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Counseling and
Human Development
Services

RETURNING COUNSELOR EDUCATION DOCTORAL STUDENTS: ISSUES OF
RETENTION AND PERCEIVED EXPERIENCES (174 pp.)

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The purpose of this study was to illuminate the experiences of counselor education doctoral students who had voluntarily departed from study and successfully returned. The main research question was: What are the experiences of doctoral students who have voluntarily departed from programs in counselor education and then successfully returned to the same programs? Six female participants completed a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed utilizing Creswell's (2007) 4-step approach for phenomenological research. Themes derived from the data analysis suggest there is a common essential experience to departing from and returning to study, including four major categories: (a) departing and returning are salient personal events, (b) faculty responses are noticed and important, (c) departure is informed by personal factors, and (d) departure is informed by academic culture. All participants conveyed that departing from and returning to study were significant events in their lives, and expressed a variety of reactions, both positive and negative. Participants also communicated the importance of how faculty members responded to them when departing and returning, suggesting that faculty members are uniquely positioned to respond to doctoral students departing from and returning to doctoral study. Finally,

participants departed from doctoral study because of academic culture, personal factors, or a combination of both. No studies were encountered in the literature examining doctoral students who had departed from and returned to study, highlighting the singular nature of this research. The findings have implications for counseling departments, counseling faculty, and counselor education doctoral students. Limitations to the research study were elucidated and proposals for future research were offered.