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The Status of Doctoral Education in the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

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ABSTRACT

The number of doctoral programs being offered by Christian universities is expanding, bringing new opportunities, needs, and challenges to these postsecondary institutions. Currently, 46 of the 113 governing member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) offer doctoral-level programs. Of the 185 member, partner, and affiliate institutions connected with the CCCU, 76 (41%) offer doctoral-level education. This article reports on the results of a 2018 survey of 57 North American institutions affiliated with the CCCU regarding their doctoral programs, with particular attention to program design, faculty development and workloads, institutional infrastructure, and student needs. Recommendations are offered for the support of doctoral programs, faculty, and students.

Introduction

There has been significant growth over the past 20 years in the number of doctoral programs offered across the United States, particularly in terms of professional doctoral programs that lead toward such degrees as the EdD, PsyD, DNP, or DBA (Zusman, 2013; See Appendix for a description of research and professional doctoral program characteristics). An increasing number of fields of study expect higher levels of credentialing for those who practice, particularly in education, counseling, nursing, business, and ministry. The proportion of doctoral programs within the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), an association of 150+ U.S. institutions, reflects this growth, with about 80% of doctoral programs offered by Governing Member, Associate Member, Collaborative Partner, and International Affiliate institutions being professional doctoral degree programs. This dramatic growth in doctoral-level education by CCCU institutions presents an opportunity to examine the supports and challenges experienced within these programs, particularly given that the CCCU has historically not offered significant support to member institutions in this important growth area.

Focused attention shifted to doctoral education within the CCCU in 2015, when the first grass-roots forum of doctoral program directors from CCCU institutions was held at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, CA. A group of about 50 people attended, investing two days in discussions on a range of important issues and ideas regarding

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designing and supporting strong doctoral programs. Because of the positive feedback from participants of this event, in 2016 the CCCU initiated a new Council focused on doctoral education efforts: the Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education. A second Doctoral Education Forum, for doctoral program directors and faculty, was held in 2017 at Biola University, in La Mirada, CA, with over 100 people in attendance.[1] Again, the results of this gathering were encouraging, and plans were developed to hold third Forum in Fall 2019, hosted by Dallas Baptist University, in Dallas, TX.

In preparation for that third Forum, in 2018 the CCCU Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education administered a survey of doctoral program directors at the 57 CCCU Governing Member, Associate Member, and Collaborative Partner institutions that were identified at that time as offering doctoral programs. The purpose of this article is to outline the findings from this survey, and based upon the findings, to offer recommendations for doctoral programs in the CCCU.

Method

A survey containing 28 items was distributed via SurveyMonkey in the Fall of 2018 to approximately 120 doctoral program directors at all 57 CCCU institutions that had been identified via web searches as offering at least one doctoral degree. We received responses from 65 different doctoral program directors, representing programs at 40 of the institutions surveyed. The programs represented in the survey results were a mix of research (PhD) and professional doctoral programs, with the majority of representation (47 of 65 programs) from professional doctoral programs. Our goal was to better understand the current practice of doctoral education in CCCU institutions, how program policies and practices were being implemented, and the challenges that program directors identified as most in need of addressing.

Results

Almost half of the programs represented in the survey had been in existence for more than 10 years; 26% had been in existence for more than 20 years. Nine new programs had reportedly been added in the previous two years, indicating a continuation of the somewhat rapid growth of doctoral programs that had been occurring in the previous decade. Across the 65 program directors, 60% had been in that role for less than five years. About one in seven had been in their role less than two years. Approximately two-thirds of the program director respondents reported being on 12-month contracts.

Doctoral Faculty

When asked about the number of full-time doctoral faculty in their programs, the program directors offered a wide range of responses. Some directors included all faculty in the institution (usually a seminary) as full-time faculty who also taught in their doctoral

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[1]In addition to doctoral program directors and faculty from CCCU member and affiliate schools, invitations were extended to doctoral program leaders from evangelical seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools and from institutions accredited by the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE).

Table 1. Percentage of dissertations chaired by full-time doctoral faculty.

Chaired by full-time faculty	n	%
None	4	6%
1–25%	7	11%
26–50%	2	3%
51–75%	6	9%
76–100%	11	17%
100%	34	53%

program. However, the median response to this item was 4.5. Almost half of the full-time doctoral faculty were identified as being on 11- or 12-month contracts. For 54% of the programs, this contract length was the same as other faculty at their institution. For the remaining programs, full-time doctoral faculty had either the same contract length as master's faculty or had longer contracts than all other faculty.

There appeared to be a reliance on part-time and adjunct faculty to support doctoral programs in the CCCU; in fact, five programs reported relying entirely on part-time and adjunct faculty. Almost a quarter of the programs were operating with two or fewer full-time faculty. The highest levels of part-time and adjunct faculty were seen in DMin programs. In contrast, 12 of the program directors responded that they did not use any adjuncts or part-time faculty in their programs, and 37% of the respondents reported that less than a fourth of their courses were taught by adjuncts.

As can be seen in Table 1, this reliance on part-time and adjunct faculty extended to the supervision of dissertations in those same programs, although not quite to the same extent. Over half of the program directors reported that only full-time doctoral faculty chaired dissertations in their programs.

Table 2 provides an overview of the distribution of workload units for doctoral faculty, including both full-time and those with other assignments outside of the doctoral program, across the categories of teaching, dissertation supervision, and research. As indicated, workloads were primarily allocated to teaching. About one-fifth did not include dissertation supervision as part of their regular workload, and 41% of the program directors reported that none of their faculty received any workload units for dissertation service.

Doctoral faculty had varying degrees of support for their research across the programs. Fewer than half (46%) the programs offered some kind of release or contract units for doctoral faculty to conduct research. Only 28% of the programs provided research units or release time for all their faculty teaching or supervising research in their doctoral program.

Dissertation Support

Given the over-reliance on part-time and adjunct faculty, along with workloads primarily allocated to teaching, the questions related to dissertation service highlighted the nature of the support that these doctoral programs provided to students during the dissertation phase. As can be seen in Table 3, almost a third of doctoral faculty did not receive any load release or compensation for chairing dissertations. Methodologists were even less likely to receive any workload allocation or compensation for their dissertation service, with almost two-thirds receiving no workload credit or compensation. Data summarized in Table 4 indicates that most programs placed an upper limit on how long a doctoral

Table 2. Doctoral faculty workload distribution.

Category	0%	1–10%	11--20%	21–30%	31–40%	41–50%	51–60%	61–70%	70%±
Teaching	0	3	8	5	2	21	16	16	30
Dissertations	21	20	21	23	5	5	2	2	0
Research	28	26	26	7	2	7	0	2	3

Table 3. Load release, stipends, and length of dissertation service.

Category	None	<.25u ≤$300	.25u $300–500	.5u $501–700	.75u $701–900	1+ ≥$900
Chair	31%	5%	5%	7%	5%	47%
Methodology	64%	8%	11%	4%	6%	8%
Outside Reader	51%	13%	20%	9%	5%	2%

Table 4. How long a doctoral faculty can earn dissertation units for a student.

Length of time	n	%
As long as it takes	13	21%
3–5 years	4	6%
3 years	3	5%
2 years	5	8%
1 year	2	3%
Use a unit total	7	11%
Other	28	45%

faculty member could earn units or compensation for a particular student in the dissertation stage, although 21% of the programs reported no limit to the length of service. There was also wide variation in terms of when the compensation or units were earned; some programs allocated on a semester or annual basis, while others awarded units or compensation only upon completion of the dissertation or final project.

In addition to the wide variation in how programs compensated doctoral faculty for dissertation service, there was considerable variation in the total number of dissertations that doctoral faculty supported. Almost a third of the programs reported that doctoral faculty were involved in only one or two dissertations per year; in contrast, three programs reported their faculty served on 15 or more dissertation committees annually. Most programs, however, required their faculty to serve on five or less committees annually. Table 5 outlines the eligibility requirements for faculty to chair dissertations. As with all other items on the survey, there was a wide range of practice, including 16% of respondents whose programs did not even require the chair to hold an earned doctorate.

The most common approach to equipping doctoral faculty to supervise dissertations was identified to be individual mentoring, as indicated in Table 5. Department or program workshops were also used by many programs. One concern of note is that 17% of respondents reported that no training was being provided for dissertation supervision in their programs.

Notably, not all doctoral programs represented in this survey required a dissertation as the culminating project; 14 of the programs required some other type of final project. These projects varied, with some being individual and others being group research projects. The individual projects ranged from portfolios to literature reviews and action research reports, with presentation options ranging from keynote addresses to workshop presentations or oral presentations at scholarly conferences. Clinical/professional degree programs were more likely to require action research projects or small group research projects.

Table 5. Eligibility requirements and training for faculty who chair dissertations.

	n	%
Eligibility requirements for dissertation supervision work		
Must have an earned doctorate	53	84%
Must be full-time faculty in the program or department	38	60%
Must be full-time faculty in your university	26	41%
Serve on dissertation committee in program/dept prior to chair	22	35%
Must be mentored at least one year by other faculty in program	12	19%
Prior dissertation committee experience at any other university	8	13%
Other	14	22%
How faculty are prepared for dissertation supervision work		
Individual mentoring	43	67%
Department/program workshops	27	42%
Not trained	11	17%
School/university-wide training	8	13%
Other	6	9%

Institutional Infrastructure

We also asked questions about the level of support for doctoral programs within the larger university. Specifically, we asked whether there was a governance structure within the institution for doctoral programs. Such structures might include a doctoral curriculum committee or a separate policy council. Slightly over half (55%) of the program directors indicated that their institution did not have such doctoral-only structures.

With regard to support for faculty development, Tables 6 and 7 outline the funding that was made available to doctoral faculty for professional development, along with the source of that funding. Most doctoral faculty members received less than $2,000 for professional conferences annually, and most did not have much support for professional memberships. The funding faculty members did receive typically came from department budgets.

Program Challenges

Of particular interest to the CCCU Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education was the types of challenges that doctoral program directors reported that they were facing and with which they needed assistance. Table 8 outlines these challenges, arranged in order of magnitude. Six areas were identified by over half the respondents as being a current challenge ("somewhat" to "significant"), with insufficient faculty being the most significant concern. Notably, inadequate compensation for faculty and difficulty attracting qualified faculty were challenges for just under 50% of the respondents, and these issues may all be linked.

The remaining issues of deep concern to these program directors tended to be split between student challenges and institutional challenges. The student challenges included weaker-than-expected writing skills and academic ability, along with weak research knowledge and skills. The institutional challenges centered on a lack of support, whether through insufficient budgets, lack of support to cope with enrollment growth, or inability to hire sufficient numbers of qualified faculty. Clearly, many of the doctoral programs represented in this survey were experiencing a critical lack of support that may be interfering with the quality of their programs. Faculty were reportedly overloaded, did not have adequate time for dissertation supervision or conducting their own research, and received little training or professional development support.

Table 6. Professional development funds available for faculty.

Category	None	≤$1,000	$1–2,000	$2–3,000	$3–4,000	≥$4,000
Travel to professional conferences	6%	25%	46%	14%	5%	5%
Professional memberships	34%	51%	11%	3%	0%	0%

Table 7. Budget sources for professional development expenses.

Source	N	%
Department/program funds	38	58%
Central university funds	30	46%
School funds (Dean)	25	38%
Not applicable	3	5%
Other	4	6%

Table 8. Ratings for the biggest challenges their program was currently facing.

Challenge	Not/Minor	Moderate/Somewhat	Significant
Insufficient faculty/overloaded	35%	13%	55%
Budget issues	35%	26%	39%
Poor student writing skills support	31%	30%	39%
Student research knowledge/skills	36%	25%	39%
Enrollment growth, lack support	48%	16%	37%
Inadequate compensation – faculty	52%	17%	30%
Attracting qualified faculty	56%	22%	22%
Poor infrastructure for doctoral programs	62%	16%	22%
Academic ability of students	50%	30%	20%
Student time/dedication to studies	58%	24%	18%
Qualified faculty for dissertations	68%	14%	17%
Declining enrollment	71%	16%	14%
Inadequate library resources	89%	11%	0%

The written comments from respondents were also telling: Some program directors noted the difficulties of adequately supporting doctoral education in an institution that had been exclusively serving undergraduate students for much of its history. Others relayed challenges with facilities, whether insufficient lab or clinical facilities or classroom size and availability. Finally, some program directors spoke of their institution's insistence on rapid growth of professional doctoral programs without careful thought and planning to adequately support them.

Discussion

The results of this survey indicate that within the wide variety of doctoral programs offered across the CCCU, two major challenges must be addressed to ensure the quality of doctoral education. They are: (1) the lack of institutional infrastructure and support for doctoral education and (2) the preparation of doctoral students for success. Our recommendations below grow out of our discussion of these two challenges.

Challenge 1: Providing Needed Infrastructure and Support for Doctoral Education Programs and Faculty

Most CCCU institutions were founded with the purpose of providing bachelors-level educational programs, with a strong emphasis on teaching, learning, and student development

for traditional undergraduate students. Over the years, many of these colleges and universities have added one or more graduate programs that serve the needs of older students but have maintained a primarily undergraduate ethos and orientation. This dominant campus ethos can create some challenges for the needed support of doctoral education programs.

As of Fall 2020, 46 of the 113 governing member schools of the CCCU offer doctoral-level programs. Of the 185 member, partner, and affiliate schools connected with the CCCU, 76 (41%) offer doctoral-level education. In most cases, CCCU campuses offer one or two doctoral programs and have not fully grasped what is required to provide comprehensive program support at this level, including governance structures for graduate education, budget standards and models, and faculty development and workload standards. The following is a presentation of five key issues that need to be carefully considered and addressed regarding the kinds of support needed for doctoral programs.

First, CCCU universities need to ensure that they have governance structures in place to address graduate program issues, including those of doctoral programs. With so much of the administrative attention focused on the needs of their undergraduate students, a group of faculty and administrators must give primary attention to graduate education development, support, and assessment, both at the master's and doctoral levels. Graduate education has some important differences from traditional undergraduate education, including recognition that the student population is different and program goals and designs need to be different. For institutions that offer multiple doctoral programs, a subcommittee or other structure to attend to the needs of doctoral programs is advisable.

Second, another key issue, particularly in times of financial stress in Christian higher education, is how the budgets of doctoral programs are evaluated and the degree to which doctoral programs are seen as needing to pay for themselves. For private Christian institutions without major research grants, the costs of doctoral education can be high, and tuition and fees may not cover all of the program expenses, particularly for PhD programs. For universities offering professional doctoral programs (e.g., EdD, PsyD, DMin, DNP), the time spent by faculty overseeing student research projects may be less than is the case in more traditional PhD programs; accordingly, these professional programs may be more cost effective. However, there are inherent challenges in attempting to balance the budget for PhD programs, due to the time invested by faculty in supervising student research. University leaders need to consider these issues in their budget models and "count the cost" before committing to doctoral-level programs. If these issues and costs are not thoroughly investigated prior to launching a doctoral program, the workloads on faculty tend to increase in an effort to close the financial gap, leading to higher work stress and possible burnout.

Third, due to the significant impact of doctoral program graduates, it is important that there are adequate numbers of qualified regular (full-time) faculty with the expertise and dedicated time for the required program workload, including teaching courses, advising students, and supervising dissertations/culminating projects. Our survey results indicated that too many institutions rely heavily on adjunct faculty for teaching and research supervision. Although having experienced practitioners teach some courses may add value to professional doctoral degree programs, the final research projects or dissertations need more consistent application of agreed-upon standards by those who are skilled in research.

Fourth, for those faculty who teach and supervise doctoral student research projects, campus leaders need to provide a range of support so they can do their work well. This support includes at least the following:

- Because they must be able to give skilled guidance to student research efforts, faculty members need time within their workload to engage in their own research projects, helping them stay fresh on research practice challenges. Reduced course loads, sabbaticals, and research leave opportunities are examples of ways to provide this support.
- Because they need to be able to present their own research to their peers and stay current in their academic and professional disciplines, faculty need financial support to attend professional/academic conferences in their fields.
- Because supervising student research is so important to the outcomes of doctoral education programs, new faculty members need training and mentoring in how to supervise students in their dissertations or culminating projects. From our survey results, it appears that too many faculty are not receiving any kind of orientation or training before they take on this significant work. This need should be addressed well before faculty are approved for this aspect of doctoral education; faculty also need to receive feedback so they can grow in their abilities, just as with teaching feedback.
- Because dissertation/culminating project supervision is not as easy to quantify for workload calculations as is teaching, care needs to be taken in developing workload models to ensure that doctoral faculty are not being overworked and burning out. Dissertations or culminating projects require significant time for written feedback and mentoring novice researchers. This responsibility ought not to be viewed as a light task that can be added as overload to a full workload; rather, it needs to be part of faculty members' regular workload calculation. In addition, if this workload is expected to continue year-round, then faculty contracts or stipends need to reflect this expectation.

Finally, with the number of newer doctoral programs that have begun recently in CCCU institutions, as well as the numbers of newer program directors, institutional leaders need to ensure that these newer program directors have opportunities to be oriented and trained in leadership skills appropriate to doctoral programs in their particular field. Others have tackled the challenges these leaders are facing, and there is much to learn from one another. Developing networks of doctoral program directors in one's field of study can provide opportunities for mutual learning and support. One opportunity for this kind of interaction and learning is available through the CCCU's Doctoral Education Forum, generally offered every other year and attracting on average over 100 doctoral program directors and faculty. See the CCCU website for details (https://www.cccu.org/programs-services/institutes/doctoral-council-portal/).

Challenge 2: Better Preparation of Doctoral Students for Success

A second challenge identified from the findings from this survey of doctoral programs across the CCCU is that attention to the quality and preparation of students entering

CCCU doctoral programs would enhance the doctoral education experience for both students and faculty. Doctoral faculty appears to feel ill-equipped to address their students' needs for writing and research methods support, in particular. These concerns exist at entrance to the program and appear to continue through the dissertation/culminating project phase.

This concern with the preparation of incoming doctoral students can be perceived in one of two ways: either the responsibility for success is placed on the student or on the institution. When success is viewed as a result of individual effort, the responsibility is placed on the student for their own success, and the institutional response tends to be a more careful admissions and selection process, along with "weed out" processes throughout the program. However, a far more productive way of perceiving student success is as a collaborative effort between students and faculty. When success is viewed as the product of such collaborative effort, the institution takes primary responsibility for creating the conditions under which all students who are admitted can succeed.

There are four recommendations that emerge from accepting a position of institutional responsibility for student success. First, recruit graduates-to-be. In marketing doctoral programs, carefully consider the most appropriate target audience. Examine assessment data throughout the program to determine what kinds of students tend to graduate and who benefits most from the program. If the results of this examination reveal gender or racial differences, discuss with program faculty how the curriculum or specific practices of faculty within the program might be contributing to such differences. Also consider what kind of support the program is able to offer to students who may be struggling at various stages. If little support can be provided, it is a disservice to admit students who are likely to need that support most.

In fact, most doctoral programs in the CCCU desire to educate diverse learners who bring a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to the program. Therefore, our second recommendation becomes pivotal in ensuring the success of students who have been admitted: Orient new students thoroughly and intentionally to the doctoral program and to what is required to succeed as a doctoral student. Introduce them to the faculty, each other, and the support services and resources provided. Consider offering a workshop on scholarly writing, so that students are aware of writing expectations from the beginning of the program. A positive orientation experience can build community, enhance student motivation, and equip students with some of the tools and access to resources they will need to succeed.

Our third recommendation is to provide students with adequate writing and research support throughout the program. Such support should not be limited to orientation or to specific research methods courses or the dissertation phase. Institutions with doctoral programs will likely need to hire doctoral writing coaches, given that the type of scholarly writing expected at the doctoral level is not the expertise typically provided by undergraduate Writing Centers. Alternatively, consider partnering with an editing service and/or adding doctoral teaching assistants who can provide significant feedback and assistance to students with their writing and research skills within the context of a required course.

Fourth and finally, build a sense of community within the doctoral program, with high levels of positive student-faculty interaction, so that doctoral students can thrive.

Previous research by Petridis (2015) found that some of the most significant predictors of thriving in doctoral programs are the sense of community within the program and a positive departmental climate characterized by satisfying interactions with faculty. A cohort model, wherein students take sequenced courses together as a group, provides the greatest opportunity for building a sense of community. Creating a sense of ownership through a doctoral student advisory board that provides input to faculty and program directors, developing multiple avenues for connecting to other students and to faculty in and out of class, and enhancing students' sense of belonging through inclusive curricular and pedagogical practices are ways of strengthening the sense of community within a doctoral program.

Final Reflection

We believe in the value of doctoral education and want to see CCCU institutions become known for doing it well. However, to do it well takes careful thought and strategic investment of personnel and funding, which means there is a cost to be paid. For those leaders thinking about venturing into or expanding their doctoral education programs, we encourage you to think about doctoral programs as an investment for God's Kingdom, something to help your institution better accomplish its mission. Yet even good investments need to be considered carefully, to avoid discovering that the goals set cannot be realistically accomplished with the resources and personnel at hand. As Jesus cautioned in one of his parables about the cost of discipleship:

> Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, "This person began to build and wasn't able to finish." (Luke 14:28-30, NIV)

Educational leaders need to take time to count the cost and determine how doctoral education fits within the larger picture of what God has called their institutions to accomplish.

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Appendix

Comparing PhD and Professional Doctorate Programs

Comparison	PD – Professional Doctorate	PhD – Research Doctorates
Program Focus	Student development *"Experienced practitioners"*	Discipline development *"Apprentice researchers"*
Career Focus	Career needs of practicing professionals, integrating work with study, advancement *"Researching Professionals"*	Career researchers, teachers Entry into academia *"Professional Researchers"*
Goal of Research	Contribution to knowledge of professional practice, to enhance practice.	Contribution to knowledge of field Contribution to theory Wide dissemination of research
Research Type	Original investigation to gain new knowledge with practical aims	Original investigation to gain new knowledge and understanding
Research Focus	Address a topic that relates to the student's field of professional practice (problem oriented)	Address gap in the research literature in a subject discipline (narrow focus)
Research Starting Point	Start with a problem in professional practice (what is not known)	Start with literature review to identify gap (what is known)
Intended Learning Outcomes	Develop capacity to make a significant original contribution to knowledge of professional practice, personal development	Develop capacity to make significant original contribution to knowledge
Admission Requirement	Master's degree AND significant professional experience	Master's degree with high grades (may have integrated MA & PhD)
Program Format	Cohorts of students, structured course plan, fixed duration	Individual pursuit of study, semester-length courses, open-ended duration
Relation to Experience	In-service training for established professionals (profess. develop.) (Already employed)	Pre-service training for future researchers/academics (Need employment?)
Mode of Study	Part-time	Full-time (historically, less so now)
Final Project	Varies considerably: shorter papers, portfolio of projects, smaller scale research project, published papers	Written dissertation and defense (3-Research Article model growing)
Assessment	Continuous assessment through coursework, plus final project	Public defense of dissertation (Rubric assessments of Program Learning Outcomes?)
Disciplines of Study	May draw on multiple disciplines and focus on their integration and application to work issues	Tends to focus in one discipline area, one field of study

Note: The above compilation chart was developed by Kevin E. Lawson from the following publications: Bourner et al. (2001); Gill & Hoppe (2009); Schildkraut & Stafford (2015); Taylor (2007).