



Special Issue: Doctoral Education Issues and Practice in Christian Higher Education

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Special Issue: Doctoral Education Issues and Practice in Christian Higher Education

Welcome!

On behalf of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities' (CCCCU) Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education, we welcome you to this special issue of the *Christian Higher Education* journal that focuses on doctoral education! Over the last few decades, doctoral education programs have been growing in Christian higher education institutions. As of Spring 2020, 76 CCCU institutions (46 Governing Members; 11 Associate Members; 5 Collaborative Partners; and 14 International Affiliates) together offer over 160 doctoral programs. With this expansion have come new challenges as well as many creative approaches to address these challenges. This theme issue is an opportunity to consider some of the distinctive issues and educational models in doctoral education today. Some of what you will be reading are concerns common across doctoral programs in all kinds of postsecondary institutions, while others are reflective of the particular values and commitments of Christian faith-based institutions.

Background

Recognizing that doctoral programs were increasing in Christian higher education institutions, a group of CCCU doctoral program leaders met in 2014 to organize a forum where doctoral program directors from these institutions could meet to learn from each other regarding a wide variety of doctoral education issues, including such things as recruiting students, program design and delivery, faculty development, dissertation/project models and supervision, and supporting doctoral student success. This first forum was held in September 2015 at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, CA. About 50 doctoral program directors attended and later strongly agreed that the gathering had been a valuable experience that should be repeated.

Following that event, the organizers met with CCCU senior staff to explore the possibility of forming a Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education that would begin addressing doctoral education issues in institutions affiliated with the CCCU. This new Council was organized in 2016 and it planned and carried out the next two biennial forums in Fall 2017 at Biola University in La Mirada, CA, and in 2019 at Dallas Baptist University in Dallas, TX, with about 100 program directors and faculty attending each event. At the time of this publication, another forum is planned for Fall 2022 although details have not yet been worked out given the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in higher education this year. Individuals interested in staying informed about this upcoming forum are encouraged to visit the CCCU website for details: <https://www.cccu.org/programs-services/institutes/>.

A Theme Issue on Doctoral Higher Education in the CCCU

The editors of *Christian Higher Education* approached this CCCU Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education with an invitation to compile a set of articles that would be made available to a wider reading audience as a theme issue on doctoral education. We reviewed the programs of the previous two forums and identified several key topics that had been addressed in well-attended breakouts at these events. We invited those scholars to develop articles from their presentations and have now reviewed and collected them for this issue. We hope you find this compilation, which is described briefly below, to be helpful for reflecting on doctoral education issues and practices in your own setting.

The opening article, authored by Kevin E. Lawson and Laurie A. Schreiner, provides an overview of the results of a survey of doctoral program directors carried out in Fall 2018, what was learned from it, and the implications that stand out for developing strong doctoral education efforts in CCCU institutions. Next, Bethani Studebaker and Heidi Curtis tackle the topic of how to build a supportive community in online doctoral programs, a delivery approach that has grown in popularity over recent years. Our third article, by Benjamin A. Pyykkonen, examines the impact of stress upon cognitive performance in the context of the many unique demands of doctoral education. The author then considers possible approaches to mitigate the impact of these stressors upon success in graduate programs, including the employment of religious coping strategies.

In the fourth article, Cheryl Sparks and Heewon Chang share their systems-thinking model for the development of quality assurance standards and practices in the assessment of doctoral capstone projects, whether these be traditional research dissertations or other kinds of applied research. In addition, with so many doctoral programs utilizing online delivery formats and/or intensive courses on campus, many students finish their studies by completing their dissertations or capstone projects at a distance. Our fifth article, by Robert L. Elmore, a veteran of working with dissertation students online, is a personal reflection on best practices in mentoring doctoral students studying at a distance as they work through the dissertation process.


Higher education in general has been greatly influenced by accrediting agencies in the identification of program learning outcomes and their assessment for all levels of studies (i.e., undergraduate, masters, doctoral). With the recent growth of professional doctoral programs, some concern has been related to ensuring that students in these programs receive a high quality doctoral-level education. K. Mallery Keenan and A. Gillian Stewart-Wells explore approaches to assessment of student learning that could provide constructive alternatives to the traditional requirement of “comprehensive exams,” reporting on “authentic assessments” in a doctoral program at their university. Next, Hannah C. Jones, Anderson Rowan, Rachel L. Stephens, and Jeffrey A. Brauch consider the unique perspectives and applications of faith-based programs in three separate applied fields. This article also offers a description of the framework that informs these authors’ commitment and connection to the work of their doctoral programs in clinical psychology, law, and business.

Finally, we offer an annotated bibliography of recent resources on doctoral education. The collection has eight major sections, addressing:

- Resources available from the Council of Graduate Schools
- Resources on a range of doctoral education issues (e.g., attrition, advising, mentoring, student development, student writing skills, assessment, and the globalization of doctoral education)
- Dissertation supervision issues
- Dissertation qualities and assessment
- Virtue/character and critical thinking formation in Christian higher education
- Online education approaches in Christian higher education
- Resources available from Langham Publishing, providing international perspective on doctoral education in Christian higher education
- International resources on doctoral education in different regions of the world, comparing doctoral education models

Invitation

We offer these articles with the hope that reading them will stimulate your own thinking about doctoral education in Christian higher education institutions, and provide you with some helpful ideas and practices to strengthen this highest level of education program in your setting. We invite you to connect with the CCCU Council for Collaboration in Doctoral Education and join us at future forums where we can continue to learn from one another. Website: <https://www.cccu.org/programs-services/institutes/>

Kevin E. Lawson
*Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, La Mirada,
California, USA*
 Kevin.Lawson@biola.edu

Benjamin A. Pyykkonen
*Department of Psychology, Wheaton College, Wheaton,
Illinois, USA*