

Factors associated with Ph.D./ Psy.D. Differences: Program content emphasis and Instructional Context

Michael J. Murphy, PhD

The designation of a program as a Ph.D. or Psy.D. program in psychology should naturally be reflected in the program's model. Those models that are most clearly differentiated are those Psy.D. programs adopting a Practitioner-Scholar or Local Clinical Scientist model versus those Ph.D. programs that adopt a Clinical Scientist model. These contrasting models clearly reveal the emphasis on research of the Ph.D. and on practice of the Psy.D. However, between these two poles there is an array of programs awarding different degrees that may overlap in their emphasis on research and practice. As a consequence it may be difficult to discriminate in terms of requirements and outcomes Scientist-Practitioner programs that emphasize practice and Psy.D. programs located in university departments of psychology and require empirical dissertations.

It would seem that the awarding a Ph.D. would imply some minimum threshold of research emphasis in the implementation of the program model and that seems to be based on the requirement that graduates complete an empirical dissertation. While some Psy.D. programs may articulate models that include completion of an empirical dissertation, the dissertation is a necessary hallmark of the Ph.D. and many programs also require a thesis. Nonetheless, differentiating Ph.D. programs that emphasize training for practice and Psy.D. programs that require a dissertation is difficult and reflects more general difficulties discriminating doctoral degrees in professional areas.

A Task Force on the Professional Doctorate was established by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In the development of their report the HLC Task Force identified characteristics that would differentiate four different categories of degrees. The four degree categories were 1) First Professional Degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM), 2) Practicing Professional Degrees, 3) Researching Professional Degrees, and 4) Professional Researcher Degree. The distinguishing characteristics examined by the HLC Task Force were:

- Amount and type of practice training
- Amount and type of applied practice
- Stated competencies for research and practice
- Research utilization vs. research production
- Practitioners/providers for clinical experience
- Type of supervision of doctoral students (HLC 2006)

In examining how the degrees would be arrayed in a matrix developed using the categories, the Task Force concluded that little would be gained from trying to differentiate doctoral education beyond the generic "professional doctorate" title. The same matrix would not be able to clearly differentiate Ph.D. from Psy.D. programs

because of the necessary balance of science and practice integrated into the accrediting standards (G&P). It appears that analysis of program content will not yield a basis for aligning model and degree.

An interesting conclusion of the Task Force was that HLS evaluation of institutions capacity to offer professional degrees should look to specialty accreditation for standards. Thus, rather than giving guidance to the Commission on Accreditation (CoA), the HLC places more responsibility on CoA. At the same time the conclusion offers a direction for the CoA by placing the focus on the institutional context of the degree as a crucial consideration in the evaluation a program's training models and appropriateness of the degree (Psy.D. vs. Ph.D.) offered.

A central consideration cited by the HLC Task Force was evaluation of the host institution's structures, policies, and procedures that support professional graduate education and the sufficiency of the institution's standards and internal quality assurance programs for professional doctorates. In professional psychology the host institution would be expected to demonstrate institutional policy that supports and monitors faculty and other resources consistent with the program's model. This would include expectations for appropriate professional aspects of training (professional credentials, continuing education, and recognition of practice related criteria in the evaluation of faculty) and research aspects of training (labs, funding, support for research and scholarship, and expectations for research productivity).

Other considerations for the host institution are the institution wide mechanisms that support doctoral training to include:

- Standards for tenure, promotion, and graduate faculty status appropriate for doctoral training, and
- Intitutional structures that support graduate study (e.g., School of Graduate Study).
- Particularly important for training in research would be the demonstration that the institution has structures that support research including:
 - An IRB,
 - Internal sources for research support,
 - Provisions of resources and assistance for development and management of external grants and contracts, and
 - Finally, structures that ensure quality control for theses, dissertations, and graduate research projects.