

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, NURSING AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

A Qualitative Phenomenological Study: Social Support that Influences Academic Progress for Doctoral Students After a Disruption

Monday, April 18th, 2022

1:00 pm- 2:30 pm

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/my/karlaloya> (Password: EDD)

**Dissertation Defense by
Ana Román-Sanchez**

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to provide doctoral students an opportunity to share their lived experiences regarding disruption (which includes school shootings, hurricanes, other natural disasters, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic). In addition, this study examined the social supports that influenced their academic progress when they faced disruption. There is currently a gap in the existing scholarship examining how disasters and disruptions affect doctoral students' academic progress, transition, mental health, and the social support and strategies they use to succeed. This study sought to address this gap. House's (1981) social support conceptual framework was used to guide the study. The primary data source was gathered from semi-structured interviews with 17 participants who have either completed their doctorate or were in the pursuit of completing one at the time of the interviews.

Disruptions experienced and shared in this study included COVID-19, medical issues including long COVID, political unrest, divorce, and others. Most participants experienced more than one disruption. Data analysis led to identifying four themes that encapsulate doctoral students' experiences as they faced a disruption in their academic progress. These themes indicate that their priorities shifted with disruption, they were driven by a 'I want to finish' impetus, they reported being blessed by disruption, and they self-advocate. Collectively, these four themes demonstrate doctoral students' ability to persevere and find alternative ways to continue and often complete their doctoral degrees despite unexpected challenges. While this study focused on doctoral students, these findings may be transferable to undergraduate and other graduate programs and other types of disruptions.

Ana Román-Sanchez is a Business Project Senior Manager for a Health Insurer ranked in the top 20 of the Fortune 500 List. She holds a Master's in Business Administration concentrated in Management and Organization and a Master of Science in Organizational Psychology from the University of Hartford; and a Bachelor of Science from Central Connecticut State University with a focus on Management and Organization.