphasis in original] draft of the dissertation exists." Yet another replied:

It would depend on the progress the student has made toward completing the dissertation. If she or he has successfully defended the dissertation proposal and if data collection can be completed from a new location, I would expect the student's prospects of successful adjustment to be high.

Despite concerns about completion, our respondents understood that some students would go ahead and accept faculty employment. Their advice fell into two domains: consider risks and make a plan.

**Consider risks.** Knowing that not all students who accept faculty positions are successful in completing, our participants were unequivocal that doctoral students should consider all risks prior to accepting a position. One emphasized, "Prepare for a very challenging year. You'll be learning a new job, new city, new colleagues while simultaneously attempting to complete your dissertation." Another stressed, "S/he should also consider all responsibilities - children, spouse, and other family members who need to be cared for." A further response was, "the stress of finishing the degree impact[s] work and personal life." A major concern for ABD faculty is the challenge presented based on expectations for advancement. One respondent reflected on a colleague's experience and indicated, "What I learned is that, by spending time on the dissertation, there was no new research initiative and no new publications - although the tenure clock was ticking!" The issue of no new research or publications while completing the dissertation resonated throughout many of our participants' comments.

**Make a plan.** Our participants indicated that doctoral students considering accepting positions should thoroughly plan for the challenges of completing the dissertation while ABD. Most responses focused on specifics at the new employment setting. These recommendations mentioned aspects such as "negotiate a writing day(s) to continue working on the dissertation" rather than writing "just at night or on the weekend," and "Have strict timelines. Negotiate for time to meet them prior to accepting a position (e.g., one less course)." A further suggestion was to "make sure beginning responsibilities will permit completion of your degree. Ensure a clear Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the time line for tenure and promotion and governance responsibilities."

A second aspect of making a plan has to do with the institution where the ABD has been studying. Clearly by putting distance between the student and the student's academic advisor, there is less opportunity for engagement. Our respondents emphasized the need to confirm what support will be provided by the major advisor from the doctoral program.

**Hiring an ABD faculty member.** Our final open-ended question asked participants to expand on why they would not consider an ABD candidate the same as one with a completed doctorate, even if the two had equal teaching and publication experience. Some of the participants added a caveat to their responses having to do with how far out the candidate was from the degree. But overwhelmingly the respondents indicated that the two would *not* be equal since "one is ready to begin the work of a faculty member and the other is not." Further, a participant replied, "All things being equal, the one who completed is more of a 'known quantity' in regard to successfully conducting research. That individual would be ready to take on all required responsibilities for the position." Yet other respondents found reasons for considering the ABD applicant, "a candidate who has an exemplary research and publication record as a student is a good risk in hiring early." The overall package an ABD candidate might present was detailed in another response:

Whether or not the dissertation is finished is not the major criterion in judging a candidate - it is the overall goodness of fit, which includes expertise, skills, promise of future accomplishments, match with the demands of the specific position, philosophical fit with the department's goals, and interpersonal skills to get along with others. If there are 2 candidates who are equal on all or most of these parameters, then and only then would ABD become a consideration. As a chair, I want the best possible faculty member, not the one who is more recently done with the dissertation.

**The voice of ABDs - a unique view.** We also found it interesting to specifically examine the opinions of the respondents who accepted positions ABD; nine of these faculty members provided answers to the qualitative portions of the survey (one responded only to the yes/no questions but provided no elaboration on the open-ended questions). Six of the nine indicated that given the same situation, as when they took their position ABD, they would make the same decision. Three responses were specific about the need to obtain employment, but this was not the only reason provided. Other responses focused more on the fact that "it was a good choice for my career path," and "working with colleagues who had their doctorates proved motivating to complete the dissertation." Three respondents indicated that they would not make the same decision. A representative comment was, "I found it difficult to complete my dissertation while making the adjustment to a new environment and faculty demands." Another participant's comment indicated "lack of faculty mentorship" as a reason for regretting the decision.

A further interesting factor was divergence among the ABD respondents regarding the question as to whether they view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with completed doctoral degrees. As indicated in the discussion of the quantitative results, 6 of the 10 ABD faculty indicated they do not view ABD faculty equally to those who hold a terminal degree. Three of these respondents used terms such as "rite of passage" and "have not had to go the final mile" or indicated the rigor of "actual planning and study implementation." Further comments were indicative of the need for "independent research activities," and "publication experience."

**LIMITATIONS**

This study was exploratory in nature, and the number of participants was small. While HECSE institutions are some of the most well-known special education programs, there were at the time of this study only 59 HECSE institutions. In comparison, the much larger Special Education Faculty Needs Assessment (SEFNA) conducted by Smith, Montrosse, Robb, Tyler, and Young (2011), surveyed all 97 special education doctoral granting programs and sampled from the more than 1,000 special education teacher education programs (defined as teacher preparation programs only at the undergraduate or master's level).

Another limitation may be the nature of the programs housing the participants of the current study. Of the 59 programs, 57 are doctoral granting programs. These programs may be less likely to hire an ABD faculty member than special education teacher preparation programs that are offered only at the undergraduate or master's level. An ABD faculty member at a doctoral granting institution may not be able to serve on doctoral committees or teach higher-level courses, limiting their usefulness to the program. If we were to replicate the study on a larger scale, we would need to use a sampling procedure similar to that used by the authors of the SEFNA study to ensure participation from those programs more likely to hire ABD candidates.

**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The liminal nature of the ABD faculty member was clearly indicated in the responses of survey participants. Comments on "professional hazing" and statements indicating that ABD candidates have not completed the required "rites of passage" demonstrate that individuals who accept faculty positions while ABD are definitely in a place "betwixt and between." They are taking on the roles and responsibilities of a faculty member while possibly being viewed by colleagues as not having yet earned that role. The responses of those who took positions while ABD demonstrate their mixed feelings toward the experience - while they clearly succeeded in completing their degree and holding their faculty positions, they, like their "completer" colleagues, may not view future ABD faculty as equal to other new faculty who completed their degrees prior to job acceptance.

What does that mean for the current or future ABD faculty member? It may be that their experience is one that cannot be shared with all junior faculty members, but only those in the same liminal period, those who are also ABD and junior faculty. But there is, as of yet, no body of research they can consult in order to measure their experience, and no documentation indicating if they will ultimately succeed by both completing their degree and maintaining their faculty position. The findings of Smith et al. (2011) indicate the shortage of special education faculty members will persist and perhaps even worsen in the next decade, making it even more likely that a large number of junior faculty will start their first positions while ABD. Additionally, special education is not the only field within education to hire faculty while still ABD (Horner, Pape, & O'Conner, 2001). What can be done to support those ABD faculty members to ensure they experience a successful start that will lead to a long and productive career? Based on this exploratory study, we see two future directions for research: 1) longitudinal studies examining the career success of faculty members who began their careers while ABD compared to those who began as degree completers, and 2) case studies examining the experience of

ABD faculty members as they tackle their new faculty positions while working to complete their degree. These individuals may be one of the missing puzzle pieces as we continue to examine the ongoing complex problem of special education faculty shortages.

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#### **APPENDIX A. ABD FACULTY SURVEY (WITH SKIP LOGIC DIRECTIONS EMBEDDED)**

1. Did you accept a faculty position while ABD?
  - a. If yes, go to question 2. If no, go to question 4.
2. Given the same situation as you had when you took your position ABD, would you make the same decision?
3. Please elaborate on why you would or would not make the same decision.

4. Do you view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with completed doctoral degrees?
  - a. If yes, go to question 6. If no, go to question 5.
5. Since you indicated you do not view ABD faculty in the same light as junior faculty with completed doctoral degrees, please explain how you view them differently.
6. What advice would you give a doctoral student you are advising about accepting a position while ABD?
7. Have you previously worked as a colleague with a faculty member who was ABD?
  - a. If yes, go to question 8. If no, go to question 9.
8. Since you indicated you have worked with a colleague who is/was ABD, how would that experience impact advise you might give a doctoral student about taking a position ABD?
9. Do you currently provide input to your program/department/college regarding hiring for open special education faculty positions?
  - a. If yes, go to question 10. If no, go to question 12.
10. Since you indicated you do provide input regarding hiring for open special education faculty positions, given two candidates with equal teaching and publication experience, would you view an ABD candidate for a position equally with a candidate who has completed their doctorate?
  - a. If yes, go to question 12. If no, go to question 11.
11. Since you have indicated you would not view the two candidates equally, how would you view them differently and why?
12. If you have any other thoughts regarding individuals who are ABD accepting traditional faculty positions, please share them here.