

Task Force
Report
on the
Professional
Doctorate



Council of Graduate Schools

CGS Task Force Report on the Professional Doctorate



COUNCIL OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS

CGS Task Force on the Professional Doctorate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Professional doctoral degrees comprise an important and growing component of higher education. The programs offering these degrees can provide valuable benefits to society by preparing leaders who will transform professional practice, just as the doctor of philosophy degree prepares those who will transform their field of knowledge. Professional doctorates may also represent mastery of the expanded knowledge base that is informing practice in many high-skill areas.

The rapid growth of professional doctoral degrees, however, presents challenges to higher education policy-makers who must establish standards and ensure quality. This growth has sometimes been described in terms of “credential creep,” by which greater numbers of professions are requiring doctorates and by which specific professions are escalating the degree demands and expectations for licensure and practice. In response, many universities find themselves deviating from their traditional academic missions. Such changes in institutional mission may be perceived as positive, in so far as they represent the greater responsiveness of universities to social needs and student demand. They may also be perceived as negative, especially when driven largely by the pursuit of revenues.

All parties charged with assuring quality in higher education—including graduate schools and graduate deans, regional accreditors, disciplinary accreditors, university systems, universities, and individual academic units—need to engage in vigorous dialogue in order to articulate clear standards and processes for the approval and evaluation of professional doctorates. This dialogue must take place because professional doctorates differ substantially from research doctorates with regard to faculty, students, and curriculum. While professional doctorates must, like research doctorates, meet well-defined standards of quality, review processes for professional doctorates must be respectful of these differences and may require changes in the academic culture of institutions.

This publication represents the conclusions of a CGS Task Force on the Professional Doctorate, established in 2005. The Task Force

concluded that graduate colleges and graduate deans should play a leading role in the dialogue surrounding professional doctoral degrees, and in the development and implementation of these standards and processes. Institutional review processes should emphasize the role and value of professional doctorates in relation to the mission and strengths of the individual institution. And disciplinary review processes should assure minimum thresholds of quality for professional doctoral programs; they should be motivated first and foremost by the advancement of learning and practice and by the public good. But the active role of graduate deans and graduate schools is vital and necessary, especially at this stage in the growth of professional doctoral degrees, to ensure that these degrees are well integrated into the overall mission of the institution and that they meet the necessary quality standards to best serve students and society.

FOREWORD

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In 2005, the Council of Graduate Schools appointed a Task Force on the Professional Doctorate to ascertain how CGS might be most helpful in providing guidance to our member institutions as they consider proposals for new professional doctorates, and as they oversee existing professional doctorates. The CGS Task Force, which included graduate deans who have been active in sessions on the professional doctorate at CGS annual meetings and summer workshops, considered issues such as: common standards for professional doctorates, the minimum qualification of graduate faculty within such programs, and other curricular matters that relate to general graduate policies for the institution. The issues and concerns identified by this task force are captured in this report.

The CGS Task Force discussion was also informed by a second group convened in Washington by CGS, in partnership with the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, in 2005. The purpose of that group discussion was to focus on degree expansion in professional fields currently taking place among university administrators and among accreditors of professional programs. The latter meeting, which included the CGS staff and graduate deans, was intended to establish consensus among all stakeholders in graduate education regarding best practices in professional doctoral programs.

CGS is grateful to the Task Force on the Professional Doctorate for their thoughtful discussions that resulted in this report, and especially to Clark Hulse who graciously served as its primary author. We hope that this report from the CGS Task Force on the Professional Doctorate serves as a guiding framework for future discussions and activities focused on this fast-emerging degree.

Debra W. Stewart
President
Council of Graduate Schools

INTRODUCTION

The professional doctorate has emerged in recent years as a major point of innovation and competition for universities. Simultaneously, it has sparked hope, concern, and even confusion among the bodies charged with quality control externally (the Department of Education, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, and disciplinary professional associations) and internally (graduate deans, disciplinary deans, provosts, system governance bodies, chancellors and presidents, and boards of trustees). All concerned parties have expressed the need for vigorous, multi-part discussion of the challenges presented by the professional doctorate and standards and practices that must characterize it if it is to take its appropriate place in the landscape of American and global higher education.

In the best case, professional degrees can represent important innovations as universities respond to societal needs and prepare a highly-skilled professional workforce to address those needs. Degree expansion can be a point of pride for universities as they meet the increasing demands of a knowledge-driven economy and society. Those earning professional doctorates will hold important positions of leadership in knowledge-based societies, and will have major influence over the quality of life for broad populations. Holders of professional doctorates can be key partners outside of universities for university-based researchers, as a critical part of the networks of inquiry that underpin engaged and translational research.

In the worst case, professional degrees can represent a competitive rush to the bottom as universities respond to revenue pressures by churning out credentials for willing buyers. Universities may resort to degree-inflation as they abandon their obligations to maintain the highest standards of knowledge and to protect the public. Professional doctorates can also be a shallow mechanism by which guilds leverage up their earnings and their prestige versus other skilled workers. In this worst case scenario, a professional doctorate—or any other degree that might lack integrity and rigor—could undermine the fundamental credibility of the world of learning.

Graduate schools have broad responsibilities within their institution for the maintenance of academic quality and for the assurance that students have successful learning experiences. Graduate schools therefore have a vested interest in the national discussion over professional doctorates and an ethical obligation to speak vigorously to the issues. The Council of Graduate Schools therefore seeks to play a strong and constructive role in that discussion.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS

Department of Education, Science, and Training (DEST), Australia: In a 1997 report on doctoral programs, the Department of Education, Science and Training of the Australian Government addressed the proliferation of professional doctorate programs in Australian Universities. Its findings presage later discussions in the United States in significant ways. Particularly important to program growth in Australia was the value placed by employers and professionals on the ways in which such programs linked research with industry needs, and the capacity to deliver them online (in whole or part). In its survey of programs, the study recorded a twenty-fold increase in the number of such programs between 1989 and 1996.

Australian universities offered two distinct rationales for professional doctorates. Some made an argument based on difference from the Ph.D., emphasizing the applied nature of the professional doctorate. Others made an argument based on equivalence, maintaining that professional doctorates should reflect the same scholarly standard as the Ph.D., but emphasize the advancement of professional practice rather than theoretical knowledge. However, the report noted that some programs lacked coherence in planning and assessment and offered limited support for students (DEST, 1997).

A 2002 DEST report observed that, among the 131 programs identified in 35 of the 38 Australian public universities, the majority exhibited only “surface” level links between universities and industry. The report recommended a number of strategies “for the design and development of doctoral programs that deliver new types of quality research training” (DEST, 2002).

Higher Learning Commission (HLC): The most extensive consideration of professional doctorates in the United States is the Report of the Task Force on the Professional Doctorate by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, issued in June, 2006. The HLC recognized the emergence of new degrees,

especially in health professions, that did not clearly fit existing taxonomies. These new degrees often go under the informal designations of “clinical doctorate,” “professional doctorate,” or “practicing doctorate.” Their characteristics have been heavily driven by individual professional associations, with the result that there is little uniformity across this emergent category in terms of content, rigor, or nature of study.

Importantly, the HLC found that professional doctorates created a series of challenges for institutions and accrediting associations. Research universities will likely approach the new degrees from within a framework shaped by the research doctorate, especially the Ph.D. Specialized professional institutions with a tight range of programming will approach them within a disciplinary or professional framework. Institutions that have historically offered master’s or bachelor’s degrees but not doctorates may lack well-developed institutional frames of reference or graduate structures. Likewise, accrediting associations face the challenge of creating evaluation tools that are relevant both to the characteristics of these new degrees and to the missions of the institutions that are considering or offering them.

The HLC concluded that professional doctorates in health professions are here to stay, that new ones will likely spring up in disciplines other than health care, and that they need to be considered as a distinct degree level with well-defined criteria and processes for evaluation and quality assurance. The HLC recommended that evaluation criteria carefully reflect the capacity of an institution to succeed in offering professional doctorates, especially in relation to its mission, resources, and ability to ensure quality. The Task Force further recommended that the HLC and other accreditation bodies establish core characteristics for professional doctorates, even as it allowed for the appropriate role of disciplinary associations in defining the variations that are demanded by a particular professional area.

The HLC Task Force noted that there is no consistency among colleges and universities about internal governance of professional doctorates: “If a graduate school exists, these degrees may or may not fall under its aegis.” In many universities, the decision has been made—at least to date—to separate the new professional doctorates from the graduate school.” While the Task Force did not make a definitive recommendation at this time about the role of graduate schools with regard to professional doctorates, it noted that “program governance through a graduate school conceivably could assist in addressing the concerns about variability among these degrees.” The Task Force

recommended that the HLC participate in a national dialogue and review recommendations from the Council of Graduate Schools and others.

PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE CGS TASK FORCE REPORT

The Council of Graduate Schools has approached the issues surrounding the professional doctorate with deliberate speed, and through careful consultation with its members, as reflected in the timeline below:

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|---------------------------|--|
| February 2005 | CGS Task Force established
The mission of the task force is to ascertain how CGS might be most helpful in providing guidance to member institutions as they evaluate proposals for new professional doctorates, and as they oversee existing professional doctorates. |
| July 2005 | CGS Summer Workshop Session |
| September 2005 | Joint meeting of Council of Higher Education Associations (CHEA) and Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). Present at the meeting were representatives of CHEA, CGS, professional accrediting bodies, and graduate deans. CHEA and CGS agreed to conduct separate internal discussions and develop policy statements that articulate the roles, responsibilities, and standards of the various parties. |
| December 2005 | CGS Concurrent Session, “Issues and Opportunities With the Professional Doctorate”
In this session, members of the CGS Task Force shared their perspectives on best practices in establishing, approving, and reviewing professional doctorates. Carol Lynch, Faculty Associate, University of Colorado at Boulder, presided over this session with speakers Robert Augustine, Dean, Eastern Illinois University; Martin Cadwallader, Vice Chancellor for Research, Dean of the Graduate School, University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Clark Hulse, Dean, University of Illinois at Chicago. |
| July 2006 | CGS Summer Workshop Session, “Emerging Best Practices in the Professional Doctorate”
This “Dean Dialogue” session solicited final feedback from deans to the CGS Task Force, prior to its formulation of recommendations to CGS on best practices. |
| August 2006–
July 2007 | Draft, Review, and Completion of Report |

DEFINING THE PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

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THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

In its 2005 policy statement on *The Doctor of Philosophy Degree*, the Council of Graduate Schools describes the Ph.D. as “the highest academic degree granted by North American universities,” awarded by faculty stewards of the discipline to those who have demonstrated the highest level of mastery of the intellectual principles of their chosen field. Through research and scholarship, recipients of the Ph.D. have demonstrated their ability to apply those principles to create original contributions that expand the boundaries of knowledge in the field” (CGS, 2005, p.1).

The defining characteristic of the Ph.D. is the independent research experience in which the degree candidate makes a new contribution to knowledge. As the highest degree available in its fields of knowledge, the Ph.D. marks an individual as capable of intellectual leadership in that field.

There is not yet a corresponding consensus about the characteristics of the professional doctorate. The “core characteristics” and key variations are discussed in Chapter 3. However, what is clear is what a professional doctorate is not. The simplest answer is that a professional doctorate is not a Ph.D. The CGS policy statement on the Ph.D. notes that the doctor of philosophy degree “is to be distinguished from other doctorates, such as the M.D., J.D., Ed.D., or N.D., which are designed for professional training or which focus on applied research related to professional practice rather than on basic research that expands the knowledge base of the field” (p. 1). As new professional doctorates emerge and their characteristics become systematized, this statement will likely require revision. Some Ph.D. programs involve engaged or clinical research. Some professional doctorates do likewise. But it is generally

agreed that basic research is the domain of the Ph.D. program, and that a professional doctorate is less research-focused in orientation, and more clinical, engaged, or applied.

Second, a professional doctorate is not—and cannot be—a re-titled master’s degree. Like a Ph.D., a professional doctorate clearly demarks a standard of achievement higher than that of degrees that precede it. Of course, not all “highest degrees” or “terminal degrees” must be doctorates. The M.F.A. is a highly-respected degree and is usually the degree of choice for the most renowned artists, composers, musicians, and directors of the world. Graduate faculty in art and design and performing arts at premier programs routinely hold the M.F.A. degree, and are evaluated for promotion and tenure on the basis of their professional accomplishments as well as their skills as teachers and mentors. But if a master’s degree, at the most general level, represents mastery of an existing domain of learning (e.g., the M.A.) or professional practice (e.g., the professional master’s degree), then a professional doctoral degree should represent preparation for the potential transformation of that field of professional practice, just as a Ph.D. represents preparation for the potential transformation of the basic knowledge in a discipline.

Professional doctorates have a long history, and the oldest of them pre-date the Ph.D. The most common professional doctoral degrees, such as the examples listed below, may be roughly categorized into three generations:

First generation:	M.D. (doctor of medicine)
	D.D.S. (doctor of dental science, or surgery)
	D.V.M. (doctor of veterinary medicine)
Second generation:	J.D. (doctor of jurisprudence)
	Pharm.D. (doctor of pharmacy)
	Ed.D. (doctor of education)
	D.Psych. (doctor of psychology)
	D.P.H. (doctor of public health)
Recent:	Aud.D. (doctor of audiology)
	O.T.D. (doctor of occupational therapy)
	D.P.T. (doctor of physical therapy)
	D.N.P. (practice doctorate in nursing)

CHARACTERISTICS AND VARIATIONS

Because the category of “professional doctorate” embraces such a wide set of degrees, and there are significant variations within individual degrees, it is difficult to offer prescriptive lists of the characteristics of the professional doctorate. Indeed, all parties at the 2005 CHEA/CGS discussion agreed that a doctorate (professional or Ph.D.) is not defined by some formula, such as a number of credit hours. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some core characteristics and core expectations, as well as some major variations.

Three core characteristics and expectations for the professional doctorate are:

- It addresses an area of professional practice where other degrees are not currently meeting all employer needs.
- It emphasizes applied or clinical research or advanced practice.
- It includes in its ranks the leaders of the profession who will drive the creative and knowledge-based development of its practices and the development of standards for others.

Analysis of the characteristics of professional doctorate and Ph.D. degrees involves six major points of comparison:

- Prior degrees
- Coursework
- Clinical practica
- Threshold examination
- Capstone
- Relation to licensure

The characteristics listed below are typical. Individual degree programs may present significant variations.

	Ph.D.	Professional doctorate with capstone experience	Professional doctorate without capstone experience
Bachelor's degree required	Yes	Yes	Yes (except Pharm.D.)
Master's degree required	Sometimes	Sometimes	No
Length of master's degree	32 hours	Varies (32 to 48 hours)	N/A
Coursework credit hours	32 hours past master's degree	Yes (amount varies)	Yes (2 to 3 years)
Non-coursework activity	32 (independent study and thesis research)	Yes (amount varies)	Sometimes (e.g., medical rounds)
Clinical practica	No	Yes	Sometimes
Threshold examinations	Preliminary or qualifying exam	Preliminary or qualifying exam	Sometimes (e.g., medical boards)
Capstone experience	Dissertation	Dissertation or project	None
Direct relation to licensure	None	Usually none	Yes

From this analysis, it is apparent that a professional doctorate may differ from a Ph.D. in five key ways:

- 1) In rare cases (notably the Doctor of Pharmacy), a professional doctorate may be a first degree, with students being admitted without a bachelor's degree, which they receive along the way.
- 2) The length of study beyond the master's degree for a professional doctorate may be slightly shorter than for a Ph.D., especially when the professional doctorate requires a "fat master's" degree that is longer than the conventional master's.
- 3) The total length of study as measured in credit hours may differ significantly from the Ph.D.; however, a considerable number of the credit hours for Ph.D. study are independent study or thesis research.
- 4) A professional doctorate ordinarily involves clinical experiences and practica.
- 5) A professional doctorate may involve a dissertation like that required for a Ph.D.; alternatively, it may have a different form of capstone experience or none at all.

The variations within the broad group of professional doctoral degrees is even greater. Key points of variance include:

- Total length of course of study
- Prior degrees required
- Nature of capstone experience
- Relation to professional licensure

However, professional doctorates may be perceived to fall into two broad groups: those with a dissertation or project as the capstone activity, and those without.

Generally, those with a dissertation or project have no direct relationship to licensure and have a significant grounding in clinical, translational, or engaged research. Hence they bear a cousin-relationship to the Ph.D. degree, with its grounding in research. Examples include the Ed.D., D.N.P., and O.T.D.

In contrast, those without a dissertation or project generally lead directly to professional licensure and do not involve individual research by the student.¹ Examples include the M.D., J.D., and D.V.M. For instance, an M.D. degree involves two years of coursework, two years of rounds, and three levels of board examinations. A J.D. degree involves three years of coursework, with the bar exam administered independently, after conferral of the degree.

IPEDS REPORTING CATEGORIES

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) recently issued new definitions governing data for the classification of first-professional degrees in the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The previous definitions recognized the M.D., D.D.S., and D.V.M. degrees as “first professional.”

The new definitions are effective for institutions on a voluntary basis for the 2009–2010 data collection year (for degrees granted between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009), and mandatory for the 2010–2011 data collection year.

¹The relationship between licensure and accreditation requires a separate discussion and will not be addressed in this report.

IPEDS Reporting Categories for Doctoral Degrees
(Effective 2009–2010 data collection year
Mandatory 2010–2011 data collection year)

Doctor's degree—research/scholarship—A Ph.D. or other doctor's degree that requires advanced work beyond the master's level, including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement. Some examples of this type of degree may include Ed.D., D.M.A., D.B.A., D.Sc., D.A., or D.M., and others, as designated by the awarding institution.

Doctor's degree—professional practice—A doctor's degree that is conferred upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice. The degree is awarded after a period of study such that the total time to the degree, including both pre-professional and professional preparation, equals at least six full-time equivalent academic years. Some of these degrees were formerly classified as "first-professional" and may include: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Law (L.L.B. or J.D.); Medicine (M.D.); Optometry (O.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Podiatry (D.P.M., Pod.D., D.P.); or Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), and others, as designated by the awarding institution.

Doctor's degree—other—A doctor's degree that does not meet the definition of a doctor's degree—research/scholarship or a doctor's degree—professional practice.

The new IPEDS definitions replace the old "first professional" category with a new category "Doctor's degree—professional practice."

"Professional practice" degrees are distinguished from "Research/scholarship" doctor's degrees in two ways. First, the "professional practice" degree prepares a student for the "recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice."

Second, the form of training in the "professional practice" degree is defined by the length of training (at least six years). In contrast, the training provided by a "research/scholarship" doctoral degree is defined through work beyond a master's level, and a capstone experience, "including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original

research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement.”

The new IPEDS definitions effectively distinguish between two kinds of professional doctorate. The “professional practice” doctorate includes the traditional “first-professional” degrees (M.D., D.D.S., D.V.M.) plus other doctoral degrees that require course work and perhaps clinical experiences leading to professional licensure (such as the J.D. and Pharm.D.).

In contrast, many professional doctoral degrees will be appropriately categorized as “research/scholarship” degrees because they emphasize clinical, translational, or engaged research, have a capstone dissertation or substantial project, and provide advanced training in a professional area where licensure is separate or comes at an earlier stage. NCES cites the Ed.D. as an example of a “research/scholarship” professional doctorate. Others, depending on their individual curricula and the requirements of their disciplinary accrediting associations, might include the D.N.P., O.T.D., and D.P.H.

By differentiating between the two kinds of professional doctorates, the IPEDS reporting categories may provide data that underscore the important relationships between Ph.D. degrees and professional doctorates conducted on the “research/scholarship” model. This relationship in turn is an important consideration for the involvement of graduate schools and colleges in new program review and program assessment.

THE PLACE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DRIVERS

The growth of professional doctorates in recent years is usually attributed to external demands in the form of employer needs, the wish of skilled workers to improve themselves professionally, and the desire of universities to better meet the needs of students and society as well as to generate revenue.

The U.S. and global economies have generated increasing demands for high-skilled workers. Individuals have responded by seeking advanced education in sharply increasing numbers. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that between 1995 and 2005, graduate enrollments increased by 20 percent, from 2,749,000 to 3,304,000.² (By comparison, growth in the previous decade was slightly more than 13 percent). While growth in doctorates awarded by U.S. colleges and universities was relatively flat during this time at approximately 4 percent overall between 1995 and 2005, growth in doctoral degrees awarded from 2002 to 2005 was double that rate (Hoffer, 2005, Table 1, p.40). Among those graduate degrees exhibiting fastest growth are master's degrees, including professional master's degrees, and professional doctorates (CGS, 2006a).

A knowledge-based society also produces a thirst for credentialing. As critical tasks become increasingly specialized, strong credentialing is essential to assist employers in identifying individuals with specific skills and proper training, in order to ensure the safety and well-being of the public. At the same time, credentials confer status on the individuals who

²U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Table A-7. See www.census.gov/population/socdemo/school/tabA-7.xls

hold them, with corresponding economic benefits, especially when the credentialing process ensures the scarcity of a human resource and prevents the substitution of other resources in addressing a social or economic need.

The value of professional doctorates as credentials creates an opportunity for universities seeking revenue growth. Many universities are facing constraints on traditional revenue sources to support education. Many public universities have faced a plateauing or reduction in state appropriations. Tuition affordability for undergraduate education has become a major issue for both public and private institutions. In contrast, holders of graduate degrees continue to enjoy strong growth rates in earnings, suggesting that a graduate degree is a wise investment. Hence, professional doctorates especially look like an area where universities have pricing power and can capture a higher proportion of the value they are creating.

In addition to these external drivers, there is also an important internal driver, as the higher education world investigates forms of knowledge and forms of learning that differ from the didactic methods and theoretical inquiry that especially characterize the traditional Ph.D.

The primary relationship of universities to the non-university world in pre-industrial and industrial periods was characterized through a vocabulary either of isolation (the “ivory tower”), or of extension and application. The Morrill Act (1862) and the Hatch Act (1887), which initially shaped America’s land grant universities, recognized a distinction between liberal and practical education. In this vocabulary, the university is figured as the site of answers, and the surrounding society as the site of problems and questions.

The explosive growth of American research universities in the aftermath of World War II saw them entering increasingly into applied fields and seeking ways to transfer their basic research beyond their institutional walls. These activities over the past sixty years have inevitably reshaped the underlying categories. In post-industrial knowledge-based society, universities are one among many sites of knowledge; other knowledge sites include industry research and development, healthcare institutions, non-profits, and government. These non-university domains are increasingly populated by individuals with high levels of knowledge attainment. University relationships with these other sites of knowledge are increasingly based on engagement, translation, and exchange. To take just one measure of the creation of knowledge, a low percent of patents are actually generated by universities despite their high concentration of scientific learning.

As universities have responded to their position in a knowledge-based post-industrial society, the hard division of basic research versus applied research has become complicated and blurred. Particularly significant is the emergence of clinical and translational research, which emphasizes a circular process of “bench to bed and back.” Engaged research, which has become a distinctive feature of many areas of the social sciences, emphasizes the formulation of research questions through interaction with external communities, so that the questions—and their answers—are informed by the specific knowledge and knowledge-formations of those communities.

In a statement on Professional Master’s Programs Initiative, the Council of Graduate Schools has noted that, from the perspective of non-academic employers in the business, government and non-profit sectors, “many doctorate (including Ph.D.) graduates are often over-qualified in research but unprepared in other areas” (CGS 2006b). A number of efforts dedicated to reforming the Ph.D. have envisioned courses of study that are more open to social concerns and more engaged with communities outside the university. Correspondingly, many new professional doctoral programs emphasize the need for leaders of professional practice to be deeply informed by research and able to contribute knowledge from their professional practice that will direct that research to new areas and new questions.

AREAS OF CONSENSUS

The driving forces behind professional doctorates are strong and persistent and require a considered and sustained response from the higher education community. Fortunately, universities have demonstrated their commitment to respond to social and economic needs on a national and global scale, and consensus exists in key areas that will underpin the shaping of policy concerning professional doctorates.

Key areas of consensus:

- The Ph.D. and the professional doctorate are different, though there is less agreement on what that difference is.
- There is emerging agreement (via IPEDS) on different subsets within the broad category of professional doctorates.
- Professional doctorates need definition as a category, including further discussion of core characteristics and reasonable ranges of variation.

- There is a need for explicit criteria for accreditation and review of professional doctorates, including national standards to give direction to professional associations.
- Disciplinary accreditation and review must be paired with strong institutional review to ensure that programs meet the standards, resources, and mission of a specific institution.
- Standards of excellence cannot be mechanically defined, e.g., through numbers of credit hours.
- Work done for one degree should not be applicable toward another.

ISSUES AND DEBATES

Despite strong points of consensus regarding the definition of professional doctorates and the need for quality assurance in their development, other aspects of the professional doctorate evoked controversy and debate among the CGS Task Force members. Many of the graduate deans on the Task Force on the Professional Doctorate registered strong objections to professional doctorate degrees that had one or the more of the following characteristics or practices:

- A “coursework-only” doctorate (i.e., without threshold examinations or capstone experiences), except where the degree is directly linked to licensure.
- “Transitional degrees” or “upgrades,” where holders of an existing degree receive a doctorate with only a modest amount of additional work.
- Admission of students without a bachelor’s degree. Among existing professional doctorates, for example, the Pharm.D. admits students as juniors or seniors. While the Pharm.D. has a record of success and many strong examples, the graduate dean community would be reluctant to see this model extended to other areas.
- Granting of credit for prior work experience.

In addition to those aspects listed above that elicited unanimous concern by task force members, the following issues surrounding the professional doctorate sparked debate. Graduate deans as a community are likely to share the concerns expressed in these debates, and the development, approval, and assessment of these degrees should be conducted with these concerns in mind:

- Graduate deans as a community recognize a particular challenge presented by work done in teams, which is a frequent characteristic of professional doctorates. There are reasonable arguments that team-based credit activities are an appropriate preparation for an area of professional practice dominated by teamwork, but careful consideration is needed in understanding how such work should be evaluated. This challenge is not limited to professional doctorates, and indeed is shared by some areas of basic research.
- Professional doctorates face a variety of status debates within higher education, related to hierarchies of knowledge. For instance, in some circles, controversies continue over the relative merits and uses of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in Education. These status debates may be alleviated by careful consideration within individual institutions of the different purposes of degrees and their relations to institutional missions.
- Graduate deans as a community believe that graduate schools can and should play a strong role as institutional evaluators for professional doctorates.
- Professional doctorates face debates over the qualifications for faculty overseeing doctoral study. In many cases, it may be highly appropriate to have portions of professional doctoral programs (e.g., clinical experiences) under the leadership of faculty who are outside the tenure system, or indeed who are outside the university. Thoughtful approaches will be needed to define qualifications, find ways to associate non-tenure system faculty with tenure-system faculty, and evaluate performance outside the familiar methods associated with Ph.D. programs.
- Some graduate deans argue that quality assurance for professional doctoral programs is best provided when all committees have an outside member representing the graduate school.
- Professional doctoral programs kindle resource debates, either when they appear to siphon resources from traditional programs, or when they generate resources that traditional programs would like to see flowing back to them.
- Professional doctorates kindle assessment debates, since they logically may require a set of outcomes measures different from those for traditional programs.

- Professional doctorates constitute a challenge to the traditional culture of graduate schools, which may have to change if they are to succeed in overseeing professional doctorates as well as Ph.D. programs.
- Graduate deans as a community feel that they face risks of saying “no” to substandard proposals for professional doctorates. Specifically, they fear that proponents of such programs may advocate for their development elsewhere in ways that might evade or erode the academic jurisdiction of graduate colleges in the name of disciplinary demands or new revenues.

DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

THE ACCREDITATION CONTEXT

It is useful to think of accreditation as a complex set of processes for quality assurance. Each form of accreditation may consider different indicators and ensure different forms of value. Institutional accreditation focuses first and foremost on the mission of the institution and the relationship of individual components—including individual academic programs—to that mission. Disciplinary accreditation focuses on the standards of a specific area of knowledge and practice, and the relationship of a program to those standards.

Regional Accreditation

Institutional accreditation as conducted by regional accrediting associations has historically placed more focus on undergraduate education than on graduate and professional education. This balance, however, is shifting. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association has called for a public dialogue about professional doctorates. The associations collectively have placed increasing emphasis on student outcomes assessment at both undergraduate and graduate levels. In all cases, the review process places a strong emphasis on institutional mission, and the relationship of the values, programs, and practices of an institution to that mission.

Ph.D. programs have historically proven difficult to assess within the framework of institutional accreditation by regional associations. Professional doctoral degrees may prove less difficult. Both mission creep and deviations from mission should be highly visible within the

accreditation process. The relationship of professional doctorates to professional practice should provide a suitable context for learning assessment.

Recently, the Department of Education has proposed changes in accreditation processes that would place a greater emphasis on key performance indicators that would apply uniformly across institutions. Higher education associations have contested these proposals on the grounds that they would lessen the more successful model that relies on peer review and internal goal-setting. The resolution of this debate will have a profound effect on both disciplinary and regional accreditation.

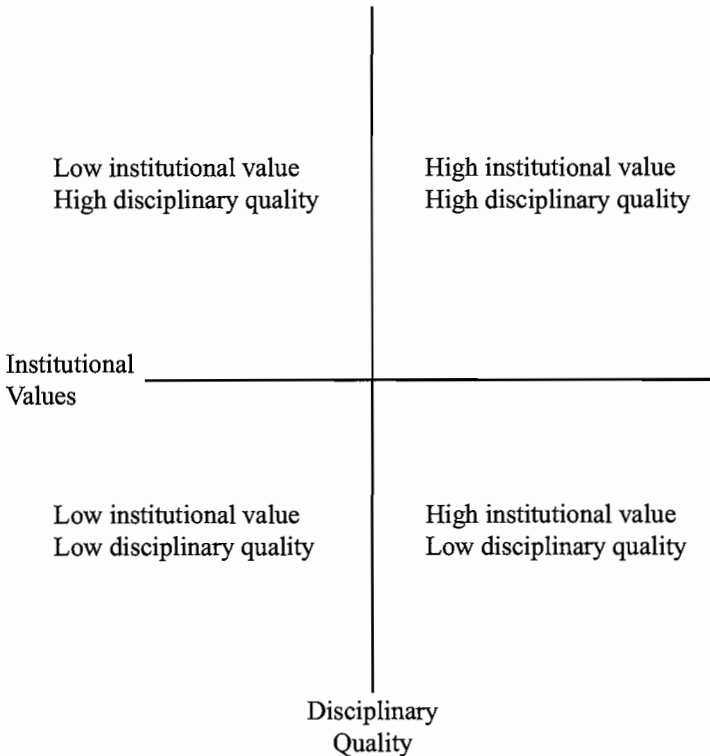
Disciplinary Accreditation

The accrediting standards for individual professions are determined by discipline-specific associations. These associations are in turn certified by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The Department of Education also sets basic standards for accreditation, and state regulatory agencies control licensure.

Accrediting associations set minimum thresholds for programs in reference to the standards of the professions that those programs serve. In the past, some associations have accredited programs as a whole, rather than specific degree levels. However, at the requirement of the Department of Education, associations are now developing standards for each specific degree level. Examples are Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy. IOTA has suspended further accreditation of O.T.D. degrees while it develops new standards specific to the professional doctorate. Physical Therapy still has a single standard for both master's and doctoral programs, but must evolve differential standards in response to the DOE mandate.

Two additional areas of debate are particularly important concerning the disciplinary accreditation of professional doctorates. One is the perception by some university leaders that disciplines or their associations may attempt to use the accreditation process to leverage resources within the institution, at the expense of other disciplines. Instead, they argue, disciplinary accreditation should restrict itself to assessments of quality and especially of minimum thresholds that ensure the public good, while institutional resource decisions must be made in the context of the institution as a whole. In this scenario, the institutional and disciplinary value assessments may be in conflict, rather than complementing each other.

The second issue involves “accreditation mills,” that is, organizations that offer accreditation with a minimum of scrutiny, and often for a very high price. Disciplines often have multiple and competing accrediting organizations. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation, which accredits accreditors, has issued criteria for recognizing “accreditation mills” (CHEA, 2003). The custodians of institutional quality, including graduate deans, should ensure that the disciplinary accreditation of their programs comes from the most reliable sources. Institutional and disciplinary quality assurance can be mapped mentally as two axes of value: a horizontal axis of institutional values and a vertical axis of disciplinary values. Ideally, professional doctoral programs—like any others—will register high on both value axes, but realistically there will be occasions when these values diverge. The possibilities can be easily visualized through four quadrants:



The upper right quadrant represents the ideal. Programs in the lower right quadrant are likely targets for institutional investment and improvement. Programs in the lower left quadrant should be highly suspect, and may be candidates for closure. Frequently, however, their

existence may indicate that factors are at work, including internal financial pressures or external political considerations (or, in the terminology of the securities markets, an excess of greed or fear). Programs in the upper left quadrant present the most difficult set of issues and decisions for administrators. These are likely small in number and are also likely to migrate over time to a different quadrant, either as they descend in quality as resources are withheld, or come to be more highly valued by their institution.

The Institutional Context

In the accreditation context, different parties conduct the different reviews for institutional accreditation and disciplinary accreditation. These reviews, and the resulting accreditation, provide assurances to the public that the specific institution—or the discipline within it—maintain certain standards and practices in comparison to others.

However, universities characteristically conduct their own internal reviews, for both new programs and existing programs, to support internal decision-making. These internal assessments tend to combine the evaluation of institutional and disciplinary values. It is sometimes argued that the accreditation of professional programs can substitute for internal review; however, the disciplinary accreditation review process necessarily omits the perspective and information necessary to understand how a program relates to the mission and pattern of strengths and weaknesses of an institution. Also, disciplinary accreditation review appropriately focuses on the minimum thresholds for professional practice by reference to a discipline. Institutional review focuses on the relation of programs to institutional mission, goals, and resources. A strong review process and set of review standards will think through the intersection of these two forms of review at both the institutional and national level.

1) Institutional Mission and Program Mix

Strong program evaluation in the institutional context begins with a consideration of the institutional mission and its particular set of strengths and weaknesses. Hence, the same professional doctoral degree may present radically different issues to institutions with different missions. In particular, the creation of a new professional doctorate presents a different kind of challenge for a Ph.D.-granting research university than it does for a non-Ph.D.-granting school, college, or university. Even among institutions with similar missions, a program that is part of a cluster of

strong, interlinked programs has a different value from one that stands in isolation or is surrounded by weak programs.

Ph.D.-Granting Research Universities

Ph.D.-granting research universities have significant advantages for offering professional doctorates. They are accustomed to offering doctoral-level training. When professional doctorates and Ph.D. programs are paired within a single disciplinary area (e.g., a Ph.D. in Nursing Science and Doctor of Nursing Practice), it is possible to create a strong complementarity. The missions and audiences of the programs can be differentiated, and the potential exists for strong interchange among students and faculty with different orientations, especially within the vocabulary of engaged or translational research. In some situations, paired programs may offer the opportunities to train dual-degree “superstar” students (e.g., M.D.-Ph.D.). In other situations, the degrees may offer alternative paths (e.g., Ed.D. vs. Ph.D. in Education).

On the other hand, Ph.D.-granting research universities often have a strong internal culture focused on basic research. Clinical faculty outside the tenure system may have difficulty gaining recognition, and clinical qualifications may count for little within the tenure and promotion process. These factors may affect program evaluation, such that programs have difficulty establishing themselves and are perceived as second-class or as threats to the central values and standards of the institution.

Non-Ph.D.-Granting Schools, Colleges, and Universities

Non-Ph.D. granting institutions face striking opportunities and challenges in offering new professional doctoral programs. In some situations, the creation of new professional doctorates may look like a good chance to “move up the food chain” to become a comprehensive institution. It may also, again in some situations, look like a logical extension of mission focused on workforce preparation and applied learning. And, of course, professional doctorates may appear to be attractive revenue sources.

On the other hand, non-Ph.D. granting institutions may lack the academic resources to be competitive in the doctoral market. If instead they compete on the basis of price, the potential revenue that may have attracted them into the market in the first place can quickly evaporate. Non-Ph.D.-granting institutions are also vulnerable to the phenomenon of degree creep by disciplines. An institution with a strong and successful master’s program may find itself confronted by a demand from a disciplinary association that the program be offered at the doctoral level in order to be accredited, even though the institution lacks authorization

for doctoral programming. This behavior threatens the viability of good master's programs, and it creates a bad incentive to match degree creep with mission creep.

University Systems

Public universities face an additional layer of complexity when they are embedded within a state university system. Such systems may support partnering between universities, allowing a non-Ph.D.-granting institution that is strong in practice-oriented disciplines to combine with a doctoral-granting research institution. In states with multiple systems, the professional doctorate may be a site of conflict for system entities, reflecting the competitive struggle among single institutions at the next level of scale.

2) Disciplinary Review

Most universities have elaborate systems of internal program review, often with mandatory review cycles. These reviews may focus on departments, examining undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as research activities, all at the same time. Less commonly, they are focused on individual programs or on a set of programs (e.g. all graduate programs within a college). University culture often places more emphasis on faculty reputation and research activity, and less on student outcomes assessment, than accreditation review. However, indicators of graduate program quality may be given particular attention, especially admissions criteria, enrollments, attrition and degree completion, and placements.

3) Institutional Review and the Graduate School

Programs are also, necessarily and appropriately, subject to cross-disciplinary institutional review; that is, they are reviewed by their institution in relation to other programs serving other disciplines and professions. These reviews are commonly conducted by graduate colleges, often in conjunction with faculty senate committees and provosts. Indeed, graduate colleges are ideally suited for conducting institutional reviews, given their unique position spanning the disciplinary range of the institution's educational activities.

CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE

Each institution should develop a process for review of professional doctoral programs that is appropriate to its mission and includes evidence of the following:

- The proposed program is likely to meet the minimum thresholds of the accrediting association.
- The standing of the sponsoring unit within the discipline.
- The characteristics of the best professional doctoral programs within the discipline.
- Graduates of the program will be prepared for leadership in the area of professional practice.
- How the professional doctorate relates to research programs, including the Ph.D., within the sponsoring unit and college.
- The qualifications of the faculty who will participate in the program.
- The program can attract students qualified for the proposed level of study.
- The program and institution will carefully evaluate student progress, student outcomes, and other markers of program success.
- The program will contribute to the overall mission, goals, and excellence of the department, college, and institution.
- The sponsoring unit will have the intellectual and material resources needed to sustain the program at a high level of excellence.

FACULTY

Professional doctorates may depend on a mix of faculty that is significantly different from the faculty for a Ph.D. program. While research doctorates, especially Ph.D.s, normally have a faculty that is entirely or overwhelmingly composed of Ph.D.s with significant research records, the professional doctorate may appropriately call upon an array of faculty with research and clinical accomplishments. Many clinical doctorates place an emphasis on clinical practice as a key element in training, and these practices are normally supervised by clinical practitioners rather than researchers. The clinical practitioners may have their professional homes outside of universities.

These conditions present challenges for the evaluation of programs by university faculty and administrators, including graduate deans. Universities should seek as clinical supervisors not merely those who are willing. Universities should seek out practitioners who have a record of reflection on clinical practice through publications of their clinical research. Clinical supervisors—especially those located outside of universities—should work in dialogue with university-based research and clinical faculty. Graduate schools may seek to formalize these relationships by extending clinical or courtesy membership in the graduate faculty to clinical supervisors. Such membership should be accompanied by a review of credentials and a statement to the individual of the rights and responsibilities of graduate faculty membership.

STUDENTS

Just as the faculty of a professional doctoral program may be significantly different from that of a research doctorate, so too the students may differ. At the outset, students may present significantly different credentials. Since many will already be in the workplace, and may have completed their prior training some years earlier, standardized tests and grade-point averages may have limited use as predictors of success—or may be useful only to establish minimum thresholds. On the other hand, achievement in the workplace and commitment to a professional future may be relatively more important predictors. Universities should conduct internal research to establish the reliability of various indicators in predicting success in the program, and later success in the profession.

Selection to professional doctoral programs may also be driven by predicted ability to succeed rather than competitive selection. That is, admissions may focus more on accommodating all students who are likely to complete the program, rather than on excluding large numbers of applicants. Ph.D. programs often consider selectivity to be an important indicator of student quality—the goal is to create a small group of the “best and brightest.” Professional doctoral programs, in contrast, may be driven more by social need (for highly skilled school principals, for instance) or by labor-force demands. A program might reasonably respond by taking as many qualified students as it can accommodate within its academic resources.

Similarly, the outcomes sought by students in professional doctoral programs may vary considerably from those sought by students in research doctorates. Some may go on to university teaching and constitute the next-generation faculty for professional doctorates. The preponderance of graduates will likely go on to more advanced positions within their professions. Hence placement and long-term career success—especially leadership within the profession—are especially important indicators.

These differences may present significant challenges to universities in evaluating program quality. Metrics for quality need to be appropriate to the nature and intent of a program and should include consideration of a program’s social impact.

CURRICULUM

Professional doctoral degrees may have curricular structures that differ significantly from those commonly used in research doctorates.

A typical Ph.D. program involves a period of didactic coursework, often two years in length. The student then sits for a qualifying or preliminary examination that tests his or her mastery of the field and readiness to undertake a doctoral dissertation. The dissertation acts as the capstone to the degree and is a specialized and intensive piece of research, meant to be an original contribution to the field of study. The student then defends the dissertation before a committee of three to five faculty members with expertise in the field, one of whom is often from outside the institution. In most cases, the student has received a master's degree along the way. Much of the academic work in the exam and dissertation stages is conducted as independent research. The entire formal course of study, including the master's degree, will range from four to six years of full-time academic work, and in some fields, on average, may take more than seven years to complete.

In contrast, professional doctoral degrees usually place more emphasis on didactic and clinical study. The length of study measured in credit hours may vary widely, and in some cases may be less than the ninety-six hours that commonly characterize Ph.D. degrees, because of a reduced emphasis on independent research, and because some professional doctorates build upon a "fat master's" degree that far exceeds the conventional thirty-two-hour threshold for the master's.

Some professional doctoral degrees may be "coursework only" degrees. The lack of a capstone experience can be justified only when the degree is tightly linked to professional licensure. Otherwise, professional doctoral degrees have the same basic structure of coursework, qualifying experiences, and capstone experience that characterizes the research doctorate. The principal differences lie in the nature of the coursework and the nature of the capstone experience.

Professional doctorates often have a practicum as their final stage rather than a dissertation. The practicum or project should culminate in an extensive written report that demonstrates a command of the relevant

scholarly literature and links it to the specific clinical or practical experience. This written report is then the subject of a defense, comparable to the Ph.D. dissertation defense. Committees should include both research faculty and clinical faculty (including the director of the practicum). Committee size will vary according to the requirements of the program and the customs of the institution, but often may constitute three members rather than five.

ADMINISTERING A PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

ROLES OF PROGRAM/DISCIPLINARY COLLEGE/GRAD COLLEGE/OTHERS

Professional doctoral programs are usually administered in the same way as research doctoral programs, with resources vested in a disciplinary department or college and primary managerial responsibility lodged with that unit.

As with research doctorates, external oversight is important and reasonably lodged with the graduate school or college. Professional accreditation cannot substitute for institutional oversight, since professional accreditation does not consider the full range of institutional values or the institutional context.

GOOD PRACTICES AND BAD PRACTICES

Non-productive behaviors:

- Accrediting associations should not tell institutions that to be accredited, they must grant a doctorate of XYZ. Their role is to set standards for such a degree. It is the institution's role to determine whether those standards meet its standards and whether it wishes to offer such a degree.
- Professional departments and programs should not propose programs that they cannot defend first and foremost on the basis of quality and contribution to society.
- Graduate colleges should not use a one-size-fits-all standard that simply asks why a professional doctorate is not just like a Ph.D.
- Departments, programs, graduate colleges, universities, and accrediting associations should all challenge and reject "necessity"

arguments. These arguments take the form that “we have to offer a degree because otherwise all the students will go somewhere that does”; or that “we have to offer it because the accrediting association said we have to”; or that “we shouldn’t subject it to full institutional review because those Ph.D.s in the graduate college just won’t understand it and are a bunch of snobs who look down on practice.”

Productive behaviors:

All parties should develop and implement standards for programs, and specific programs, based on fundamental questions:

- What need does this program serve?
- Does it advance the well-being of society (and not just the holders of the degree)?
- Will it lead to the transformation of practice?
- Does it represent an equivalent excellence to what we expect from Ph.D. programs?
- Do our professional doctoral programs meet the same high level of scrutiny that we set for our Ph.D.s?

PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES ONLINE

Professional doctoral programs are particularly adaptable to full or partial online delivery. The clientele for the professional doctorate often consists of practicing professionals in a discipline who are seeking to move up in their field. Often, these individuals are place-bound or time-bound, or both. The content and pedagogy of the fields are often highly standardized and modularized by their disciplinary and licensing bodies. Furthermore, the students are often highly proficient in working online through their experiences in the workplace. And, finally, the portions of a professional doctoral program that must of necessity be conducted face-to-face, such as clinical experiences, must often themselves be located at sites other than the university campus.

For all these reasons, institutions may find that professional doctoral programs may be proposed from the beginning as online programs, or may quickly migrate to the online universe. This phenomenon can be expected to exacerbate the issues already facing universities and accreditation bodies in defining and evaluating this emergent category of

programs. Graduate schools in particular often have little experience with online education and may find the very idea of an online doctorate to be unacceptable.

LOOKING FORWARD

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The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) played an important role with its 2006 report in framing discussion over the professional doctorate. The Council of Graduate Schools has issued this report with the hope of advancing that discussion, and joins the HLC in encouraging others to articulate clear positions. Specifically:

- Disciplinary accreditors should issue standards for professional doctorates in their fields that clearly articulate how these degrees build upon prior degree levels (especially the master's degree) and clearly defend against degree inflation.
- University systems should issue clear guidelines relating professional doctorates to the specific missions of universities under their governance and should encourage cooperation among universities that will serve the public and make effective use of resources.
- Individual universities should develop policies and procedures ensuring that the development and evaluation of professional doctoral degrees are consistent with their institutional missions and with the highest standards of academic quality.
- Graduate deans should take the lead in framing discussion at their institutions, in developing policies and processes, and in educating their academic communities about the relative virtues of different kinds of degree programs.

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